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Translating this guide into practice



As we have seen in previous chapters, it will be necessary for non-state actors to work together to organise themselves, create strategic alliances and monitor progress in implementing the Cotonou Agreement. This chapter explores how this guide can serve as a catalyst in that process. If widely disseminated, the guide could contribute to ongoing discussions and sustain information flows on non-state actor participation in practice. The chapter also looks at the role of umbrella organisations and networks, and provides a brief overview of the potential role of information and communications technologies (ICTs) in this process.

'The challenge lies in translating and transforming information so that it flows from the grassroots level, via national fora, to international negotiations, and back again. It is not enough with a handful of informed individuals representing NSAs in each country. We need to invest in information brokering between these different levels.'

A non-state actor in Kenya

7.1 Disseminating this guide

The Cotonou Agreement stresses the importance of information sharing at all levels – not just in formal dialogue between ACP governments, the European Commission and non-state actors in ACP countries, but also among non-state actors themselves. This is particularly important as the EC, like many other development agencies, and ACP governments have only limited capacity when it comes to information dissemination. Non-state actors are best placed to pass on information of relevance to them – including this guide – using their own communications channels and networks.

Further dissemination

The **ACP Secretariat** will be the focal point for the distribution of printed copies of the guide. In order to be cost-effective, dissemination will be primarily organised through the official parties (NAOs, Delegations of the European Commission) and through networks of non-state actors. The guide can also be downloaded from the ACP Secretariat website (www.acpsec.org). Yet it would be unrealistic to expect official parties to have sufficient means and mechanisms to distribute it to all the hundreds of thousands of non-state actors in the 77 ACP countries who could potentially benefit from the information it contains.

To ensure that this guide can serve as the **basis and starting point for discussion**, it

is important that non-state actors take it as their own task to **disseminate it further to anyone who may be interested**.

In doing so, non-state actors should keep in mind that this guide is intended only to provide information – it is not binding on the official parties in any way. It can serve as a useful tool for defining your own desired roles and functions in getting involved in implementing the Cotonou Agreement, and as the basis for discussions with official parties on how the guide applies to the national context.

New information products

A first step is to spread the word about this guide among your colleagues and networks, and ask them to download, email, photocopy, translate if necessary, and distribute it further. The information it contains can also be used to create new information products that may be better suited for the needs of network members, such as:

- training modules;
- posters or pamphlets explaining relevant sections using simple terms and language; and
- translations of relevant sections of the guide into local languages, especially for use in rural areas.

Such information products can provide common reference points for launching a

debate on how this guide relates to your own circumstances, and what action you can take together to engage in ACP-EC cooperation. Remember that this is your product, from which you can select relevant parts to be used for influencing policy, lobbying, or simply as an organising tool.

Further funding

All of these activities will cost money, of course. You could therefore jointly, or via national platforms or umbrella organisations, try to obtain further funding for your planned dissemination and communication activities, either from the EC or from other donor agencies.

Be creative in your fundraising campaigns.

It is usually difficult to obtain funding to start up a new information and communications network, or to expand a network that is not yet well established and the benefits for its members are not clear. However, networking and information sharing processes that do take off and prove to be successful usually have little trouble in getting support from both members and donors.

This highlights a common dilemma: in order to get further funding you will need to strengthen the mechanisms for networking and communicating with others, yet in order to do so, you will (most likely) need further funding. To avoid getting stuck at the outset, look for cheap solutions to get a dissemination process off the ground that could lead both to a

debate about this guide and to follow-up actions afterwards. However, it is important that you make full use of existing communication channels to start up the process before investing in new technologies.

Taking an active role in information dissemination and discussion fora around the Cotonou Agreement can also facilitate your access to broader national debates on policy formulation and programme implementation, including the PRSP process or other national development strategies (*see section 4.2, point 1*).

7.2 Starting a discussion

Non-state actors are encouraged to tailor the information in this guide to meet specific needs. Discussions on how it can be adapted could take place at **several levels**:

- at the **local level**, on a small scale, among your partners;
- at the **sector level**, through umbrella organisations and other representative bodies; or
- at the **national level**, among the members of national platforms, which will vary from country to country, depending on national characteristics of civil society participation and the political climate.

