

Record of outreach meetings with non-governmental organisations (NGOs)

We held two outreach meetings with NGOs, one in Brussels on 29 January 2013 and one in London on 8 February 2013. Representatives from the following NGOs participated:

1. Absolute Return for Kids
2. Africa Foundation for Development (AFFORD)
3. Association of World Council of Churches related Development Organisations in Europe (Aprodev)
4. Bond
5. British Red Cross
6. Catholic Agency for Overseas Development (CAFOD)
7. Confederation for Cooperation of Relief and Development NGOs (CONCORD)
8. Cord
9. European Network on Debt and Development (Eurodad)
10. European Peacebuilding Liaison Office (EPLO)
11. Interact Worldwide
12. Leonard Chesire Disability Foundation
13. Malaria Consortium
14. ONE
15. Oxfam International
16. Royal College of Nursing
17. Save the Children
18. Sightsavers
19. The Brooke
20. Voluntary Organisations in Cooperation in Emergencies (VOICE)
21. WaterAid

The following is a record of the statements made by the representatives at those meetings.

BEGINS

Advantages of working through the EU

General

- The coexistence of parallel competences is not a problem: the most relevant body should act.
- The current balance of competences is a result of decades of negotiations.
- The EU has a comparative advantage in that it is a regional organisation, not a nation state, meaning it can work effectively with other regional organisations. For example the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) working

group works well. The ACP-EU joint parliamentary assembly is also something that the UK does not have on its own.

- The European Commission Directorate-General for Development and Cooperation – EuropeAid (DEVCO) has the right policy focus in poverty reduction and is a key international player in achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

Scale, reach and coordination

- The size and global presence of the EU is a major advantage. It has a substantial presence in fragile states and in forgotten crises (e.g. Niger or the Central African Republic).
- The EU has greater visibility – with one flag for local people to identify.
- Working through the EU, the UK can reach countries where DFID does not have a presence.
- The EU has more funds than the UK.
- In the European Development Bank (EIB), the UK has recourse to an institution for which there is no equivalent in the UK. The EIB is very supportive of infrastructure development which is in big demand in developing countries.
- EU coordination produces efficiency savings compared to acting individually.
- There is greater power to influence collectively as the EU compared to acting individually.
- Difficult steps are easier to take as a group: EU better placed to take risks than UK acting alone.
- Division of labour between donors was seen as a positive example of the EU's coordination role.
- The EU is especially well placed to deal with cross-border and regional instruments.

Political neutrality

- The EU is perceived to be more politically neutral. Whereas many Member States have strong historic ties with some developing countries, the EU is a separate entity that can bridge historic sensitivities. This better places it to work on democracy, human rights, electoral support and conflict prevention.
- Because of the EU's relative neutrality, its staff members are more secure in some countries.

Relations between aid and other competences; potential for Policy Coherence for Development (PCD)

- The EU has a comparative advantage over other multilaterals because it has a unique comprehensive approach linking all aspects of foreign policy including political, military and development.
- Complementarity is important leading to coordination and coherence.
- PCD at the EU level has strong potential, especially given that the EU has exclusive competence in trade, but it is far from being realised.
- The emphasis placed on PCD give NGOs scope to push for more development coherence.
- There is a need for a unit in the Commission where NGO views on these issues can be submitted.
- PCD is most effective in the thematic instruments of the Development Cooperation Instrument (DCI) and the European Development Fund (EDF).
- The EEAS could play a strong role in PCD. There is a need for EU delegations to have specialists in PCD.

External representation; working with other organisations

- EU external representation has a greater impact than Member States acting individually. In effect, this can give the “two voices” in international fora – its own and its voice through the EU.

Alignment of UK and EU policy objectives; UK influence in the EU

- On the whole, in the sphere of development there is a great deal of consensus between the EU and Member States.
- The UK’s vote in the Council and EDF management committees allows it to influence EDF and budget instrument spending. This gives it the potential to influence the entirety of EU spending, not only its proportional share based on its contribution. It also provides a strategic influence on development activities in these countries that it would not have if it did not work through the EU.
- The UK is able to influence only joint EU policy positions and development programmes, as well as those of other Member States. This gives it scope to ensure that EU collective action and other Member States’ individual actions also support UK objectives and priorities.
- Budget support and the Agenda for Change are good examples of DFID working well to influence EU
- The UK’s membership of the EU gives it greater global influence

Transparency and accountability

- There is greater UK scrutiny of EU aid compared with aid channelled through other multilateral organisations.
- The EU’s accountability mechanisms are effective, although they can at times cause delays in decision-making. There are concerns about transparency, however.

- Member States are able to scrutinise EU through the Council's working groups.
- The Lisbon Treaty gave a greater scrutiny role for the European Parliament (EP), but this has not been fully realised yet. A greater role for the EP could, however, slow down EU activity in development/humanitarian aid.
- There is a lack of EP scrutiny of EDF, but the EP is more involved with the ACP. From NGOs' perspectives, the EP is more accessible for civil society organisations and NGOs than the Council.

