Evaluation of the Commission of the European Union’s co-operation with Colombia

Final Report

October 2012

Evaluation for the European Commission
Framework contract for
Multi-country thematic and regional/country-level strategy evaluation studies and synthesis in the area of external co-operation

LOT 4:
Evaluation of EC geographic co-operation strategies for countries/regions in Asia, Latin America, the Southern Mediterranean and Eastern Europe (the area of the New Neighbourhood Policy)

Ref.: EuropeAid/122888/C/SER/Multi
Request for Services: 2011/263-508

Evaluation of the Commission of the European Union’s co-operation with Colombia

FINAL REPORT

October 2012

This evaluation was carried out by
The evaluation study was carried out by: Josyane Bouchier (TL), Alejandro Alvarez Morato and Markus Schultze-Kraft. The team was assisted by Milena Leoni. The evaluation was managed by María del Carmen Bueno Barriga.

The evaluation was managed by the Evaluation Unit of DG DEVCO.

The authors accept sole responsibility for this report, drawn up on behalf of the Commission of the European Communities. The report does not necessarily reflect the views of the Commission.
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

0.1  **Objective and scope of the evaluation**

The objective of this evaluation is to provide an overall independent assessment of the Commission’s past and current cooperation with Colombia over the period 2002-2011. It also aims at identifying key lessons in order to improve the current and future strategies and programmes of the Commission, particularly considering the new development policy set in the “Agenda for Change”.

The evaluation focuses on the following areas of investigation: Peace, Stability and Socio-economic Development; Rule of Law and Justice; Human Rights and Victims of the Armed Conflict; Good Governance; Productivity and Competitiveness; Environmental Sustainability and the Linkage between Relief, Rehabilitation and Development. It also analyses the instruments and aid modalities made available by the Commission, as well as the coherence, coordination and complementarity (“3Cs) of EU cooperation and the European added value.

0.2  **Methodological issues**

The evaluation answers nine key Evaluation Questions (EQs) that cover major parts of the EC strategy and its implementation. The evaluators formulated these questions following the analysis of the Country Strategy Papers and EC policy documents and through a representative selection of EU interventions in Colombia. The projects and their contribution to the development of Colombia were then analysed on the basis of project evaluations, internal progress reports, and monitoring data and documentation from other development partners (DPs), from international NGOs and academics and from Colombian official institutions.

During a country field visit, the evaluation team validated the hypotheses formulated through interviews, focus group discussions and visits to project sites. This allowed covering both policy and strategy aspects and implementation issues. Overall the evaluators interviewed over 120 persons in Brussels and Colombia, held two focus group discussions, and visited two project sites outside Bogotá.

0.3  **Main limitations of the evaluation**

Among main limitations encountered, the following would be the most important:

- **EC interventions’ data availability and quality**

  Limitations in the analysis are closely related to the quantity and the quality of the information obtained. Availability of information varied among interventions. Furthermore, although the log frames of the programmes assessed contain a set of indicators, those indicators are not systematically informed in programme related documents (such as progress reports, monitoring, evaluations, etc.)

  Because of these limitations, the present evaluation provides limited answers on the actual results and impact of EC interventions.

- **Lack of data availability at local/municipal level in the conflict zones**.

  In many cases, it is difficult, from the documentary sources at hand, to assess to what extent the situation observed is due to EC cooperation in the conflict zones.

  The websites of the Peace Laboratories are often outdated, the baseline and progress reported on-line were for municipalities. As regards data at departmental level, the multiannual investment plan of the Departmental Development Plans (DDP) was often not available or could not be compared.
0.4 Main findings

The analysis shows that, while EC cooperation at country level has been able to link - in a simultaneous and complementary way – relief and rehabilitation - the short and medium term objectives- it has not been able to establish the link with development - long term objective- although it has been able to create the conditions which may allow it in the future.