In discussions at any of these levels, it is important to get together with others to determine what particular role and function your organisation or network would be best suited to play, and how it can complement the work of others. It will also be necessary to identify in what area of the Cotonou Agreement you wish to intervene as a non-state actor.



Making this guide locally relevant

Some questions to stimulate reflection on how to make this guide relevant in the context you are working could be:

- How does this guide relate to us?
- Does a platform exist in our area of operations that is currently hosting or would be willing to facilitate a dialogue on this topic?
- What role can we play in initiating/sustaining such a dialogue?
- Who else can we inform about this guide?
- How can we use extracts from this guide in our current communications tools – newsletters, meetings, seminars or other media?
- What new communications tools do we need in order to engage with organisations or platforms operating at other levels – district/local level, national, regional or international?

7.3 Sustaining information flows and knowledge sharing

Following the initial dissemination and discussion phases, the next step will be to ensure that the dialogue and exchange of experiences continue once the guide is put into practice. For this non-state actors may need to set up new or strengthen existing information distribution mechanisms that will **foster linkages** between local, national, regional and international levels, and maintain a two-way flow of information.

As the **body of evidence and experience** on how things work in practice increases, non-state actors will be able to monitor progress in the implementation of the Cotonou Agreement over time, as well as the quality of participation. Equipped with such evidence non-state actors will be able to intervene more effectively at key stages of the programming and review processes, such as in the mid-term and annual reviews of national implementation and policies (*see section 4.2, point 5*).

Learn lessons based on experiences

Policy makers both at the national level and in Europe are keen to understand how the provisions of the Cotonou Agreement for non-state actor participation will work in practice on the ground. Information on all aspects of their participation therefore needs to be systematically gathered and disseminated, allowing for a wide range of

examples to be put forward in the various reviews. Such information could also encourage non-state actors themselves to engage with others, to learn lessons based on experiences in other countries and regions, to share their frustrations, or to plan new ways forward.

Local and/or national non-state actors in ACP countries may want to team up with European partner organisations, where

such partners would provide added value in feeding their experiences to wider networks, such as decision makers in Brussels, European donors and the public at large. A number of European organisations (see *box*) are working to ensure that information on how implementation works in practice, and the lessons learned in the process, flows beyond national borders into the ACP-EU debate.



Examples of European initiatives around non-state actor participation

The **Cotonou Monitoring Group** is the coordinating structure for a number of European development non-governmental organisation (NGO) networks. The Group exchanges information and ideas on monitoring and advocacy approaches in the implementation of the Cotonou Agreement. www.eurostep.org

The **Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES)** works in many ACP countries, where it organises training seminars on the Cotonou Agreement for decision makers, NGOs and other non-state actors, and the media. The FES also facilitates a number of dialogue processes to follow the implementation of the Agreement at the ACP

country level, in order to ensure that the lessons learned are fed into the European dialogues. www.fes.de/cotonou

The **European Centre for Development Policy Management (ECDPM)**, as well as facilitating the production of this guide, is building up a series of country case studies of non-state actor involvement in implementing the Cotonou Agreement. In the coming years the Centre will monitor the process of implementation in practice, with the aim of facilitating wide use and sharing of national experiences and evidence-based learning. www.ecdpm.org

