

## SOUND OF AFRICA EU AFRICA STRATEGY – A WAY OUT OF POVERTY? International conference on the EU-Africa Strategy hosted by the Austrian EU-Platform in Vienna on 22/23 June 2006

On the 22-23 of June 2006, during the Austrian EU Presidency, more than 290 participants, from 41 countries across Africa and Europe, met at the international conference „Sound of Africa“ hosted by the Austrian EU-Platform of NGOs in Vienna. To discuss, whether or not the EU-Africa Strategy has the potential of being a way out of poverty for African countries, and to work on specific recommendations to involve NGOs and other civil society actors in order to achieve the Millennium Development Goals were the aims of the conference.

### 22nd of June: Building on optimistic awareness and critical engagement of civil society actors!

Johannes Trimmel, Chair of the EU-Platform opened the conference with greetings from Heinz Fischer, Federal President of the Republic of Austria, who, hindered by other



obligations, was unable to attend. Trimmel read the welcoming words of Heinz Fischer expressing that the EU-Africa Strategy adds a significant new dimension to development cooperation and the policy coherence approach to achieving sustainable development based on key issues that will be discussed later on during the conference.

Mr. Trimmel then gave a brief summary of the agenda and after some personal comments, to remind us not to forget the people behind the strategy. He gave a heartbreaking look at them through the African version of a song from, Herman van Veen, a Dutch singer: "Father you still have to learn so many things, come on – put your child on your lap, sway it smoothly in your arms, because before you realize it your child has died." He also beckoned the participants to think about what we can really change in the lives of the

African people, to concentrate on overcoming the obstacles along the way out of poverty and to help project the positive image and sound of development within civil society.

Joanna Maycock, Member of the Board of CONCORD, the European NGO confederation for development and relief, then added some welcoming words on 2005 being a landmark on issues of global poverty, with the EU-Africa Strategy as the European milestone therefore. This was followed-up by a brief summary given by Johannes Trimmel of the EU-Africa Strategy in the light of the European Consensus based on a presentation from Denise Auclair (CIDSE/Caritas Europa).

Caroline Gudenus, Head of the Sub-saharan Africa Unit of the Austrian Foreign Ministry, then informed the participants on the status of implementation and the latest developments the Austrian Presidency has undertaken to operationalize the EU-Africa Strategy. In addition to many important political aspects she informed the audience that the strategy must be seen as a political framework that has to be read in conjunction with three other documents

containing the practical and operational parts. These documents are the Commission Communication on an EU-Strategy for Africa towards a



Euro-African pact to accelerate African development, the contribution of the EU High-Representative, Javier Solana, on peace and security issues and the General Affairs and External Relations Council (GAERC) Conclusion from 2005. She also spoke about issues of human rights and migration, stating migration to be one of the most important political issues between Africa and the European Union, ensuring that work on these issues is already in progress.

The next part of the conference was dedicated to the civil society responses from six preparatory seminars world-wide. Mary Mwingira, executive Director of TANGO (Tanzanian NGO Association), opened her response from a seminar in East Africa - Uganda, which was organized by HORIZONT3000, by pointing out that advocacy should be regarded as a window of opportunity as far as the EU-Africa Strategy goes. She encouraged using it to enhance the level of coherence between the private and governmental sectors and to access additional resources. She also pointed out the importance of popularizing the strategy within civil society to develop quality and flexibility, e.g. finding new ways of connecting when lack of electricity makes Internet communication impossible. Another example she stated was that front-office planning definitely needs to consider that aid deliveries have to cope with many delays before reaching their targets.



Immaculée Ingabire, President of the Dynamique des Sociétés civiles du Burundi, de la R.D. Congo et du Rwanda, voiced the report from Central Africa, a seminar in Goma, which was organized in collaboration with EURAC, that a better atmosphere of cooperation is necessary



between the African states and the European Union to define and harmonize issues of ownership and cooperation between recipient countries and donors. The idea is to use

benchmarking as a tool to manage development cooperation and to ensure that respect for human rights and democratic principles is regarded with the same importance as economic growth. She also emphasized that human rights issues necessitate direct links between civil society and NGOs, as well as more respect between partners and the reduction of bureaucratic procedures for accessing financial aid.

