



"PROMOTING SUSTAINABLE AND INCLUSIVE DEVELOPMENT"

26TH MEETING OF ACP-EU ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL INTEREST GROUPS

BRUSSELS, EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE, 5-7 JULY 2011

The European Economic and Social Committee (EESC), representing the economic and social components of organised civil society in the European Union, organised the conference "Promoting sustainable and inclusive development: 26th meeting of ACP-EU economic and social interest groups" in Brussels, Belgium, in accordance with the mandate conferred upon the EESC by the Cotonou Agreement. The conference brought together delegates from the economic and social interest groups of most ACP countries, members of the EESC and representatives of the Economic and Social Councils of EU and ACP countries. Representatives of the ACP-EC Council of Ministers, the ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly, the European Commission, the General Secretariat of the ACP Group of States and European, African and international institutions and socio-professional organisations also attended.

FINAL DECLARATION

I. Progress on Cotonou, but further steps needed

The participants

1. welcome the fact that the agreement revised in 2010 takes account of the growing importance of regional integration in ACP countries and clearly highlights the interdependence between security and development;
2. note that joint approaches to EU-ACP cooperation in areas such as food security, health and sustainable fisheries are agreed in the revised agreement with the aim of contributing further to sustainable development, growth and poverty reduction;
3. note the joint recognition of climate change as a global challenge and the commitment to raising the profile of climate change in development cooperation. Recognise that, on the basis of the Cotonou Agreement, ACP countries need to be supported in their efforts to mitigate and adapt to the effects of climate change; in this context they request that the developed countries should fulfil the financial commitments agreed at the Cancún conference so that a fair transition for ACP countries is guaranteed;
4. highlight the challenges facing ACP countries in effectively integrating into the global economy, and call for the appropriate economic development strategies and aid-for-trade schemes to be put in place;

5. call on the ACP authorities and the EU to include the following provisions in the future revision of the Cotonou Agreement:
 - strengthening social protection schemes so that universal social systems are provided in all ACP countries;
 - including measures to improve fiscal governance;
 - providing additional and innovative sources of funding to undertake structural reforms;
 - increasing efforts by the EU and ACP authorities to disseminate information on the Cotonou Agreement and to improve consultations with non-state actors by involving them at an early stage in the design, implementation and monitoring of the Agreement;
 - putting in place effective capacity-building programmes for non-state actors which should be implemented in parallel to simplifying procedures for access to EU funding.
6. encourage non-state actors to:
 - increase their efforts to be more involved and contribute further to the consultative process;
 - continue organising themselves into representative platforms and networks at the national, regional and pan-regional level and to efficiently benefit from these increased interactions;
 - establish more structured contacts with their national authorities and EU delegations;
 - seek economic autonomy of women, vocational training for women and opportunities for long-term jobs for women.

II. On the challenges of food security

Right to food and trade

The participants

7. are seriously concerned that one billion human beings still suffer from hunger in 2011, and that the first of the Millennium Development Goals of halving the proportion of people who suffer from hunger by 2015 may not be achieved;
8. regret the lack of ambition of the action plan agreed by the G20 agriculture ministers in Paris on 23 June 2011 and the fact that the contributions of civil society were not sufficiently taken into account;
9. stress nevertheless that the "early warning system" to be set up should bring more transparency in commodity markets and thus help curb price volatility;
10. urge the international community to adopt a human-rights based framework as a foundation for establishing a universal right to food, in line with Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Article 11 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights;
11. call on the governments of the ACP countries to adopt legislation and strategies on the right to food at national level and establish the appropriate institutional mechanisms to ensure safe and nutritious food for their populations;