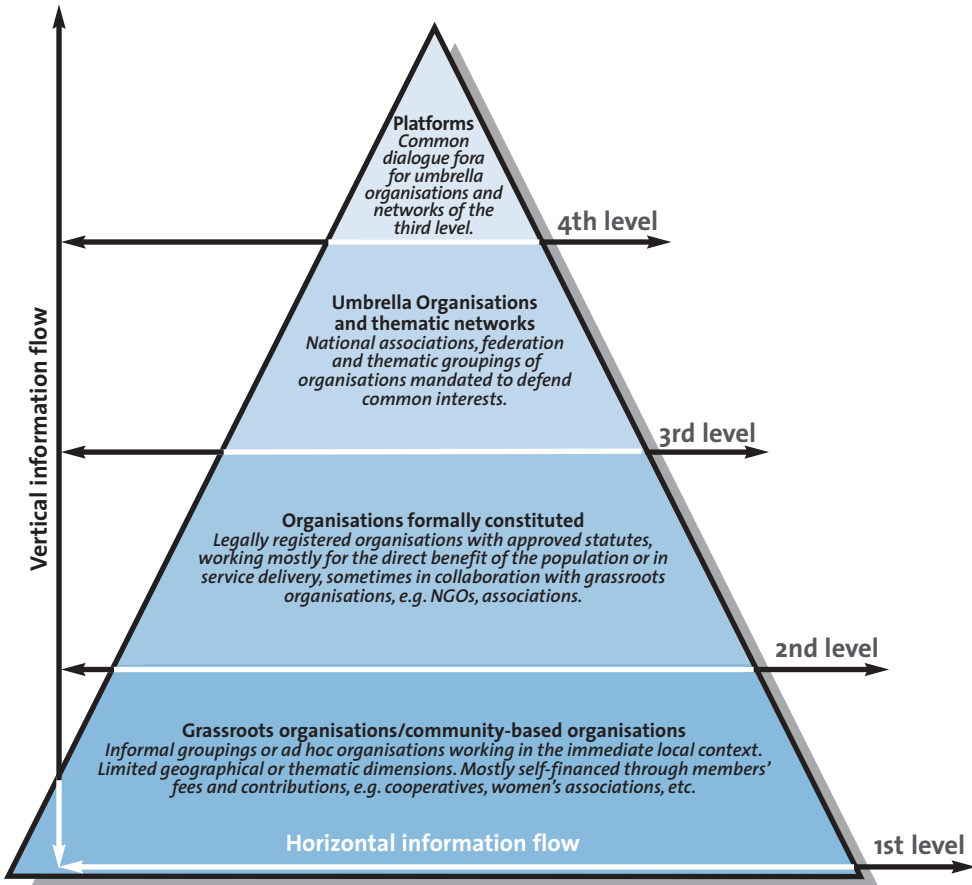
Sharing information

At the national level, structures to ensure **vertical information flows**, both from the top down and from the bottom up needs to be put in place to ensure a two-way flow of information between central and decentralised/local non-state actors. The links between these different levels of discussion and information sharing are critical for ensuring that the approach adopted by

non-state actors is coherent, and that their participation is truly representative.

Similarly, sharing information with peers and partners in **horizontal information flows** can enhance learning, coordination and encourage coalition building among different groups of non-state actors. This, in turn, can increase their ability to influence policies, access funding, etc.

Figure 5: Vertical and horizontal information flows between non-state actors



7.4 The role of umbrella organisations and networks

The implementation of the Cotonou Agreement, as with many other international development cooperation agreements, will rely heavily on the existence of well functioning networks for sharing information and keeping non-state actors up-to-date with progress.

Important role

Umbrella organisations and platforms have a particularly important role to play in strengthening both vertical and horizontal information flows. However, it is



Get in touch with your network

- If such a platform exists in your country or area of operation, contact them to see what plans they have in relation to this guide, and offer your own suggestions.
- If you are a part of such a platform, find out what funding might be available to start a national process to adapt this guide to your country-specific context. Could such a communications process around this guide also help to strengthen existing means of sharing information among platform members? You may also want to consider what channels and technologies would be the best suited for communicating with different groups of non-state actors.

challenging to make a network function well, which calls for careful planning and investments, especially in making sure the information is passed up and trickles back down to the local level and rural areas.

Such networks and national platforms could perform an important function in hosting dialogue processes and facilitating information sharing on how this guide can be adapted to country and sector-specific contexts. They could also be pivotal in sustaining the process over time and in building up a body of evidence and experience on how the guide can be used in practice in different settings.

Many of the non-state actors consulted in the preparation of this guide stressed the need for second-level or intermediary organisations (such as umbrella organisations, networks and other knowledge brokers) to explain in non-technical terms and in local languages what the different development cooperation frameworks, policies and programmes mean in practice. Various media outlets (such as radio bulletins, newspapers and online newsportals) could also assist by compiling 'information digests' and by 'translating' this guide for different audiences.

