

Conclusions and Recommendations

This is the last section of the report *Mainstreaming Conflict Prevention - A Study of EU Action in ACP Countries*¹. This section includes conclusions, questions and recommendations generated from research into the EU's conflict prevention initiatives. The recommendations are repeated in a list for easy reference at the very end. Apart from the information presented in the report, conclusions are also drawn from the six country studies that have been done within the project. Recommendations were assembled through contacts with Brussels-based Country Desk Officers and responses to questionnaires sent out both to civil society organisations working on the ground and to the European Commission Delegation in the six countries researched. The full report, as well as the country reports, are available at: <http://www.quaker.org/qcea/>

Key Findings

The central goal of this project was to discover whether the 'mainstreaming' of conflict prevention had caused conflict prevention to become a forgotten issue. For the most part, we conclude that it has not. The lack of specific programming and of a conflict prevention budget can make it difficult to trace *what* exactly is being done by the EU in the area and has the drawback of decreased awareness of what the EU is doing among civil society organisations. Despite this, our research has shown that there is a great deal of activity being undertaken by the EU.

This view echoes what most civil society respondents to our questionnaire feel about the mainstreaming of conflict prevention, with those who believe it has become a forgotten issue in the minority (four out of twenty-four respondents). Of those who were unsure whether conflict prevention had become a forgotten issue or not, several feel that mainstreaming is necessary if only because conflict prevention, development, infrastructure, reintegration, justice etc. are all interlinked. Conflict prevention must be 'mainstreamed' into all programming because it is an overarching issue, but specific conflict prevention programmes can also be helpful. Of twenty-one respondents, only six feel that mainstreaming has led to more conflict-sensitivity in EU programming, with twelve out of twenty-seven respondents saying they have seen an increase in conflict prevention efforts since 2000. Only eight of the remaining fifteen said they have noticed no increase; the others were unsure.

A dual-track approach could be extremely helpful for the EU's conflict prevention efforts. Based on the results of our research and the responses to our questionnaires, we see a dual-track, holistic, approach to conflict prevention - combining both conflict-specific programming and conflict-sensitivity in all programming - as potentially effective, particularly in countries where ongoing conflict makes all other development impossible.

Even though the vast majority of respondents reported that they have at least some contact with the Commission's Delegation in their country (thirty-one out of forty-one), only twenty are aware of EU-funded conflict prevention projects, even when such projects were, according to the Delegation, being implemented in their regions. Despite this, twenty respondents labelled the EU's approach to conflict prevention helpful. Of the remaining fourteen, eleven feel it is neutral or mixed, and only three consider it unhelpful.

It is difficult to say with any degree of certainty whether civil society's lack of awareness of the EU's vast involvement in conflict prevention has to do with 'mainstreaming', but mainstreaming most likely contributes to it. This suggests that while mainstreaming is a useful tool for conflict prevention, **it could be beneficial for the EU to specifically identify some of their work as conflict prevention in certain areas.**

¹ Quaker Council for European Affairs, *Mainstreaming Conflict Prevention - A Study of EU Action in ACP Countries* (Brussels: QCEA, 2008). Available at: <http://www.quaker.org/qcea/mainstreamingcp/index.htm>

Twenty respondents cited examples of conflict prevention projects that the EU should support but does not. Only sixteen listed noteworthy EU-funded projects (six of which were micro-project programmes in Nigeria). In cases where civil society is repeatedly citing certain projects (though funded by other donors) as particularly effective, we recommend that the **Commission take the assessments into account and use those examples of best practice to improve their own approach to conflict prevention.**

We do not assume that a lack of awareness among our respondents implies a lack of EU involvement or even inappropriate involvement. Civil society is clearly aware that the EU is active in conflict prevention, but finds it difficult to list specific examples of conflict prevention as such. This suggests there is a **need for the EU to make its own presence on the ground more known** beyond simply identifying projects as conflict-preventative, as recommended above. Unlike many other large donors, the EU does not always clearly identify EU sponsored projects as such, which can leave people on the ground unaware of the EU's presence. We suggest that **where possible the EU 'brands' itself more, so that those benefiting from EU programmes are aware that they are Commission-funded.** This, of course, can be difficult, because conflict-sensitivity would not allow branding something as 'conflict prevention' every time an action is undertaken. But it does perhaps mean communicating the idea of 'mainstreaming' more widely, and discussing what it should mean and what it should include.

