



CEMR response to the consultation of the European Commission on external action through thematic programmes under future financial perspectives 2007-2013 - the role of non-state actors

The Council of European Municipalities and Regions is the broadest association of local and regional authorities in Europe, gathering 47 national associations of local and regional authorities in 34 countries.

The CEMR, currently chaired by Michael Häupl, Mayor of Vienna, is the European section of the world organisation of cities and municipalities, United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG). Together with UCLG, CEMR is, inter alia, active in promoting the role of local and regional government in implementing the Millennium Development Goals, and in raising awareness of the MDGs in our localities.

Many of CEMR's national associations undertake major activities in the domain of cooperation for development involving municipalities, cities, regions and the associations themselves. In order to facilitate the exchange of information and experience between its members in this sector, the CEMR has established a very active network of coordinators for North-South Cooperation from its member associations.

CEMR previously responded to the consultation on the future of EU international development policy, in which we argued for a stronger future role for local and regional government. We therefore took note with great interest of the European Commission's Communication on 'External Actions through Thematic Programmes under the Future Financial Perspectives 2007-2013' (COM (2005) 324 final), published in August 2005.

We understand that in general terms 'geographical programmes are the privileged instrument for cooperation with third countries' (p.3) but share the view that thematic programmes are also necessary instruments, for the reasons set out. We were pleased to note the proposal for a Thematic Programme for 'non-state actors in development', once we understood that local governments are in principle included within the definition of non-state actors for this purpose. (This classification is indeed the subject of a long-standing and unfinished debate, with local governments generally seeing themselves as 'state actors of a different kind', with a clear role in promoting local democracy and effective local government and governance - but we do not seek to take this point further in the present context.) We must point out that

the wording in the Communication (p.6) is slightly ambiguous in its reference to 'local authorities", since the passage could be read as only referring to local authorities in 'partner countries", whereas it appears evident to us that EU local governments are also intended to be included as 'actors" for this Thematic Programme (as is clarified in the current consultation document - see below).

In the light of these proposals in the Communication, CEMR is very pleased that Commissioner Louis Michel decided to launch an external consultation to gather the positions of actors potentially affected or interested by this proposed new Thematic Programme. We particularly appreciate to have been specifically consulted as an organisation that brings together the representatives of European local and regional governments. CEMR has transmitted this consultation to UCLG so that non-European local and regional authorities, and/or their associations, may be able to present their views to the European Commission (though the tight timescale may limit the extent of this).

For many years, local and regional authorities have worked so that their specific role in cooperation for development would be recognised. We are therefore very pleased to note the role put forward for consultation at paragraph 3.1 under the heading 'Actors" in relation to local and regional governments, and support the analysis set out in the consultation document in this regard.

Whilst noting (see earlier comments) that local and regional authorities are grouped together with 'non-state actors" such as NGOs, it is critical that the link between local governments and national governments be strengthened to ensure that local and regional authorities - the sector of elected government closest to the people - have a genuine influence on issues that affect communities in their countries. We need to ensure that inclusion in a Thematic Programme on non-state actors does not adversely affect the democratic link between local and national governments. On the contrary, the overall impact of the geographic and thematic programmes should enhance this process.

European local and regional governments have a multi-faceted role to play in the development agenda: they have demonstrated experience and impact in reinforcing and building the capacity for good governance with their counterparts in non-European countries; they have a key role to play in supporting progress towards the Millennium Development Goals through direct contributions to sustainable development and improved service delivery in developing countries; and they are able to effectively raise awareness amongst European citizens and civil society regarding the positive potential that European action represents for development.

It is within this perspective that the CEMR, as a European organisation, responds to the different questions raised in the Commission's consultation document and questionnaire.

Which types of actors should be eligible for funding under the thematic programme?

Local and regional authorities are closer to the grassroots than other public institutions and can have an added value in strengthening democracy and the improvement of living conditions. We were pleased that Secretary General of the United Nations Kofi Annan, for example, recently recognised this role in the context

of the Millennium Development Goals, during a meeting with a delegation of mayors and local elected representatives in New York in September 2005.

At present, local and regional authorities of the EU and partner countries are at least in principle eligible for Community funding for development in their capacities as actors in decentralised cooperation. Unfortunately the funds available for this budget line are completely insufficient, and in practice it has proved difficult for them to succeed in gaining access to this funding. For this reason, the activities of local and regional authorities and of their national associations are currently funded primarily by their national governments, the associations and local and regional authorities themselves. Most countries in Europe have legislation which permits a proportion of local authority resources to be spent on international issues. However, a significant amount of potential development activity - particularly in terms of technical cooperation - is lost due to the limitations on institutional funds that local and regional government are eligible to access. We recognize that the proposed new Programme, whose resources will be relatively modest by comparison with country and regional programmes, will not itself solve this problem. However, we believe that it would be beneficial to have some part of the Thematic Programme earmarked for local/regional government actions in support of the Programme's objectives.

