

European Conference for Development NGOs on the Reconstruction of Haiti

Brussels, 23 March 2010

FINAL REPORT

The European Commission organised this one-day conference for European and Haitian NGOs as part of a series of outreach meetings being organised in the run up to the International Conference on the reconstruction of Haiti, taking place in NY on March 31st, 2010.

Objectives

The purpose of the meeting was to exchange views on the role that NGOs and civil society could play in addressing the priority reconstruction and development challenges currently facing Haiti. The outcomes of this event will be presented on March 25 in New York at an international NGO consultation co-sponsored by the UN, the EU and InterAction, and at the International Conference on the reconstruction of Haiti on 31st March, 2010, also in NY.

Participation

The meeting was attended by over 50 representatives of Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) from Haiti and Europe and 4 representatives from the Haitian Government. A list of participants is attached to this report. Participants welcomed the Commission's initiative to hold such a conference, seeing it as an opportunity to exchange views and share ideas ahead of the New York donor conference at which the NGO community will also be represented. It would also contribute to promoting consensus on a common vision of the development community for Haiti's recovery and reconstruction.

Opening

The proceedings were opened by the European Commissioner for Development, Mr. Andris Piebalgs, who delivered the first address of the conference.

Mr. Piebalgs insisted on the importance of achieving of the Millennium Development Goals, and helping Haiti to move forward on the road to sustainable development. Referring to the enormous outpouring of aid and humanitarian assistance that had been mobilised on an unprecedented scale to assist the Haitian Government and population, Mr. Piebalgs said the conference aimed to initiate dialogue to ensure that cooperation, transparency and dialogue would characterise the process of Haiti's reconstruction. The conference provided a platform for dialogue between various representatives of the Haitian government, Haitian civil society and European NGOs to safeguard these aims.

At the end of this month, an International Pledging Conference will be held in New York, at which the Haitian government will outline its action plan for the reconstruction of Haiti. It is hoped that this conference will assist in formulating a consolidated integrated response that

encompasses the views of the national authorities, civil society, donors, NGOs and the private sector to 'build back better'.

The Commissioner recognised the vital role of NGOs as grass-roots actors in development. He also acknowledged that despite the generosity of donations for Haiti, money alone is not enough. Commissioner Piebalgs emphasized the importance that the European Union attaches to the efficiency of aid delivery, which he said required the active involvement of civil society and non-state actors. Working together, NGOs and donors can deliver aid better.

Commissioner Piebalgs also underlined the urgency of more effective donor coordination in the context of "building back better" so as to establish a strong basis for Haiti's stable growth. He called upon all development actors to work together to ensure Haiti could be an example of aid effectiveness for the rest of the world. He also referred to the Council conclusions adopted on 22 March, which he described as a stepping stone to Haiti's recovery. He expressed his hope that development partners would contribute to the success of the New York donor conference, and would articulate their long-term commitment to Haiti's development.

Proceedings

Opening presentations in plenary were followed by work in four working groups on the following subjects:

- Decentralisation
- Agriculture, production and food security
- Fundamental rights
- Social Sectors

This report, compiled by the European Commission, constitutes a summary overview of the plenary proceedings of the Conference. It is complemented by the reports from the four working groups (in annex), prepared by the participating NGOs.

Key outcomes of plenary discussions

1. Challenges facing Haiti

A representative of Haitian civil society presented an overview of the social, economic and physical impact of the earthquake on Haiti. Key challenges to implementing an effective recovery and development strategy were identified as limited capacity within the Government of Haiti, limited participation by civil society actors in the planning of the response strategy and the lack of broad political consensus around a development vision.

The representative welcomed proposal to establish a development authority jointly overseen by Haitian and international actors, but also warned against the marginalisation of Haiti's democratic institutions in the planning and implementation of development aid. Similarly, it is important to ensure that civil society plays an active role, particularly in the monitoring of financial decisions.