12. in accordance with FAO directives, support the establishment of food security safety nets through a global reinsurance mechanism underwritten by international financial institutions. National authorities and institutions must be able to protect their citizens from the impact of increasingly volatile food prices;
13. call for measures to be taken to reduce speculation in agricultural markets driven by the increasingly dominant position of derivatives in these markets;
14. share with Prof. Olivier De Schutter, UN Special Rapporteur on the right to food, the view that there is a need to recognise the specificity of agricultural products in terms of international trade, rather than treating them as any other commodities;
15. agree consequently with Prof. De Schutter that "developing countries should be allowed more flexibility in order to shield their agricultural producers from competition from industrialised countries' farmers"; to this end, they encourage developing countries to make use of provisions on special and differential treatment to help them protect their food markets;
16. call on the WTO and the EU to ensure that in trade reforms and in trade negotiations with ACP countries, proper account is taken of the need to help these countries reduce food and nutrition insecurity, particularly as regards women, young people and other population groups;
17. call on the EU to provide additional resources for Aid for Trade in order to strengthen the production capacity of developing countries and their ability to engage in and reap the benefits of international trade in food products;
18. ask that technical assistance and capacity building to help developing countries comply with agricultural and food regulations and standards be strengthened;
19. further ask the international community and the EU to encourage regional integration and South-South trade and cooperation through both respect for and promotion of regional economic groupings.

How to promote agriculture in developing countries?

The participants

20. call on the EU to increase its financial support to the agricultural sector via its development aid to ACP countries;
21. emphasise that the EU should assist and provide technical expertise to ACP countries, for example on locally adapted quality seeds, appropriate fertilisers, irrigation and adequate farming techniques, veterinary drugs and services, access to markets, and better provision of agricultural advisory services to smallholder farmers and their organisations;
22. stress that developing countries must increase the share of their national budget dedicated to agriculture, and ask the governments of those countries to dedicate at least 10% of the national budget to agriculture and rural development, in line with the commitment taken in Maputo by African countries in 2003;
23. note that food security begins by promoting the development of agriculture in developing countries; they regret that there has been underinvestment in agriculture capacity in past

- years, especially in smallholder-based production and underline the need to slow down rural-urban migration;
24. support public agriculture policies that promote local and regional markets;
 25. welcome the success in agriculture policy renewal in countries such as Ghana, Malawi and Rwanda, and recommend that this success be replicated in other ACP countries;
 26. call for transparent business regulation and for the development of rural financial institutions in order to support sustainable agriculture;
 27. highlight that preserving the environment and mitigating climate change must be primary concerns of agriculture policy; they need agricultural policies, development aid and investments to promote agricultural systems that minimise pollution, ensure the sustainable use of vital natural resources, and support species and ecosystem diversity;
 28. insist on the need to improve infrastructure for storage and transport of agricultural products in order to reduce post-production wastage and improve commercialisation in local markets.

How to tackle the issue of land grabbing?

The participants

29. express their concern about the fact that farmland grabbing is increasingly used by the financial sector for betting on the growing profitability of food trade in the future, and by foreign countries determined to secure food production for their population, in a way that is detrimental to the local communities;
30. ask the governments of ACP countries to keep checks on the handing-over of land to large domestic and international investors or foreign governments;
31. stress that negotiations for investment agreements must be transparent and involve the local communities and social partners;
32. highlight that the revenue generated by these investment agreements has to be used for the benefit of local communities and be accompanied by impact assessments and monitoring;
33. insist that these investments should comply fully with environmental concerns and be subject to prior impact assessments;
34. support the ongoing development by the FAO of Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land and Other Natural Resources and ask governments of ACP countries to use these guidelines to support and strengthen national and regional policy processes.

