



Some key messages from Civil Society representatives on the future Joint EU-Africa Strategy

As the final step of the first phase of the public consultation, ECDPM organised a **Conference on Civil Society and the Joint EU-Africa Strategy** in cooperation with VENRO, the Association of German development NGOs. The Conference, which was held on 23 and 24 April 2007 in Bad Honnef, was attended by 104 participants and built on the topics raised in the internet consultation as well as in the institutional negotiations. It allowed African and European Civil Society actors to formulate expectations vis-à-vis the EU and the AU regarding the contents of the EU-Africa Joint Strategy and their role in it. Key messages and recommendations were identified and communicated to the official negotiators.

The organisers aimed to achieve **balanced participation** between European and African organisations, between the main thematic clusters, and between the various types of stakeholders. Senior officials from the African Union Commission and Member States as well as the European Commission and European Union Member States were also present.¹

Below is an excerpt from the organiser's summary of key points emerging from the Conference. The aim was to discuss and exchange ideas on the Joint EU-Africa Strategy rather than to arrive at a formal declaration, as the participants present felt that they did not have a mandate to endorse statements on behalf of Civil Society. A synthesis of the Key Messages was presented to the EU-Africa Troika Expert Meeting that took place in Brussels on 26-28 April 2007.² During the Conference, thematic Working Groups were organised that discussed governance, democracy and human rights; key development issues; trade and regional integration; and peace and security. Key messages were formulated under the various topics.³

What will be the added value of the joint Strategy?

Although the debates were rich, they seemed to provoke **more questions than answers**, notably on the expected impact on the ground of the future Joint Strategy, the proposed relationship between the Joint Strategy and existing partnerships and instruments of cooperation and political dialogue between the EU and Africa, and whether the Joint Strategy would merely integrate these or result in new initiatives. A related point of contention was the true value-added of a Joint Strategy beyond the support it provided for the principle of *'treating Africa as one'*.

¹ The list of participants can be downloaded from:

http://europafrica.files.wordpress.com/2007/04/tn_liste200407fin.pdf

² See synthesis at: <http://europafrica.files.wordpress.com/2007/05/bad-honnef-key-message-final.doc>

³ The results of these Working Group sessions can be found at:

<http://europafrica.org/2007/01/01/results/>



Despite this background, strong agreement emerged on **principles and values**. In developing a Joint Strategy, there is a need to recognise the historical legacy of unequal relations between Africa and Europe, the most recent incarnation of which is that of recipient and donor. The Joint Strategy needs to address a partnership and participatory approach between Africa and the EU as well as the political level and Civil Society. Participants called for a new people-centred and people-driven partnership based on a set of shared principles, including mutual accountability, democracy, trust, justice, the rule of law, equality, citizenship, ownership, gender awareness and sustainability.

The **potential added value** of a Joint Strategy could reside in the opportunity it provides to better integrate various sector-based agreements by moving away from a fragmented relationship and towards bringing different strands together. A Joint Strategy might also better reflect the recent changes and developments in both Unions and their interest in jointly tackling problems at a global level. It could further be beneficial to the peoples of both continents, provided it gives them a strong voice. Finally, it may lead to the creation of a more structured framework to systematically involve Civil Society in the official relations between the two continents

Considerable **scepticism** was also voiced. There is a real danger that the Joint Strategy could be 'just another strategy paper'. Will it genuinely improve the coherence of EU policies towards Africa and for development? Moreover, will the Strategy process also integrate critical voices? Will it change other critical debates where the EU is currently not listening to Africa, such as over EPAs? Finally, would a Joint Strategy take account of African debates and diverging views, for instance on the negative effects of neo-liberalism, or would it simply reinforce the ascendancy of market liberalism?

A lot of work remains to be done in order to arrive at common Civil Society positions on many of the questions raised above.

Scepticism on the process leading to a joint EU-Africa Strategy

In terms of the **process and the role of Civil Society**, concerns were voiced about the **short timeline and the process** leading to a Joint EU-Africa Strategy. In order to have a meaningful consultation, there must be a transparent process with clarity who decides on participation and outcomes, the timing of the process, and how inputs will be taken into account. Participants took note of the reasons why the draft outline had not been distributed and expressed regrets regarding this decision since it would have allowed for a more focussed contribution. Making the outline public after the Ministerial meeting in May would provide a new opportunity for more focussed comments. Participants took note that the consultation would continue after May.

There was appreciation for the number of African participants at the Conference. For a genuine EU-Africa partnership **all types of actors should be involved** in the consultation. Women's organisations, youth and diaspora should participate on an equal footing. There is still a need to convince many of the Civil Society Organisations that serious engagement in the formulation process is worth



spending their limited resources on. In this context, financial support for full participation of Civil Society in Europe and Africa would be desirable.

Participants felt that the Lisbon Summit should be seen as one further milestone in the Joint Strategy process rather than an end in itself, and the question of **what happens after the Summit** should be addressed. Reflection is needed on the appropriate mechanisms to monitor implementation. More decentralised accountability mechanisms should be put in place. Monitoring would require an action plan with indicators, and the official monitoring process should be accompanied by civil society monitoring. Independent spaces should be created for civil society dialogue and monitoring.

What follow up for civil society?

There were substantial discussions about the **follow-up options for Civil Society**. Participants should use their networks to inform their constituencies about the Joint Strategy process. Global fora and existing thematic networks must be used to inform and disseminate relevant information and discuss the process, progress and objectives of the Joint Strategy. There is a need to map open, decentralised and autonomous civil society initiatives concerning the Joint Strategy. Taking a sector-based approach may be more manageable in this context. Although an appropriate space is needed for African, European and joint Euro-African civil society discussions, meetings with officials remain of vital importance. Concerning the monitoring work, using scheduled events and active networks would be useful. Finally, the African caucus met after the formal closing of the Conference in order to discuss possibilities for cooperation, coordination and follow-up.

Two key messages emerging from the conference:

- ***'There is a need to move from consultation to involvement'***
- ***'We are not endorsing a strategy that we do not know'***

For more information please see:
<http://europafrika.org/2007/01/01/results/>

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