A further challenge mentioned is the expiry of the parliamentary mandate in May, combined with the risk that current conditions may not necessarily favour transparency in an electoral process. Donor support in this area would be particularly important, to reinforce democratic processes and ensure free and fair elections.

2. Response strategy

A representative of the Haitian authorities presented the outline of the Government's recovery and development plan, which is planned in a two-phased cycle. The initial transition phase is set to last for one year, while the longer term plan is set over ten years, split into three cycles of growth, and comprising four areas of focus:

1. Infrastructure: transport, road network, energy and electrification.
2. Governance: Judicial reforms, increased security, re-launch of public administration, economic governance, territorial planning, and urban and rural planning.
3. Reducing Haiti's vulnerability: health, education and cyclone cycle, employment creation, job stimulation, growth, large-scale public work projects.
4. Economic growth: focused on national production, funding for agriculture, cultural funding.

The representative underlined that the approach to the plan's implementation will be participatory, and that the Government would enter into active dialogue with NGOs, based on their expertise and geographical distribution. The NGO Coordination Unit in the Ministry of Planning would have to be reactivated, having been destroyed in the earthquake.

A representative of Haiti's civil society described a development vision that would prioritise inclusiveness, public services, decentralisation, environmental protection, risk reduction, rule of law, employment opportunities, good governance and regional integration. He spoke of a renewed engagement with the wider world, particularly of the assistance the Dominican Republic provided in Haiti's time of need. He also called upon the establishment of urban policies that take these factors into account.

NGO representatives proposed placing emphasis on sustainable agriculture and agro-ecology, as well as decentralisation in the context of food security. Participants expressed their support for a "whole island" development approach, in particular looking at involving Dominican Republic. They also underlined the need for justice reform, including strengthening human, civic and social rights and promoting a new approach to citizenship that encourages national pride and good citizenship. Participants also highlighted the need to update legislation regulating land ownership and usage, judged inadequate, particularly in the post-earthquake context. They also called attention to the needs of Haitian migrants abroad, and the importance of integrating a cross-cutting gender perspective into relevant initiatives. The importance of climate change and environmental degradation was also evoked.

The European Commission informed about its aid provision in the aftermath of the earthquake, including the focus on rebuilding capacity of the state to operate. Programmes already in existence before the disaster have been reoriented to adjust to the new context. Initial short-term aid has freed up large sums to be spent on thematic projects. The tender process has been accelerated, as well as bringing forward a financial agreement providing one million EUR to micro-finance initiatives in rural areas. The annual call for proposals may have its financial allocation increased, potentially doubling the money available this year. Funds for civil society are increasing, especially in increasing Haitian participation in NGOs and civil dialogue across various sectors. The decentralisation process will also be supported, as its key concepts are cross cutting ones involving agriculture and rural development among others.

3. Role of development actors

The participants reaffirmed their support to Haiti's long-term development and their commitment to improving aid effectiveness. They also discussed the importance of strong national ownership of the development process, including a visible and meaningful role for civil society. Effective decentralisation was deemed as a cornerstone of national development. The Government's strategy was acknowledged as a key driver of the development process.

The Government representative welcomed civil society's involvement in discussions and decisions about Haiti's reconstruction and development. Participants suggested that the Commission could help reinforce the efforts of NGOs and civil society through capacity building and further promotion of participatory approaches in its programming. Some participants favoured the creation of an “observatoire” that would oversee assistance to the country by NGOs and ensure coordination of such efforts. It was also suggested the EU should make reconstruction assistance conditional upon meaningful social and political dialogue.

The European Commission welcomed the exchange of views and critical analysis offered by the participants. It underlined its plans to continue working closely with NGOs and civil society to improve development cooperation in Haiti and strengthen the capacity of local actors. It also expressed the view that Haiti needs not just more aid, but aid that is used better, and that effective coordination of all development partners was essential in “building back better” in Haiti.