The EC strategy in Colombia, coherent with the policies defined by the Colombian government in relation to peace-building at local and national levels, has contributed to supporting peace-building efforts and tackling the root causes of conflict in the regions most affected by the latter. The main achievements of the EC’s contribution have been in creating platforms of dialogue between the different actors present in the territory, in strengthening of networks and civil society organizations, in promoting the creation of alliances between public and private actors, and in supporting productive activities for the socio-economic stabilization of the territories.

The productive activities supported by the EC, aiming at invigorating the local economies, contributed to the socioeconomic stabilization of the regions, creating a fundamental incentive for rural communities to remain in their territories, as well as enhancing the communities’ organizational capacities. They helped micro, small and medium enterprises to access local and national markets. Nevertheless, there is still not sufficient evidence to demonstrate that they have attained a consolidation level that ensures viability and economic sustainability.

At national level, the EC has contributed to strengthening the National System of External Trade and to reducing the impact of non-tariff barriers to trade, though it is not possible to determine the level of its contribution.

EC support has succeeded in mainstreaming environmental sustainability across its interventions. Furthermore, in several productive chains it constitutes an element of differentiation that has allowed producer organizations access to new markets. The EC has also played a key role in strengthening the capacity of the ‘Corporaciones Autónomas Regionales’ (CARs) and enhancing the coordination process with community-based organizations and small entrepreneurs. This contrasts with the lack of coordination between the EC and the Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development, the main environmental authority of the country.

Bilateral EC interventions have made specific contributions to institutional strengthening of the justice sector, mainly in relation to the State’s capacity to assist victims within the transitional justice framework and its capacity to implement the POAS. But it has also supported victims’ capacity to participate in the transitional justice process and make claims. With respect to the impunity situation in Colombia, the evaluation found no evidence that it has improved during the evaluation period, particularly after the new POAS began to be gradually rolled out in 2005 and, given the complex situation, it would not be reasonable to expect that the analyzed EC contributions to strengthening the rule of law in Colombia during the evaluation period could have fundamentally changed the impunity situation in the country.

In the difficult conflict and human rights context in Colombia EC cooperation in promoting human rights and assisting victims of the armed conflict has made a number of significant contributions, EC political support helped strengthen Colombian civil society organizations and human rights groups which most of the time over the evaluation period were faced with a difficult and sometimes hostile environment. After 2007, the degree of congruence between the government’s and EC’s positions increases when the second Uribe administration adopted a somewhat more comprehensive stance on the human rights issue and the EU Delegation in Bogotá established a close rapport with the government (which included the launch of an official dialogue on human rights) while distancing itself from Colombia’s non-governmental human rights community.

Noticeable also are key contributions to the protection of land and patrimonial assets of IDPs and Colombian public policy for IDPs; and the strengthening of the capacity of victim and human rights organizations to participate in the transitional justice process and maintain a high level of activity in favour of the defence and promotion of human rights.

EC cooperation has also contributed to the strengthening of local players. It has helped sub-national bodies promote participative budgeting and focus public service delivery according to social and territorial needs; it has partially helped them build technical capacity and fight corruption. On the other side, it has also helped
local CSOs gain credibility and technical capacities, favouring at the same time the establishment and effective operation of different local dialogue platforms.

During the evaluation period, aid in Colombia is delivered through two main aid delivery modalities: programme or project-based approaches (PA) and marginally, Sector Budget Support. Relevant is the vast combination of programmable and non-programmable financing instruments used to deliver aid and the choice of allocating most of the funds through grants to finance projects implemented by CSOs and public institutions. By doing so, the EC has promoted ownership and capacity-building processes among partner country institutions. On the negative side, the two main weaknesses are that EC’s procedures have affected the project/programme efficiency and that there has been a lack of internal coherence between levels of intervention (bilateral, sub-regional and regional) and instruments while the search for internal coordination and complementarity has been a source of contradiction and strain.

During the evaluation period, coordination and complementarity between donors and particularly between the EC and the MS, in Colombia were quite limited and, in spite of the publication in 2007 of the Code of Conduct, the EC’s Value Added is neither identified nor recognized among donors, limiting considerably any possibility of a Division of Labour between donors.

