



Wilhelminenstraße 91/IIf
1160 Vienna ■ Austria
Tel: +43 1 3197949-0 ■ Fax -15
office@trialog.or.at
Skype: trialog.office
www.trialog.or.at



Expert Seminar “The Future of Civil Society Development Organisations (CSOs)” November 10-11, 2009

Presentation of key findings of the first seminar day

Reflections by TRIALOG Advisory Group members

Jiri Silny, Ecumenical Academy Prague

There were interesting discussions around the question about the role of civil society actors. The debates showed quite different experiences and positions on this main topic. Some participants have participated in the discussion process for a longer time (e.g. since the Prague conference), others were new.

The discussions revealed a distinction between 2 types of civil society actors:

- such who work for change
- such who want to maintain the status quo

We should create a base for CSOs who work for change towards sustainable and just societies. For a change in the South we need to change the North.

The question is what can we do as civil society actors? The main goal is to regain the political space. Currently we are pushed to serve politics. The question is how can we as citizens' organisations become again actors in the process of change; not being defensive but gain self-confidence by joining together – especially from the South and North.

The difference between actors from New EU Member States (NMS) and Old Member States (OMS) is diminishing. The border is not the “Berlin wall”; there are different players in different regions.

In order to reach the aim of having an active role for change, not only strong cooperation between development CSOs from South and North is necessary, but it's important for the development sector to open up to other sectors (such as environment, churches and others).

Vince Caruana, KOPIN Malta

The first seminar day provided us with an insight into the rules of the game, on the Lisbon treaty and the conflicting interests between EU external relations and development cooperation. Some tension was felt in the seminar around the question whether we should resign and accept the rules as they emerge in the Lisbon treaty. Some seem more pragmatic in playing according to the rules, while others are more critical and reclaim spaces.

An important question is whether we can keep our independence and at the same time keep donors content. To what extent is our independence compromised?

There are two perspectives:

- make the best out of the existing rules
- ask ourselves what we can do with less money (e.g. new technological spaces could be interesting to explore)

There is also a different sense of urgency:

- some see it as urgent to define our role as CSOs
- others have less sense of urgency but curiosity

There is also the question who counts within civil society. Civil society reaches from small groups to very big organisations. The inclusive aspect of civil society is to be underlined.

Ways of doing development are under question. What are the successes of development cooperation of last decades? What can we show after so much “development”?

The role of partnership has been discussed. We still have some Euro-centric perspective and should think more what is common in our struggle for change. We could approach development cooperation from a commonality perspective.

The question of history was raised: To what extent does history affect the ways how we see development? On the one hand the history before the EU enlargements has influence, on the other hand it is for most already 5 years since NMS and OMS CSOs work together.

It was mentioned that NMS lack self-confidence as a global player. This shows self-reflection and encourages to look more positively into the future. We need awareness that we are forming Europe today which has direct implications. Therefore we should think more of our responsibility as part of Europe and as a player in the world.

The main emphasis is on the question of the political space – what is the change we want?

Joachim Lindau, development expert, Germany

The first seminar day showed that nothing can be taken for granted. Contrary to previous expectations, the most conflictive point was the question about the necessity of a Code of Conduct for CSOs. While some are opposed to it, it is considered a routine and clearly needed by others.

Advantages of a code of conduct are provided in the (previously circulated) reader on page 26ff (The “U4 Expert Answer” authored by Transparency International can also be found at <http://www.u4.no/helpdesk/helpdesk/query.cfm?id=200>). It seems advisable to think along the lines outlined in this document.

By 2014 the financial system of the EU will have changed and be different. If we want the CSO community to remain so colourful as it is, we need to take action now. The EC is good in unilateral changes of the rules, sometimes in the middle of the game. How can we as CSOs defend our course?

We will make a suggestion how to get to a Code of Conduct. It would be much appreciated if those CSOs with big reservations against it, would communicate to the TRIALOG Advisory group and office some of their main concerns in writing.

Minutes: TRIALOG