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**Can the European Union learn from Dutch
development aid successes?
High-level conference in the Parliament looked at new
ways of development cooperation**

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THE HAGUE – A high-level conference in the Dutch Parliament under the title “*Organising Inclusive Ownership – The EU’s Structured Dialogue to strengthen cooperation with Non State Actors in the South*” explored new and promising development cooperation approaches, such as South-South cooperation. The conference brought together Costa Rican Foreign Minister René Castro, Members of the Dutch Parliament and senior representatives from Non Governmental Organizations and the Dutch Foreign Ministry.

At the conference a number of programmes supported by the Netherlands were presented, including Social Watch, based in Montevideo, ‘Communities of Change’, supported by Cordaid, a Dutch development organisation and ‘Partners in South-South Cooperation’ based in Costa Rica.

“South-South cooperation is a visionary idea of The Netherlands that is starting to pay off today. Due to their first-hand familiarity with the problems on the ground, actors in South-South cooperation can be more efficient and effective in identifying and implementing solutions,” said Minister Rene Castro. “South-South cooperation increases the cost effectiveness, promotes the transfer of appropriate technologies and ensures local ownership, leadership and capacity building.”

“By supporting South-South cooperation early on, The Netherlands have shown leadership. South-South cooperation has proven to be a promising development strategy”, said Mirjam van Reisen, Professor at Tilburg University and Director of Europe External Policy Advisors EEPA. “The EU can really learn from The Netherlands when it comes to new development cooperation strategies.”

Roberto Bissio, coordinator of Social Watch observed: “South-South cooperation is meaningful and effective in terms of regional integration and unity in global negotiations. In relation with civil societies, the conventional North-South split is fast becoming meaningless after the ‘Arab Spring’. Social Watch (and other voices) warned about the financial crisis and about the imminent collapse of the Arab dictatorships.

To allow for second opinions and for voices to be heard that are usually not consulted is, precisely, the added value of the European Union's "structured dialogue".

Partners in South-South Cooperation, formerly Programme for South-South Cooperation, a sustainable development partnership enables small-scale farmers and micro-entrepreneurs to share their experiences and expertise across continents. Its 36 financially sustainable projects have so far created thousands of new jobs and additional income for poor people in the three participating countries.

"By working closely together we are able to tap into the diverse knowledge of each partner. We taught Costa Ricans the value of edible insects for fodder, while Costa Ricans helped us to introduce organic pineapple farming, which opened up new export markets for our small-scale farmers and generated much needed additional income," said Mathias K. Pofagi, Director of Partners's Benin chapter. "But all this would not have been possible without the support of The Netherlands."

"The success was emphasis on real reciprocity and equality between members and the participation not only of governments but also businesses and civil society, indigenous people, women, farmers and universities," said Marianella Feoli, from the Partners's Secretariat. "We have proven that South-South cooperation can make the difference, if one not just 'talks the talk' but also 'walks the walk.'"

The European Union's *Structured Dialogue* aims to increase the effectiveness of all stakeholders involved in EU development cooperation by agreeing specific roles for all actors and by aligning their strategies and programmes. Through this process, the European Commission hopes to strengthen their partnership with civil society organisations and local authorities worldwide.

"The EU should use the *Structured Dialogue* and its focus on ownership to implement policies that include all stakeholders in the identification of the most-promising development approaches," said René Grotenhuis, Director Cordaid. "The Netherlands can have a leading role in this drive towards a more promising future of development cooperation".

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Note to the editor

The conference agenda <http://bit.ly/kM0xx0>

Partners in South-South Cooperation www.southsouthcooperation.net

The **photo exhibition *Three continents, three countries...one lens*** by Partners in South-South Cooperation will show photos from Benin, Bhutan and Costa Rica until June 16 in the Atrium, City Hall, The Hague.

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