0.5 Overall assessment and main Conclusions

1. An innovative and effective strategy. The EC’s cooperation strategy with Colombia between 2002 and 2011 has been characterised by one core strategy aimed at Peace Building. Innovative in its approach and methods, the strategy has proved effective in its results.

2. Yet weaknesses of three types prevented the EC’s cooperation strategy in Colombia from attaining better levels of effectiveness and impact and negatively affected its levels of efficiency and sustainability: Weaknesses associated with tools and methodologies (lack of tools and methodology for carrying out territorial capacity assessment; poor application of existing tools in the field of capacity assessment and capacity development; of sensitive issues like Human Rights); Weaknesses associated with the EC’s interventions (implementation problems mainly related to procedures, fragile economic viability of the productive activities supported by the EC); Weaknesses in EC’s organizational, strategic and political capacity (defective internal coordination between aid instruments and tools, projects and sectors; reduced application of Aid Effectiveness principles; the EC’s limited leadership at political and managerial level in order to push for sensitive but essential issues such as human rights; the lack of a structured, results-oriented and cross-sectoral actor-inclusive policy dialogue).

As regards the main conclusions:

on Policy & Strategy. The EC cooperation strategy has helped victims of the armed conflict transit from relief to rehabilitation but has failed to link development (the long-term objective) to the former short- and medium-term objectives. (C1). The EC has no structured strategic framework to hand to promote good governance principles coherently or, better, mainstream good governance. (C2)

on EC response Strategy and programming. In spite of the EC’s willingness to provide effective aid, the highly political context of EC cooperation in Colombia has been a hindrance. (C4) Capacity assessment exercises have been rather scarce in EC technical cooperation in Colombia. Furthermore, standard EC capacity development scheme has shown a lack of adaptation to its territorial development approach in Colombia in that it failed to assess the territories. (C5)

on 3 Cs and EC value added. Coordination and complementarity between donors in Colombia were quite limited and EC Value Added was neither identified nor recognized among the donors’ community, precluding any possibility of a Division of Labour between donors. (C6) On the other hand the EC cooperation strategy during the evaluation period suffered from a serious lack of internal coherence that even affected EUD’s internal organizational balance. (C7). Yet External coherence is rather well safeguarded between EU policies and EC interventions at country level (C8)

on Conflict Prevention and Resolution. The EC strategy in Colombia has contributed to generating the conditions for peace in the conflict zones, mainly with the construction of a social network in the territories thanks to the strengthening of civil society organizations, networks and the promotion of alliances between public and private institutions in the territory. It has also contributed to the generation of platforms for dialogue between the different actors present in the territory. Nevertheless these organizations and
platforms for dialogue reveal weaknesses in terms of sustainability and of formalization and incidence of proposals in local and national policies. (C9). EC cooperation has also invested important resources in the promotion of productive alternatives in the zones most affected by the conflict. Initially these initiatives contributed to food safety and productive reactivation of the territory and are valued positively for their impacts in terms of social cohesion and contribution to the permanence of the families in the territory (C10).

**on Rule of Law, Justice and Human Rights.** In response to national priorities, the EC has focused on supporting implementation of the new Penal Oral Accusatory System (POAS) and has helped to strengthen the institutions charged with the application of the Justice and Peace Law and the protection of victims’ rights to truth, justice and reparation, but impunity remains a key problem for the rule of law in Colombia and the transitional justice process is faltering. (C11) Although it is not possible to attribute conclusively specific improvements of the human rights situation of the targeted population groups, in a difficult conflict and human rights context the EC has provided significant political and technical support for the promotion of human rights, especially civil and political rights, and for assisting and empowering victims of the armed conflict in Colombia. (C12)

