



Cotonou Infokit

Organising to Participate

Non state actors and local governments share responsibility in making participatory development a reality in future ACP-EU cooperation. This fiche introduces the various initiatives taken by non-state actors to organise themselves in order to participate more effectively in the partnership.

The Green Paper consultation process on the future of ACP-EU cooperation (1996) involved a wide range of civil society actors, private sector organisations, trade unions, and to a lesser extent also representatives from the world of local governments.

Through this process, new actors became aware of the 'hidden treasures' of ACP-EU cooperation. They also started to organise themselves at different levels (global, regional, national) in order to increase their participation in Lomé cooperation or to defend their interests in the negotiating process for a successor agreement to Lomé IV.

These processes of organisational development of non-state actors turned out to be a major strategic and operational challenge. Few linkages, for instance, exist between private sector actors across the ACP -- and the same holds true for civil society and local government actors. Funding is not easily available to bring these actors together, to build networks, to develop capacity, let alone to develop solid representative structures.

In this fiche, we focus primarily on new networks of actors at a global ACP level. However, it should be clear that interesting initiatives are also taking place at regional and

national levels. The new opportunities for participation, created by the Cotonou Agreement, will most probably give a boost to these processes of organisational development of non-state actors.

The ACP Civil Society Forum

In October 1997, over 30 Civil Society organisations from the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) regions met in Entebbe (Uganda) and agreed to establish a common platform to address issues relating to ACP-EU cooperation. Seven ACP NGOs, representing the four major African sub-regions (Southern Africa, Eastern Africa, Central Africa and West Africa), the Caribbean and the Pacific were mandated to drive the process leading to the establishment of said platform to be known as the ACP Civil Society Forum.

The Forum is meant to be a democratic, transparent and inclusive structure. It is a coalition of not-for-profit organisations working on issues relating to ACP-EU development co-operation. It seeks to cater for the diverse range civil society development issues within the wide geographic coverage of the ACP group. It will benefit from, and be informed by, the diverse expertise and competencies of the ACP Civil Society Forum membership.

The objectives of the ACP Civil Society Forum are :

to provide a platform for Civil Society actors from the ACP to formulate common positions on issues of concern relevant to ACP-EU cooperation;

to promote the articulation of the views and concerns of marginalised social groups in ACP countries;

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to facilitate dialogue between ACP Civil Society organisations and official institutions of the ACP Group and the EU (e.g. the ACP Secretariat, the Joint Parliamentary Assembly or the European Commission);

to support and strengthen the participation of ACP Civil Society organisations in the ACP-EU development co-operation framework; and

to regularly access, update and share information on developments at all levels of the ACP-EU cooperation.

ACP Local Government Platform

Local governments and their national or regional representative structures, were probably the least involved actors in Lomé cooperation. In recent years, however, a major change is taking place, mainly as a result of decentralization processes in most ACP countries. The specific identity of local government (as a separate sphere of government) and their role in promoting local (economic) development are increasingly recognized. Thus, the Cotonou Agreement considers local governments as a distinct actor, to be associated to the formulation and implementation of ACP-EU cooperation.

Emulating the example of the civil society and the private sector, African local government actors took the initiative to organise an informal dialogue process in December 1999 among themselves, with their European counterparts, and with representatives from the European Commission. This meeting made it possible to define the building blocks of a stronger partnership between local governments and the EU. It also led to the creation of an ACP Local Government Platform.

The Platform will be based on existing local government networks and structures. It will act as an organ for interest articulation and dialogue at ACP-EU level. It intends to play a catalytic role in channeling information, supporting dialogue, networking and organizational development of ACP local government actors.

The Platform is currently exploring ways and means to develop its mandate, membership (beyond Africa), structures and capacity.

ACP Private Sector

The new political and institutional environment in favour of private sector development has been welcomed by the ACP private sector. This has resulted in an increasing number of initiatives by the ACP private sector to better engage in dialogue with public bodies and to better tap the new opportunities provided by the Cotonou Agreement. Various

sectoral, national and regional organisations have been enhancing their constituencies and building their capacities. Examples can be found at the sectoral level (eg Caribbean Hotel Association, ACP Sugar Industries, etc.) at the national level (Joint Economic Council in Mauritius) and at regional levels (SADC Association of Chambers of Commerce, Caribbean Association of Industry and Commerce, West, East and Southern African Enterprise Networks, etc.).

Two major initiatives currently exist at the overall ACP level:

The Association of ACP National Chambers of Commerce, Industry and Other Economic Operators

The Association was legally constituted in 1996 at a meeting in the Canary Islands attended by representatives of ACP Chambers from some 50 countries. The constituencies of the Association are largely made up of Chambers and smaller ACP business sectors. The main objectives of the Association are:

- To upgrade ACP national chambers of commerce to facilitate and foster their dialogue between its members and others;

- To contribute to the integration of the informal sector of the ACP economies into the formal sector of these economies;

- To develop and promote intra-ACP and ACP-EU trade and investment;

- To facilitate and promote the regular flow of information and communication between ACP national chambers;

- To disseminate information and establish an information network;

- To assist in harmonising the commercial policies of ACP countries to promote economic activities among the ACP states as well as with other countries.

ACP Business Forum

The Libreville Declaration of the first ACP Heads of State Meeting (November 1997) expressed a strong commitment 'to promote the development of a socially responsible private sector and encourage its participation in the development process'. ACP Heads of State also called for 'the establishment of an ACP-EU business forum of ACP and EU business institutions and enterprises'.

Building on this, a group of ACP private sector actors started in 1998 an informal, bottom-up process, aimed to gradually construct an ACP Business Forum. The idea was to set up an

open and loose-knit private sector network with a clear added-value compared to existing ACP private sector organisations. The niche of the ACP Business Forum lies in promoting dialogue and interest articulation among different existing ACP private sector intermediate bodies and networks and with ACP and EU authorities at global, regional and national levels.

As a young entity, the ACP Business Forum is establishing its own structures, both in Brussels and in the various (sub)regions of the ACP. Constituencies of the ACP Business Forum include intermediate bodies of the ACP manufacturing, services, export industries, as well as chambers of commerce associations at national and regional ACP levels. The objectives of the Forum are:

To promote linkages and collaboration among ACP intermediate private sector and business associations and with their EU counterparts;

To strengthen the capacity of the ACP private sector intermediate bodies to effectively participate in the formulation, programming and implementation of ACP-EU cooperation at national, sub-regional, and global ACP-EU levels;

To build new public-private partnerships with ACP governments and with the EU, based on dialogue, a quest for complementarity action and mutual accountability.

In the course of the negotiating process for the Cotonou Agreement, the ACP Business Forum provided constructive inputs on private sector development issues. The Forum has also engaged in structured dialogue with the Brussels-based ACP-EU official bodies (EC, ACP secretariat, ACP Committee of Ambassadors) and the various instruments in support of the private sector.

The future work of the Forum is largely concentrating on the promotion of structured public-private dialogue in the context of the new Cotonou Partnership Agreement.

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