We noticed a large disparity between the responses of indigenous civil society and that of international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) regarding the level of contact they have with the respective Commission Delegations. When asked whether there is enough dialogue with the Delegation, a significant number of respondents (both local and international) reported that there is only enough dialogue with the international NGOs. Certainly our analysis of the responses to our questionnaires shows that INGOs tend to have significantly more contact with the Delegations, as well as a history of responding far more frequently and with greater success to Calls for Proposals. In some cases, such as in Somalia, this division between indigenous and international NGOs is explicit: local NGOs are unable to access EU funds without an international partner. Although it is understood that this is due to a lack of a recognised legal framework in Somalia, **the Commission must make funding indigenous NGOs available a priority.** A working group of the European Parliament Committee on Development also highlighted the Delegation's poor consultation with local civil society as an area for improvement. This leaves indigenous NGOs disempowered and isolates the EU's work from the communities they are attempting to work with. **More needs to be done to enable interaction with local NGOs; we see this as a priority area for action.**

Geographical location also plays a role in how accessible the Delegation is to civil society organisations. Those based in areas where the Commission does little work, or far enough away from the location of the Delegation to make regular or even infrequent contact impossible, are notably less aware of Calls for Proposals and information on funding and consultation. **We see room for increased outreach to isolated areas, where there are often few organisations working, yet where there is a significant need for them.** The difficulty of the requisite procedures and time pressures were mentioned several times as an impediment to responding to Calls for Proposals (for nine out of twelve respondents). Financial constraints, distance and an obligation to call local partners 'sub-contractors' instead of 'partners' were other difficulties referred to: such problems can be increased by language and cultural barriers.

Decentralisation has sped up the Commission's decision-making process. However, our research concurs with the views of civil society on the ground, as well as with the conclusion of the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the OECD in their peer review of the Commission's official development assistance (ODA) in both ACP and non-ACP countries: compared to other donors the Commission is still difficult for civil society to work with because of slow decisions and complex bureaucratic and funding procedures. **The Commission must continue to work to simplify procedures, taking into account the needs of smaller NGOs to a higher degree.**

Another issue that came up was the financial capacity of the organisations seeking EU aid. Often Calls for Proposals require (in many ways understandably) a minimum budget for proposed projects, but many smaller NGOs do not have the capacity to manage such large sums of money. **More funds**

need to be earmarked for micro-projects, such as those that have been implemented in Nigeria with great success.²

In addition to this, not all respondents were aware of Commission Calls for Proposals or how to respond to them, which seems to suggest that **information on Calls for Proposals and consultations needs to be more widely disseminated**. The same is true for civil society consultations. Several Delegations confirmed that they tended to have contact with the same civil society groups repeatedly, though most were making an effort to expand their contacts. **We encourage them to continue with these efforts.**

One difficulty we came across in our research was the occasional discrepancy between rhetoric, policy, and actual implementation. This seems to be a hurdle in particular regarding gender mainstreaming. All Delegations responded to queries by saying they ensured gender mainstreaming as outlined in EU policy, but none gave specific examples of how they did so. This finding was also underscored by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's Development Assistance Committee (OECD-DAC) conclusions on the Commission's official development assistance (ODA). As outlined at a recent meeting held by PLAN, there are **various mechanisms that can be adopted at an institutional level to aid in the implementation process, such as the use of a gender advisor**. It is worth highlighting that employing gender as a cross-cutting issue helps to achieve the Commission's goals by creating a more inclusive process. It should thus be seen not as a burden but as a positive addition to programmes, as it makes them more effective.