Humanitarian aid

- The European Commission Directorate-General for Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection (ECHO) has separate offices in 37 countries with over 400 humanitarian experts. Geographic breadth and political neutrality are real advantages.
- ECHO can achieve more than individual Member States can. For example, not all Member States have field experts.
- ECHO is less bound by a political agenda as it bases its action on global needs (e.g. forgotten crises).
- The Humanitarian Aid and Food Aid Working Party (COHAFA) is a positive development introduced by the Lisbon Treaty. It has resulted in a promotion of humanitarian policies and strategies at national level.
- ECHO has positively influenced UN agencies.
- ECHO came out well in DFID's Humanitarian Emergency Response Review (HERR)
- EU aid channelled through ECHO is considered to be more transparent than other EU aid as there is a higher level of Member State and EP scrutiny, which is confirmed in numerous auditor reports.
- NGOs highly value ECHO's partnership framework and consider that its fund a balanced range of partner organisations.
- ECHO is more agile and accessible than UN organisations and will work through the NGO community whereas the UN works more through governments. It is responsive and has acted quickly in countries such as Niger.

Disadvantages of working through the EU

Ineffectiveness and inefficiency in EU policy making and programme delivery

- EU policy making can be a protracted process, although at times it is partly slowed down by Member States' demands.
- With the exception of the Instrument for Stability, the EU budget instruments are inflexible; there is a need for more flexibility. Events tend to outpace donors' ability to respond (e.g. Syria, Mali). However, this inflexibility is in part due to the EU's long-term budgeting, and is a trade-off for greater consistency and predictability.

- Excessive regulation can be a barrier for local NGOs in accessing funds: administrative burden needs to be lightened.
- Duplication of action by multiple Member States and/or EU institutions is problematic (e.g. NGOs perceive that some partner governments benefit from “playing off” donors against each other), although it can be positive where it reinforces best practice). EU policies to improve aid effectiveness (Division of Labour, joint programming, delegated cooperation, budget support etc.) have the potential to improve EU aid effectiveness and efficiency but not been fully implemented.

Policy Coherence for Development (PCD)

- The potential for PCD at the EU level has not been realised. More consideration needs to be taken of development objectives in trade policy, the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP). EU biofuels policy represent a failure of PCD, having a significant adverse on small-scale agriculture.
- There is a need for more flexibility and more coordination between humanitarian aid and development cooperation. For example, there is uncertainty about whether responsibility for resilience and disaster risk reduction sits with DEVCO or ECHO.
- There is a perceivable disagreement between Member States on the “comprehensive approach.” Examples include a lack of consensus on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) debate between DG Climate (CLIMA) and DEVCO and a shift from crisis response to conflict prevention. The comprehensive approach should be applied prospectively to countries, not in response to crises.
- In efforts to achieve PCD, changes in practice may be more important than technical legislative changes.

Institutional capacity and expertise

- The EU institutions, including DEVCO and the EU delegations, lack sufficient development expertise and capacity.
- DEVCO also faces challenges in recruitment.
- There is a need to streamline accountability procedures between DEVCO headquarters and the EU delegations, particularly by devolving more authority to the latter.

Relationship between development/humanitarian aid and other areas of EU external action

- There a lack of coordination between the EU institutions, in particular between the EEAS and DEVCO. Better communication is needed between Brussels and in-country EU Delegations.
- The EEAS lacks development expertise and resources.

- The EEAS tends to marginalise poverty alleviation priorities in favour of foreign policy objectives and to focus on short term goals and the expense of long-term strategy.
- The EEAS tends to interact less with development NGOs than other EU institutions, although it does take a strong stance on human rights issues.

Humanitarian aid

- Humanitarian aid needs to be better connected to other areas of development policy. ECHO has a specific remit, but is trying to be more connected in areas such as resilience.
- There is a need for improvement in ECHO's operational plans and in its work in fragile states.
- ECHO needs to promote more self-reliance in partner countries.
- Excessive levels of bureaucracy can prevent humanitarian aid reaching people in need rapidly. More flexibility is needed in programming funding in order to ensure more rapid responses.
- There are concerns that the new European Voluntary Humanitarian Aid Corps (EVHAC) will bring inexperienced young people into humanitarian situations. There was a suggestion that volunteers should focus on issues such as resilience rather than being placed on the front line in emergency situations.

Future options and challenges

- Climate change will be a significant challenge. There is a need for the Commission and Member States to work together better in addressing it.
- Some NGOs felt that EU countries were in relative decline, with diminishing influence. EU donors will likely find it difficult to keep focus on achieving long-term results when emerging donors are getting political "quick win" results.
- Achieving value for money and combating corruption are significant challenges.
- Increasing budgetary pressures and capacity constraints in donor countries may reinforce the argument for greater EU level coordination and oversight. Donor countries will likely face increasing domestic political pressures on development spending.
- The EU's action in fragile states is becoming increasingly important.
- The EU also has an important role in the post-2015 agenda.
- There will be an increasing need for greater accountability for development spending both in donor and recipient nations.
- The shape and focus of ODA is likely to change, moving away from an exclusive focus on poverty reduction.
- New technologies will present both challenges and opportunities both to the EU and partner countries.

ENDS
