

## **Thematic programmes versus geographic ones**

### **Comments from APRODEV**

The key question for any programme, be it geographic or thematic, is its added value in reaching the objectives of the EU consensus on development. Coherence is to be established at that level - coherence with the EU consensus - and should be a key factor taken into account when preparing the programme's strategy and the country strategy papers.

When talking of coherence between the two types of programmes at country level, the main question is related to the **complementarity between the two approaches and the added value that thematic programmes** can bring in contributing to achieving the objectives of the consensus in a given country or region.

In 2003 already, CONCORD when discussing future rationalisation of thematic budget lines with a few persons in the Commission established a list of criteria that could help decide on whether to maintain or not a thematic approach.

Several criteria discussed at that time have been retained by the Commission (trans-regional and multi-country projects, international actors, difficulty to work with government and sensitive issues, cross-cutting issues) while others were ignored.

In our view, many criteria related to quality of operations - knowledge building, innovation and pilot actions, risk taking, civil society participation, NSA partnership building and flexibility of implementation - are not sufficiently taken into account in the way the thematic programmes have been programmed and will be implemented even though they represent key aspects of the added value of these thematic programmes.

#### **When we consider how geographic programmes are programmed and implemented:**

- CSPs are concentrated on 2 or 3 recurrent priority areas (transport and infrastructure, competitiveness, budget support, good governance in the case of EDF for example)
- mainstreaming of cross-cutting issues is weak or ineffective in the majority of CSPs
- Civil society participation in CSP is rather weak:
  - weak participation in policy dialogue and programming
  - very limited contribution to implementation of CSP priorities (because of the nature of the priorities and the limited interest to get CS involved)
  - dedicated CS support programmes are not as frequent as one could expect: 13 running programmes in the 78 ACP countries under 9<sup>th</sup> EDF, many of them only started recently and with limited financial resources. Continuity in the long-term is not ensured (see example of Burkina Faso: 15 mio under 9<sup>th</sup> EDF, convention only signed in 2006, no CS programme in the 10<sup>th</sup> EDF and yet BF is not a priority country for NSA/LA)

We question this prescription that thematic actions must be coherent with the CSPs. Wouldn't it be more effective to look at **ways in which thematic programmes can complement and upgrade the geographic approach**. Thematic programmes can bring a 'plus' and added value in terms of quality and effectiveness of EU aid and civil society actors can certainly contribute to the potential of thematic programmes from that point of view.

#### **Key assets of thematic programmes are:**

- Complementary route for EU aid delivery besides the official aid to governments both in terms of focus (e.g. poverty reduction, social sectors, gender, children...) and access e.g. by NSAs. This is also true for reinforced partnership with UN Agencies, Red Cross etc. NGOs, in particular, can support and reinforce the legitimacy of aid through their links to European citizens (tax payers) and can prevent a purely top-down approach (there is also an issue of cost-effectiveness);
- The Thematic instruments are also "pools" of knowledge/know-how on the themes, and for following up all developments at the international level on those themes, including how diverse partners address the themes.
- Needs evaluation, planning of EC response through different EC instruments implementation and sharing of expertise and responsibilities with other EU donors
- The mainstreaming of cross-cutting issues and the need for targeted actions in support to mainstreaming (two-track approach)
- Innovative approaches and risky and/or pilot actions that can be multiplied

- The better use of southern expertise in policy dialogue, programming, implementation and evaluation
- The networking between development actors (S-S, N-S, N-N), public awareness raising in both N and S and advocacy work
- The strengthening of NSA in view of making governments accountable (part of good governance)
- The promotion of more systematic learning processes and of institutional memory,
- The capacity building of all actors involved in EU development aid on sectoral and thematic issues (including staff of EC and beneficiary governments).
- The coordination between EC and other main donors on thematic and sectoral issues (joint work on approaches, indicators, assessments...)
- Flexibility criteria: how does the instrument respond to the need for flexibility in aid delivery in certain situations?
  - o Flexibility in the implementation of the Link between Relief Rehabilitation and Development approach including prevention aspects and disaster preparedness
  - o Flexibility in situation of crisis prevention and peace building
  - o Flexibility in the case of sensitive programmes that have no support from the beneficiary government (human rights; peace building; promotion of rights of marginalised populations, refugees and displaced people; social auditing and fight against corruption)

For the NSA programme in particular, the thematic programme has the potential to upgrade the quality of support to civil society through:

- Partnership between actors
- Learning and exchange of experiences and networking
- Combination of service delivery and concrete actions with capacity building and institutional building
- Possibility of integrated and long-term projects
- Activities related to upgrading the quality and coverage of services delivered by the state and in partnership with administration responsible for service delivery: (examples: bringing street children to school, improving training of teachers, awareness raising activities around schools, awareness raising on health problems in cooperation with basic service centers,...etc...)
- support to CSO active in the field of advocacy on rights, inclusion, corruption, governance, social and gender budgeting, training and supervision for elections, ... all sectors where the government may be reticent

So far, the type of support that is provided through the few CSO programmes under geographic programmes such as EDF, has in general a limited scope and is often limited in time and budget. It is different from the kind of support provided through the thematic programme, the one doesn't replace the other but the two can be complementary. This distinction has to be made and delegations together with CSOs have to be aware of the opportunities offered by the two types of approaches and have to be in a position to make the best use of these two approaches in all developing countries.

Karine Sohet, APRODEV, September 2007