Supporting farmers' and rural workers' organisations

The participants

35. urge the governments of developing countries to better integrate farmers' and rural workers' organisations in decision-making processes that concern them, as well as giving them access to agricultural statistics and market data in order to assist them in taking decisions about investments and production;

36. request that the European Union make the involvement of civil society, especially farmers' and rural workers' organisations, in political decision-making one of the criteria for assessing good governance in the country;
37. consider that international and European funds should focus on building the capacities of farmers' and rural workers' organisations, in order to promote more professional structures in these sectors;
38. call on the EU to make the rules on financing more flexible and to provide training for farmers' and rural workers' organisations on how to access international funding;
39. stress that women contribute significantly to agriculture production but face many constraints which limit their ability to ensure food and nutrition security within their households and communities; urge ACP countries to grant women equal and unrestricted access to production resources, including the right to own and inherit land and the right of access to land and affordable credit;
40. support consumer organisations and the setting-up of consumer-farmer dialogue that aims to promote the interests of both sides;
41. call on international organisations to develop special programmes for women in rural areas and ensure that women are at the centre of action for food and nutrition security;
42. ask for special attention to be paid to young farmers through dedicated national policies and by supporting the establishment of training centres and programmes that help them become self-employed, give them access to affordable credit and promote their integration into the working life of rural areas.

III. The renewed EU development policy to focus on poverty eradication and more inclusive and sustainable development:

The participants

43. note that the provisions of the Lisbon Treaty give increased prominence to poverty eradication as one of the primary objectives of EU development cooperation and EU external action, and that poverty eradication is reflected in the overall values and policies to be upheld and promoted by the EU;
44. welcome the positive change introduced by the Treaty in the EU's strengthened commitment to promoting policy coherence for development (PCD), which implies that all EU policies – both external and internal – should be consistent with the Union's development policy;
45. following the recent changes concerning the organisation and operation of EU external relations services, the participants express concern that currently within the EU External Action Service and the Commission Directorate-General responsible for development programming (DEVCO) there is no single entry point for ACP countries as a group;
46. note that a Communication on a modernised EU development policy will be tabled by the Commission before the end of 2011 and that it will focus on the impact and effectiveness of EU aid, facilitating more inclusive growth, promoting sustainable development and achieving lasting effects, particularly in agriculture and food security, but note that the proposal is being

- prepared in a difficult time of economic, environmental and food crisis which will significantly increase the challenge;
47. agree that economically inclusive and sustainable growth and development, based on the decent work agenda, is a cornerstone of any development policy and an important precondition for poverty eradication, therefore improving growth potential is necessary to increase quality employment prospects and income in developing countries;
 48. underline that when growth is genuinely complemented by a social dimension, it generates a much greater effect in terms of poverty eradication;
 49. demand that EU aid should become an enabler for developing countries to help them pull themselves out of poverty, and consider that the main areas of action could be the following:
 - improving fiscal governance to ensure a minimum financial capacity,
 - improving law enforcement with a special focus on social issues and the implementation of ILO Labour Standards,
 - investing in agriculture-related sectors,
 - investing in public education and vocational training,
 - improving access to health services in line with the Millennium Development Goals,
 - promoting social and civil dialogue and the concept of supporting a democratic and organised civil society,
 50. promoting leadership among women and young people, their economic autonomy and a stable work environment; consider that reducing the gaps and overlaps in donors' work, improving the predictability and transparency of aid, focusing more on the concrete results, on governments' accountability and on non-state actors' involvement in political dialogue on development policies are of crucial importance and contribute to increased aid effectiveness and impact;
 51. call for the Fourth High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness, scheduled for 29 November to 1 December 2011 in Busan (Korea), to make further progress as regards aid effectiveness and to agree on an ambitious aid effectiveness agenda;
 52. point out that, in developing countries, GDP growth generated by agriculture is up to four times more effective in reducing poverty than growth generated by other sectors; therefore the support for agriculture within EU development policy should be increased;
 53. recognise the importance of addressing climate change effects and protection of biodiversity via a new development policy but stress that poverty eradication should remain a priority;
 54. point out that adapting to adverse impacts of climate change is becoming a necessity for many societies; among them, many of the ACP states are at high risk of being gravely affected;
 55. highlight that there is an urgent need to enhance institutional capacity building for environmental management at the national and local level in developing countries, and for more targeted investments in sustainable management of natural resources to protect biodiversity;
 56. note that access to sustainable energy sources and affordable energy is a real challenge for ACP countries; they welcome the existing instruments to support ACP countries in their efforts, but stress the need to ensure that appropriate ways of consulting with non-state actors in developing countries are in place so that they can contribute to how this policy is shaped and implemented;

57. call for the development of better policies to promote decent, green jobs in the energy sector;
58. support the ILO initiatives to introduce and implement a social security floor in ACP countries in order to protect and empower the most disadvantaged and vulnerable groups in society, including women, children, young people, the elderly and those working in the informal economy.