**on Trade and Competitiveness.** The Local Economic Development approach supported by the EC has contributed to create the basis for the development and competitiveness of the territories, mainly in rural areas. Several of these chains have export potential and may benefit from the trade agreements recently signed with the USA and the EU. Nevertheless most of the MSME involved still face many difficulties to strengthen their participation in national markets and in accessing international markets (C13)

**on Environmental sustainability.** Although environment is not a priority of the EC cooperation strategy in Colombia, its contribution has nonetheless been key to improving the sustainability of the environment in the country. Even so, the EC strategy has not been coordinated with the Environment Ministry or national environmental policy. (C14)

### 0.6 Main Recommendations

In a country such Colombia characterized by mid-to-high-level income and by internal armed conflict, the EC has to define a clear position on a number of critical issues - in particular on human rights on account of the highly sensitive humanitarian and human rights context - and on quite probably antagonistic key stakeholders, so as to be able to build a relevant cooperation strategy as well as build and assume leadership among donors and particularly EU MS (Value Added).

It also seems appropriate to consider analysing some issues relating to EC methodologies and tools:

- the relevance, in a situation of territorialized interventions, of carrying out a territorial capacity assessment, insofar as a standard institutional analysis falls short of the required assessment scope; and of associated social and territorial cohesion;
- the necessity for systematizing models like the DELCO programme methodology and approach, and disseminating them,
- the relevance of carrying out an impact evaluation of EC’s Peace Building Strategy in Colombia in order to systematise the core aspects of an effective peace building strategy, for dissemination purposes.

**on Policy & strategy.** Considering the lack of quality information on EC cooperation programme results as well as the Agenda for Change and the possible adjustments in EC cooperation towards middle-income countries, it seems advisable to commission impact evaluations so that present and future decision-making on policy and strategies is duly informed (R1):

To fine tune and consolidate the LRRD strategy by, among others, keeping to a demand-driven approach while maintaining the basis of a clear institutional (EU / EC) political position with respect to the crisis that gives rise to the LRRD intervention, and attaching due importance to political dialogue at national and local government levels and with all parties involved (R2)

To promote good governance principles based on the Agenda for Change by building or improving the Framework for EU Good Governance policy and Lines for Action. A set of impact indicators should enable promoting an environment for good governance. Include the subject in the political dialogue. (R3)
on EC response Strategy and programming.

Enhance Aid Effectiveness in order to build a new inclusive partnership, diversifying partners and fostering the principles of “multilevel governance”. (R4).

Review the Backbone Strategy and the corresponding 2010 EuropeAid Toolkit for Capacity Development in order to adapt and/or complement the proposed Capacity Assessment (CA) and Capacity Development (CD) scheme for territorialized interventions (R5)

on 3 Cs and EC value added.

Grant full credit and focus to the political dimension in which cooperation intervenes and build cooperation strategies starting from that political angle. (R6)

on Conflict Prevention and Resolution.

The EC cooperation strategy should maintain and enhance its support to those civil organizations and platforms for dialogue created in the zones most affected by the conflict, in order to ensure their permanence, formalization and representativeness. (R7)

on Rule of Law, Justice and HR.

In line with the ‘Agenda for Change’ devise a new cooperation strategy prioritizing robust, open and inclusive political and policy dialogue with the Colombian government, CSOs, and victim and human rights organizations, on how best to address the underlying drivers of still widespread impunity as well as tackle the pressing issue of what would be the best way forward in respect of making transitional justice work better in Colombia. (R8)

Support Colombia, via an inclusive, open and regular political and policy dialogue with all key stakeholders, in the development and implementation of an effective human rights policy (also including progressively more economic, social and cultural rights) and guaranteeing victims’ rights to truth, justice and reparation. (R9)

on Trade and Competitiveness. Continue to promote local economic development, thus paving the way for an effective use of the recently signed EU-Colombia Trade Agreement. The strategy should continue promoting the strengthening of those MSME and producer associations that have an important impact on local development and a multiplication effect in the national economy. (R10)

on Environmental sustainability, EC strategy needs to be articulated with the Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development and to the implementation of the National Policy. (R11)