



ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly
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Civil Society and Parliaments: collaboration to improve the impact and effectiveness of EC Aid through the Cotonou Agreement

The Issue

“One of the fundamental prerequisites for the achievement of sustainable development is broad public participation in decision-making” Agenda 21, Chapter 23

A major principle of the Cotonou Agreement is that ACP countries determine the development principles, strategies and models of their economies and societies. Equally important and enshrined in the Agreement is the involvement of non-state actors in both the consultations around decision-making and implementation of the cooperation agreement.

Collaborative work between national and regional parliaments and civil society actors has the potential to consolidate and enhance the principles of ownership and participation as set out in the Cotonou Agreement and the European Consensus on Development.

The combination of an informed civil society and elected representatives of the peoples, from ACP and from European states, is a powerful force to strengthen the voice and ownership of developing countries in decision-making.

The Mid-Term Review of the Country and Regional Strategy Papers for ACP states, in 2010, presents an important opportunity to test some of the suggestions that have been made for improving voice and accountability within the Cotonou Partnership.

Creating policy space and ownership

The 2005 EU Consensus on Development reiterates the importance of the participation of all stakeholders. Programming principles of the Common Framework for Country Strategy Papers state that the “partnership must be extended to include (civil society) which should be involved in discussing policy, drawing up the cooperation strategy and implementing programmes. Other players, particularly local authorities and parliament, should also be involved.”

A survey undertaken by DG Development amongst their delegations on the scope and scale of consultations in country provided some useful insight and recommendations for the future: in particular, that the EC should attempt to move from ad hoc information to institutionalised dialogue.

The joint Pan-African and European Parliament has already demanded, in the context of the EU-Africa partnership, that oversight of the draft ACP country strategy papers by parliament goes beyond “information only” to an institutional role in monitoring budget and policy implementation processes of all actions funded through the European Union’s cooperation.¹

The Joint Parliament Assembly in Kigali agreed that ACP Parliaments should play a role in Country Strategy Papers.

The Mid-Term Review in 2010 will provide the opportunity to examine how the CSPs and RSPs are delivering in practice against the Cotonou principles, the Millennium Development Goals and the European Consensus on Development.

The role of Parliaments – proposals

In their home institutions, EU and ACP Parliamentarians are uniquely placed to provide information, knowledge and provoke debate on issues that require following up at the national or regional level and to share themes and debates with their colleagues. Together, through the joint assemblies, there are further opportunities to expand their role:

- The establishment of a Parliamentary Commission to undertake an analysis of National and Regional Indicative Programmes, supported by specialists and representatives of civil society. The analyses could be framed against criteria such as the contribution of the Indicative Programmes to the achievement of the MDGs and coordinated at a regional level, aiming to have a final report and recommendations prepared by 2009.
- Direct involvement in the Mid-Term Review, including involvement in the definition of guidelines for the Review and ensuring an effective and transparent framework for the participation of civil society. Such involvement might include, for example, the participation of parliamentarians and civil society in joint monitoring missions.
- Other opportunities for enhancing democratic scrutiny include the organisation of debates or hearings on the chosen themes of the Assembly, before and after the meetings, with non-governmental organisations and other experts.
- In terms of continuity, previous reports and resolutions could be revisited from time to time through follow-up discussions in the JPA in order to evaluate their progress and impact. In addition, parliamentarians should endeavour to promote continuity in participation for the JPAs, as far as possible, by the representatives experienced in the themes or sectors in question.

Improving collaboration between Parliaments and Civil Society - proposals

During the last few years, civil society, in particular development NGOs from the EU and ACP states, has regularly attended the Joint Parliamentary Assemblies. These interactions have created avenues for advocacy and policy activities by civil society and supported parliamentarians by providing additional knowledge and perspectives on the dossiers for debate. Civil society values these interactions, currently based on goodwill on all sides, and believe some measures could be taken to make them even more effective:

- In organisational terms, practical steps include adequate logistics, jointly-agreed agendas for parliamentarians and CSO meetings and good communications before, during and after the Assemblies.
- Work between ACP Parliaments and Civil Society could be expanded beyond the six-monthly Joint Parliamentary Assembly sessions. For example through: the establishment of a focal point in the parliaments to facilitate links with civil society, the organisation of hearings on topics of common interest, the establishment of a Parliamentary Committee focusing on development and cooperation.

ⁱ Joint EP-PAP Statement on the Joint EU-Africa Strategy, 2nd EU-Africa Summit, 8-9 December 2007, Lisbon