In this context, and taking into account the above points, CEMR supports the following options that the European Commission has put forward for consultation:

- **Set 1 - Type of Actors: CEMR supports Option 1.3 - Eligibility for funding for all types of non-state actors and for local authorities (municipalities and regions)**

- **Set 2 - Origin of Actors: CEMR supports Option 2.2 in principle - Actors from both the EU and partner countries should (in principle) have access to funding.**

Within Set 2, however, we need to face up to the fact that, at this stage, we have no information on the likely scale of resources to be allocated to this Thematic Programme. If the funding is in the event very restricted, we would with regret argue that very limited funds should be limited - at least as regards local/regional government actors - to partnerships involving an EU local/regional partner.

Priorities for action and categories of interventions that should be eligible for funding under the thematic programme

We accept the need for clarity on which types of action / intervention should be dealt with by the geographic programmes, and which under this thematic programme. Within this, we agree that major decentralization processes in partner countries must be 'agreed with central governments' - indeed it could not be otherwise, since you cannot impose decentralization against the will of governments - and therefore implemented through the geographic instruments. We hope that in drafting the guidelines for the geographic programmes, the involvement of local governments and their associations will be written in as essential components of such programmes.

In addition however, we believe that the thematic programme can and should support good quality initiatives (e.g. innovative pilot actions) that support and complement decentralization processes. Therefore, any exclusions from the thematic

programme in relation to decentralization processes need to be carefully drafted so as not to preclude such complementary actions.

As regards the possible categories of intervention, we broadly agree with the three headings set out in the consultation paper, namely interventions in the field, development education, and capacity-building / networking.

However, as regards the first category - interventions in the field - we have concerns around the way the consultation document expresses the issues. It states that the role of 'non state actors and local authorities' could be 'consolidated' in situations of post crisis and difficult partnerships. We agree with this point, though the particular situations for such interventions will need to be carefully evaluated.

The reference to 'putting into practice innovative approaches' also appears to us to be correct, but the examples given in the present text appear very limited and not very clear - we hope that the final programme will permit good quality innovative actions by local governments.

We have more concern at the drafting of the paragraph on 'building confidence between state and non-state actors' since it is far from clear to us what if any role is envisaged here for local authorities. Are they state or non-state actors, or are they excluded? We believe there is a very important role for local governments here in relation to the delivery of basic services and enhancing local democratisation processes, in partnerships both with other levels of governments and with local civil society. We strongly urge that the finally agreed programme recognizes this role.

We are particularly pleased by the importance the Commission accords to awareness raising and development education for the European public, as we are convinced that mutual comprehension and a strengthened partnership between the countries of the North and the South are the necessary foundations for a better world for all. The emphasis on development education throughout the European Union should complement and be consistent with national and local efforts in this sector. In many countries local authorities, through their role in coordinating schools, public health bodies and other functional institutions, are already at the centre of this effort and this should be encouraged further through the European Development policy. There are already good examples where cities' governments with local NGO's are raising awareness on the Millennium Development Goals at local level (e.g. the City of Stuttgart) and we are convinced that there are many others which will be willing to undertake similar actions.

CEMR and its national associations also support the proposal set out in the paper that the reinforcement of capacities, of cooperation and coordination between the networks of civil society and the local authorities, and between these networks and the European institutions should be eligible for financial support under the thematic programme. Indeed, we believe these are issues where a thematic programme adds a specific value.

What should be the geographic scope for the types of interventions supported by the thematic programme?

CEMR gathers national associations of local and regional authorities of EU member countries, countries that are candidates for membership or accession countries, and which work with partners from different geographic zones.

Recognising the diversity of the needs of its members, CEMR recommends the following options concerning those set out in the document.

Set 1 - Interventions in Partner Countries: CEMR supports Option 1.3. - Eligibility for interventions in all developing countries as well as in countries in transition.

However, as set out above in the paper, given that the overall amount of money under this programme is likely to be limited, the local authority partnerships to be supported should include an EU local or regional partner, in order to enhance the sense of 'ownership' of EU development policy by Europe's local authority sector, whilst at the same time ensuring that the partner from the 'south' can take the lead in initiating the partnership.

Set 2 - Awareness Raising and Development Education: CEMR supports Option 2.1. -Eligibility for interventions within the EU.

Set 3 - Coordination: CEMR supports Option 3.2. - Eligibility for interventions within the EU, acceding and candidate countries and all developing countries. Implementing Modalities

We hope in this framework to see the legitimacy of the actions of local and regional authorities recognised, and CEMR and its national member associations, as well as their non-European counterparts, consulted by the European Commission in the framework of the implementation of this programme.

Given some of the specific complexities of accessing and managing European funds, EU local and regional authority partners are likely to have a specific role to play in supporting their counterparts in developing countries in the process of accountable Project Cycle Management.

We recall CEMR's membership of UCLG and particularly the new formation this year of UCLG Africa. There is therefore now a formal mechanism in place through which to consult widely with local authority partners throughout the majority of the developing world.