

31 May 2011

**How inclusive ownership and South-South
cooperation could boost EU development aid**
**High-level conference in European Parliament looked
at new ways of development cooperation**

Rue Stévin 115
1000 Brussels | Belgium

Tel: +32 (0)2 230 07 32
Fax: +32 (0)2 230 37 80
Mail: office@eepa.eu
Web: www.eepa.eu
www.developmentportal.eu

Bank Account: 001-3 998 773-24
BNP Paribas Fortis
BIC: GEBABEBB
IBAN: BE81 0013 9987 7324
VAT Number: BE 0480 228 390

BRUSSELS – A high-level conference in the European 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, Jamaican Minister of State in the Foreign Ministry Marlene Malahoo Forte, Members of the European Parliament and senior representatives from the European Commission, Non Governmental Organizations and national ministries.

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 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 René Castro. “South-South cooperation increases the cost effectiveness, promotes the transfer of appropriate technologies and ensures local ownership, leadership and capacity building.”

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.

“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*,” said Roberto Bissio, Coordinator of Social Watch.

All speakers warned against the EU trying to reinvent the wheel, and urged it to rely on experiences that have been tested and found successful. “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 strategies,” said René Grotenhuis, Director Cordaid. “Countries like The Netherlands, who have supported new approaches such as South-South cooperation early on, can have a leading role in this drive towards a more promising future of development cooperation.”

At the conference Partners in South-South Cooperation, formerly Programme for South-South Cooperation, a sustainable development partnership founded in 2006 between Benin, Bhutan and Costa Rica presented their success formula. After initial funding by The Netherlands Partners has been running independently their hands-on and inclusive projects, which enable 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.

“Given the global character of today’s challenges it is time that the EU, as a leader in promoting aid effectiveness, supports South-South cooperation instead of just focusing on bilateral aid. South-South cooperation ensures that developing countries are equal partners in their own development and creates joint global responsibility for global problems,” said Mirjam van Reisen, Professor at Tilburg University and Director of Europe External Policy Advisors EEPA.

South-South cooperation is an inherent and successful part of the aid effectiveness agenda. Due to their first-hand familiarity with the problems and development challenges faced, actors in South-South cooperation can be more efficient and effective in identifying and implementing promising strategies and solutions. South-South technical cooperation therefore increases the cost effectiveness, promotes the transfer of appropriate technology and ensures local ownership, leadership and capacity building.

“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.

“Partners’s success formula was independence from donors, 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’.”

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Note to the editor

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

Partners in South-South Cooperation www.southsouthcooperation.net

CONTACT: Florian Eisele

florian@florianeisele.com

+32.473 239 577