IV. Negotiations on EPAs should continue, but special attention should be given to the following:

The participants

59. note that so far little progress has been made as regards the negotiations on new Economic Partnership Agreements between the EU and the African states;
60. stress the need to launch reflections on possible alternative scenarios to EPAs in case the negotiations on comprehensive EPAs are not heading towards a successful completion;
61. consider that a strong political commitment is needed in order to sign the Interim EPAs but also that the Interim EPAs should not be an obstacle to continuing negotiations towards comprehensive EPAs; however, recommend that this be done under certain conditions, so that due account is taken of the different capacities of ACP countries and their right to continue negotiations at an appropriate pace;
62. demand appropriate accompanying measures to ensure the successful implementation of the EPAs; these should include the restructuring of ACP industries in order to ensure production diversification, economic resilience and increased levels of exports of processed products, development of infrastructure, modernisation of agricultural sectors, human resources development, improvements to administrative and economic governance and reforms of rules of origin;
63. ask for sufficient financial resources to be made available from the 10th EDF, the "Aid for Trade" programme, the EU budget and EU Member States;
64. welcome the creation of Regional Aid for Trade packages to support regional integration;
65. demand that the EPAs include economic, social and environmental provisions and appropriate technical support in order to capitalise on their development potential and allow for more sustainable results;
66. underline that special attention should be given to education and training as a main pre-condition for better employability and quality job creation, particularly in view of the future implementation of the EPAs;
67. ask for vocational training in the agricultural area and integration and employment policies that take into account the specific circumstances of women;
68. insist that social and economic interest groups as well as other non-state actors be effectively consulted and involved in EPA negotiations and revision;
69. welcome the progress made in the implementation of the CARIFORUM EPA, especially as regards the establishment and functioning of the Joint Consultative Committee;

70. demand that institutional provisions for the participation of non-state actors in monitoring the implementation of the EPAs (Civil Society Consultative Committees) be introduced in future comprehensive EPAs, following the model of the CARIFORUM EPA.

V. The participatory approach

The participants

71. assert strongly that the Millennium Development Goals must remain a vital reference for ACP and EU civil society organisations;
 72. stress that civil society organisations must ensure that these goals remain top priorities on the agendas of ACP and EU political authorities;
 73. insist on the key role of the participatory (inclusive, bottom-up) approach in democratic governance;
 74. call on ACP and EU countries to involve civil society organisations in genuine consultations on draft legislation, governmental decisions or strategies related in particular to economic, social, agricultural or environmental matters, including gender issues;
 75. recommend that the level of dialogue between each ACP government and its national civil society should be a key criterion for the EU in assessing the respect for democracy in each ACP country and note the role that national parliaments of ACP countries can play in contributing to good governance;
 76. welcome the achievements of the European Commission programme "Non-state actors and local authorities in development" and request that its financial means be extended further;
 77. call for platforms and networks of non-state actors, including economic and social councils, to be established or strengthened in individual ACP countries or at the regional and continental level;
 78. welcome the setting-up of the Pan-African Farmers Federation and call on the EU to support its development;
 79. recommend that other socio-professional organisations set up and reinforce similar structures at the regional level with a view to fostering regional integration, including in the Caribbean and Pacific regions;
 80. express the hope that the Economic, Social and Cultural Council of the African Union (ECOSOCC) will become a fully active consultative body of the African Union;
 81. recall the crucial importance of social dialogue in any functioning participatory democracy, insist on the need to increase the capacities of the social partners in ACP countries and call on the EU to increase its support for them, in cooperation with the ILO.
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