Though acknowledged in EU documents, we reiterate the real need to place emphasis and effort (including funding) into conflict **prevention**. The earlier root causes of conflict are addressed, the less likely it is that violent conflict will erupt. This necessitates a shift in thinking and approach to development, **including a coordinated, complementary, approach between long and short-term tools**. The EU has taken the first steps in this direction by pledging to mainstream conflict prevention into development cooperation, but the short-term nature of the Stability Instrument and **the lack of a clear conflict prevention focus in the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR) works counter to this coordination, and should be reviewed at the earliest opportunity.**

Perhaps the single biggest challenge in researching this project was simply finding out which entities the EU funds and what those organisations are actually doing with that money - including what entities *they* fund with it. Louis Michel, the Commissioner for Development, concurs that this is a major issue. In a recent meeting of the Development Committee of the European Parliament, Commissioner Michel stated that the Commission services are not equipped to collect information on what the Commission is actually doing in the concrete terms of how many schools are built or how many kilometres of road put down. This is clearly an issue in terms of transparency and effectiveness. While conflict prevention has not been forgotten through 'mainstreaming', it has perhaps gotten a bit lost in the system. We recommend that **information on what the EU is actually doing and what is being funded with EU money be made more accessible and comprehensible, both to European taxpayers and to organisations working on the ground.**

We see the question of communication between the Delegations and Brussels as an area for further research. Of the eight Delegation responses to our questionnaire, seven described their communication with the headquarters in Brussels as good. Despite that, we have seen evidence of the **need for the Delegation to be more integrated into policy development**, such as the non-participation of many Delegations in the Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) negotiations. Only three reported having participated. This need was also noted by a European Parliament working group, which found a lack of coordination between both DG External Relations (RELEX) and DG Development, as well as between the Commission Delegations in the field and Brussels.³

² See the case study on Nigeria for more information

³ *ibid.*

We identify the issue of coherent communication between the Commission and EU Member States as an area for further research, both in Brussels and between Delegations on the ground. It is apparent from our research that Member States are active in the areas examined, as is the Commission, but time and human resources have restricted us from looking into the coordination that does or does not take place between them. This is an area that the DAC highlighted as having room for improvement.

A second area for further research, also linked to coherence of purpose between Commission action and Member States, is that of the production in and export of SALW from EU Member States, which often undermines actions taken in third countries to combat the weapons' proliferation and use.

List of Recommendations

Concerning the EU's approach in general:

- A dual-track approach, combining mainstreaming with specific programming, could be extremely helpful for the EU's conflict prevention efforts.
- To ensure effective implementation of policies, mechanisms should be adopted at an institutional level to aid in the implementation process, such as the use of a gender advisor.
- Conflict prevention necessitates a shift in thinking and approach to development, including a coordinated, complementary, approach between long and short-term tools. The lack of a clear conflict prevention focus in the EIDHR works counter to this coordination, and should be reviewed at the earliest opportunity.
- The Delegations should be more involved in policy development.

Concerning the EU's relations with NGOs and other organisations:

- The EU should make its own presence on the ground more known.
- The European Commission must make the funding of indigenous NGOs a priority. Additionally, more needs to be done to enable interaction with local NGOs; we see this as a priority area for action.
- We see room for increased outreach to isolated areas, where there are often few organisations working, yet where there is a significant need for them.
- The European Commission must continue to work to simplify procedures, taking into account the needs of smaller NGOs to a higher degree.
- More funds need to be earmarked for micro-projects, such as those that have been implemented in Nigeria with great success.
- Information on Calls for Proposals and consultations needs to be more widely disseminated.
- Information on what the EU is actually doing and what is being funded with EU money should be made more accessible and comprehensible, both to European taxpayers and to organisations working on the ground.