

INAUGURAL DINNER
SCIENTIFIC ADVISORY BOARD ON EU DEVELOPMENT POLICY
EUROPEAN COMMISSION, BRUSSELS, 15 FEBRUARY 2012

REPORT

Commissioner Piebalgs met with Members¹ of the newly established Scientific Advisory Board for EU development policy over dinner on 15 February 2012. The Commissioner welcomed the Members who were present and thanked them for their time and voluntary contribution to this initiative. The four other Board Members were unable to attend.

The Commissioner outlined the role of the Board, stating that he wanted to ensure that EU development policies are based on the best scientific evidence available to achieve the best possible results with EU aid. Taking the initiative to establish a Scientific Advisory Board on EU Development Policy bringing together some of the best brains in the field, will help the Commission link research and concrete policy formulation and implementation in a much more effective way.

The Scientific Advisory Board is another step to further modernise EU development policy, providing advice to the Commissioner on a broad range of issues, but with a particular focus on the priorities indicated in the Agenda for Change. In particular the Commissioner wanted to focus on the following two topics for 2012:

- how to achieve the goal of providing sustainable energy for all by 2030 by ensuring universal access to modern energy services for the poor.
- how to improve food security in the world and increase and sustain agricultural production for countries in the Horn of Africa and in the Sahel which are facing huge hunger problems. Improved resilience to the external shocks of these vulnerable regions will also be addressed.

The intention is to hold seminars to debate particular issues complemented by visiting academics with expertise in specific sectors when the topics of discussion require it.

The Commissioner stressed that all participants need to benefit from their engagement in the Board and encouraged whenever possible a two-way, informal but worthwhile exchange of ideas, comments and suggestions. The Commissioner pointed out that the challenges facing development cooperation policy are enormous with the Agenda for Change initiative playing a key role, two examples being access to energy and food security. However the Agenda for Change process needs to be deepened to ensure that EU spending concentrates on sectors key for long-term and inclusive growth, targeting countries that are in the greatest need of external support where aid and cooperation can make a difference. Development cooperation in practice needs to be based on research and robust scientific evidence, however such a process is a complex undertaking.

The Board can contribute by identifying good, reliable sources of knowledge and how that knowledge can be best transformed into practice to facilitate evidence-based policy-making. The Board can also contribute to framing the right kind of question that is sufficiently specific to allow concrete measures to be discussed. A question was posed about the 10 things that the

¹ See List of Members attached

EU should be doing, for example concerning access to energy, how can ideas be turned into action plans. Can the EU help create/facilitate an enabling atmosphere for the private sector? What pioneering pilots would be possible - if of course desired by countries? Achieving the MDGs will not be possible without access to energy but a strategy to accommodate joint interests is needed – how can this be done? Some thoughts about access to energy in Africa included access to pilots and linkages to systems with appropriate incentives, identifying investment opportunities at local levels, involving engineers in the process and recognising that innovation capacity starts with technology transfer.

All Members welcomed the initiative by the Commissioner to establish such a Board as this was perceived to be a great opportunity to advance an evidence-based approach at the highest level. At the same time direction would be needed in the Board's reflections to allow the Members to be of best use to the Commissioner. This would require ownership of the process as well as a clear willingness to listen otherwise this is likely to undervalue the process. The Board Members could act as agents for change, highlighting and illustrating what can be done through concrete initiatives and practical examples.

It was pointed out that Europe has an enormous amount of knowledge to offer but there seems to be no strategy at the European level that would ensure that the best use is made of what is out there. Research already done needs to be directed to the proper channels and in particular local research capacity has to be used profitably. At the same time it had to be recognised that policy coherence issues and political realities where development policy is concerned, will throw up obstacles to applying the evidence available, examples include the Common Agricultural Policy and agricultural production in low and middle income countries on one hand, and land reform issues in Africa set against China's development initiatives on the other.

The Commissioner thanked Members for this first exchange of thoughts and ideas and looked forward to working with the Board at future meetings. The topic of next meeting will focus on Energy for All to take place at the end of May/beginning of June. Board Members will be joined by visiting academics with expertise in the sector.

List of dinner participants:

Commissioner Andris Piebalgs
Christopher Jones Head of Cabinet

Scientific Advisory Board Members:

Dirk Messner, German Development Institute, DE
Elizabeth Sidiropoulos, South African Institute of International Affairs, SA
Jonathan White, German Marshall Fund, USA
Lennart Wohlgemuth, Gothenburg University, SE

DG DEVCO

Gustavo Martin Prada, Director DEVCO/A
Françoise Moreau, Head of Unit DEVCO/A1
Kevin McCarthy, DEVCO/A1