The EC Delegations are trying to make their operations more transparent. For instance, they are increasingly using their own country-specific websites to make

relevant information available to a larger audience. On its own, however, this is not enough to broaden their outreach to all non-state actors in a country. Here, intermediary organisations and platforms could play an important role by gathering infor-

mation from these websites, translating it into easily understandable language, and passing it on to their members. In this way they can also help to even out 'information inequalities' due to the poor connectivity in the rural areas of many ACP countries.



Communication and information dissemination Suggestions from non-state actors

The following suggestions for improving communication and information dissemination among non-state actors were made during the online consultation with over 130 participants and at national seminars in the different ACP regions.

- **The Internet** can be used to make information - including this guide - more widely available, but it first needs to be 'digested' and forwarded by other means to potential users in areas where Internet connections are slow or non-existent. It also needs to be complemented by more participatory methods for those with minimal background knowledge (Jamaica, Cameroon).
- **E-newsletters** can be a useful and inexpensive way to disseminate information (Zimbabwe).
- A neutral '**information exchange point**' could be created at the national level, with a directory of the activities of broad groupings/categories of non-state actors, as well as their advocacy interests and geographical scope. It should also contain a directory of what the EC and government priorities are for each area, and what support is available for capacity building. This information exchange point should ideally be managed by a neutral third party that could also match interests, send out targeted alerts to non-state actors, and identify any information gaps. This third party could also facilitate a dialogue process on how the guide can be adapted to particular working environments

and in different areas of operations of non-state actors (Kenya).

- **Work more closely with the media and specific journalists** (Mali, Kenya). In particular, make good use of **radio outlets** for disseminating information, such as community radio (Jamaica) and Pan-African Radio (Cameroon). Radio stations could host debates between EC and non-state actor representatives on different topics that would be of interest to a wide range of listeners (Malawi).
- **Mobilise and strengthen non-state actor networks** so they can communicate better with members to inform them about this guide. (Mali, Swaziland). Invest in the information sharing function of non-state actor platforms (Fiji).
- **Broaden knowledge** about the Cotonou Agreement and the opportunities for participation beyond a handful of informed individuals using a diversity of information channels at local, national and regional levels (Fiji).
- **Work in partnership with national knowledge institutions** to build up the capacity to participate in debates in an informed manner (Kenya).
- **Within each EC Delegation one person** should be designated as **non-state actor liaison officer** to act as a common entry point and to respond to requests for information (Mauritius).

7.5 The role of information and communication technologies (ICTs)

Information and communication technologies (ICTs) can play a valuable and complementary role in dissemination, discussion and sustained knowledge sharing. However, this is only the case if 'new' technologies (such as the Internet and various online tools) are integrated with existing, more traditional means of communication, such as face-to-face meetings and consultations.

It is important to keep in mind, however, that technologies are just that – technologies. Just as you can get from point A to point B faster by car than if you walk, ICTs can transmit messages more efficiently. But ultimately they simply facilitate human interaction, and assist you in getting from A to B.



CTA's experience in ICTs

The Centre has more than 10 years experience in working with non-state actors in the field of agriculture and rural development and has a mandate to support the ICM (Information and Communication Management) strategies of any group, rural or otherwise, pursuing issues in support of or in the interest of the rural sector. In addition to the more traditional methods of information dissemination, such as print publications (e.g. Spore Bulletin), conferences, radio programmes and face-to-face meetings, CTA also exploits available ICTs such as web-portals, e-forums and satellite broadcasting to reach its audiences. CTA has dedicated one of its thematic web portals to ICTs with the 'ICT Update' website focusing on the use of ICTs for ACP agricultural and rural development.

See: <http://ictupdate.cta.int/>



Some initial questions to ask when choosing ICTs

1. What kind of information do we need to pass on to network members in order for us to start discussions and get involved at local, national and regional levels?
2. What channels of communication would be most effective for reaching the different groups in the network - i.e. what should the mix of ICTs look like?
3. Is there a role for new, digitally based ICTs in addition to the communications channels and tools we already use?
4. Do all of the people we want to engage with have access to and know how to use these new technologies? If they do not, would it mean that some people would be excluded from the discussions? If so, how can we overcome such information inequalities?
5. What capacities do we need to develop in order to communicate more effectively and share our experiences?

Sharing information through online communities

The Internet is an efficient means of disseminating this guide to those who have online access. Yet it may not be sufficient in areas where Internet connections are slow. In many cases it may be more effective to photocopy the guide and hand it out to colleagues. As mentioned above, intermediary networks and platforms can play an important role in levelling the playing field in relation to information inequalities (see section 7.4).

Although some people may have difficulties downloading big documents from the Internet due to poor connectivity, email (electronic mail) requires less in terms of hardware, and is used by many non-state actors for information dissemination and networking. There are numerous electronic discussion groups organised by individual organisations or, increasingly, by communities of interest or networks.

Of course, setting up an online consultation is not an easy task. It requires a lot of preparatory work, coordination and effort, not only on the technical aspects. It will also take time and effort to motivate and encourage members of a network to participate. On the other hand, online consultations can be an effective way of connecting members of a community of interest around a common goal (such as to discuss follow-up actions to this guide). They could also be particularly useful for exchanging lessons learned across borders and in enabling non-

state actors to participate in dialogue at the regional or international level.



Online communities

Dgroups: development through dialogue

During the preparation of this guide, an online workspace and electronic discussion ran in parallel with the in-country seminars and meetings to consult the widest possible number of non-state actors and stakeholders across the ACP countries. Dgroups is one of several portals/online networking tools that enable groups and communities in international development to share information and interact online. It is targeted at low-bandwidth users in developing countries. www.dgroups.org

ACP Civil Society Information Network

A joint project of the ACP Civil Society Forum (represented by Environmental Development Action in the Third World, ENDA), Euforic and ECDPM, the ACP-EU Civil Society Information Network aims to extend and enhance the appropriate use of ICTs by civil society actors in ACP countries and in Europe. The Network is working to raise awareness, and to create knowledge-sharing systems and partnerships on priority issues like poverty reduction, sustainable development, and the integration of ACP economies into the world economy. <http://acp-eu.euforic.org/civsoc/>

Radio

As the reach of the Internet increases, it is sometimes forgotten that a more traditional ICT like radio can be a very effective communications tool. Almost everyone across the globe has access to a radio at home, at work or in public places. Radio can also be both instructive and entertaining. Many of the non-state actors consulted in the preparation of this guide stressed the value of community radio. One participant suggested that radio stations could host live debates and phone-in sessions on non-state actor participation in the Cotonou Agreement based on this guide, focusing on one chapter per week.



Community radio in rural Africa Radio Galkayo, Somalia

Radio Galkayo broadcasts throughout the Horn of Africa, and is the only community-based media outlet in northeastern Somalia. It was set up in 1993 to provide an alternative to the radio stations controlled by the local warlords. Run by young people on a voluntary basis, its programmes focus on socio-economic issues, development strategies, education, demining, sports and culture, the concerns of women, peace and reconciliation. www.radiogalkayo.com/

Many NGOs and platforms now operate their own radio stations. They commission local journalists all over the world to file reports specifically for the development sector, and distribute story clips via the Internet.

Video and TV

Various online platforms are being launched where individuals and organisations can upload their own video clips to share with others (<http://tv.oneworld.net>). This is based on the 'open documentary' concept. Stories are collectively built up, based on video clips uploaded by individuals and organisations, which can then be edited into a story and broadcast on a community TV channel. Although this is rather technologically advanced, it could be used for broadcasting interviews with non-state actors and stories of their experiences in implementing the Cotonou Agreement.

Another more traditional way to disseminate information is of course to work with local TV stations and their own reporters, keeping them informed about the involvement of non-state actors in influencing and implementing policies under the Cotonou Agreement.



Working with the media print, radio and TV

- Contact the local/national/regional office or correspondent for the media organisation you have in mind.
- Find out how the media organisation can help you tell your story. For example, does the organisation have its own journalists, or can you submit your own material (video, radio clip or article)?
- Build up long-term relationships with interested journalists covering your area of operations.
- Be aware of general news debates, and decide what story would be best suited for which media outlet (radio, TV or print).