Ely Dembele, coordinator of FONGEM an NGO network in Mali, spoke (interpreted by Florent Sebban, Eurostep) for the West-African region and the seminar organized in Mali by CARE on the issues of human rights and government and pointed out that there are many agreements between the United Nations and regions of Africa. He opened by stirring-up the debris at the bottom of the water-hole and letting the questions surface: What about NGO participation, decentralization, corruption, budgets? Is the implementation a consensus for all participants, will it improve matters and bring concrete answers, will it effectively contribute to the fight against poverty where other agreements have failed, how will it operate, will it work in times of crisis and war, what about participation and ownership, the role of civil society ... ? He also questioned the African unity approach and how the strategy proposed to deal with the problems of corruption on this level and called for



implementations to reach the African communities on the lowest level so that governance becomes a reality subject to citizen control. This was a call for measures to ensure the interaction between civil society and government that, in the end, produce a stronger policy of development assistance.

Mr. Dembele also strongly demanded that women be put at the center of the strategy, regarding them as major actors in future development aid projects. He went so far as to define women as a precondition for the future success of participation and decision making in development aid projects. He voiced the need to recognize the fact that decentralization requires concrete mechanisms developed in connection with the environmental needs of a specific region and proposes new challenges as well as new opportunities for the training of specific actors. He also called for employment measures to promote a stronger

integration of women and youth populations (plumbing, carpentry, agriculture, etc.), measures to improve health, i.e. both preventive and curative health measures, e.g. to counter malnutrition.

As the spokesman for Southern Africa Jaap de Visser, representing the Good Governance Learning Network South



Africa and the seminar in Cape Town, organized by the network together with the Open Society Foundation for South Africa, emphasized that sub-national governments are emerging and that the focal point of the African commitment is a local one. Therefore, he focused on the human rights and governance issues and pointed out that seventy percent of the MDGs, which in the end was the reason for the conference, will most likely be achieved through local governments in collaboration with civil society actors. He emphasized that although the dialogue on the EU implementation matrix is already ongoing, the matrix itself has failed to define decentralization possibilities that propose the opportunity of choice. In this sense he noted that public participation is not a guarantee for success and that skills and expertise must be developed on a local level, including those for planning and budgeting, which are necessary to convert the framework into reality. In addition, he stressed that these should include training measures for senior government levels to strengthen and balance their capabilities for engagements with autonomous sub-national governments and to help them develop respect for their position in assisting the new local governments.

Mikaela Gavvas, Chair of the Policy Working group CONCORD and Policy Officer of BOND UK, also confronted us



with many questions voiced on the European side in two seminars held in Brussels and Bonn, organized by CONCORD and Venro, DIE and EADI. She then stated the three main recommendations that were developed there:

First of all, the importance of coherence and consistency for the implementation of the strategy with regard to binding commitments as well as to the large number of European policies for Africa and the role communication plays in uniting all of their budget lines. Secondly, the challenge on an EU-AU level to translate this unbalance into a situation of consultation, continuous dialogue and integration of civil society, and since previous measures therefore have proven inadequate, she noted the need of developing new types of relationships between people and governments based on more democracy. The third point was on ownership needed to strengthen governmental accountability to its citizens as the most sustainable form of partner country ownership. The strategy, it was found, should be grounded in Africa's needs, political processes and expectations and its priority should pinpoint the promotion of development.

Peter Hulényi, former Head of the Development Cooperation in Bratislava, spoke for Central Europe and expressed his thanks to the Austrian EU-Platform for inviting him to report on the seminar about the EU-Africa strategy, which took place in Bratislava and was organized by the Austrian EU-Platform. His main message was the need to find a role for New Member States within the concept of the EU-Africa Strategy and a role in the African-European dialogue. He concentrated on issues that proposed a positive development for future cooperations, such as the New Member States' lack of affiliation with Africa and their knowledge and experience in developing local governments as well as their experience with painful but effective changes in transformation of society.



He highlighted the cooperation of the New Member States and Central Europe as a two way strategy with feedback from Africa and the right partners on the African side. This could be used to provide the basis for the definition of milestones and roadmaps on a national level and to improve the effectiveness of development aid altogether. This trilateral-cooperation was mentioned to be a key modality for Central Europe and an effective tool for cooperating with Africa.

Johannes Trimmel then opened the floor to discussion. Topics arose, for example on concrete plans for training

people in local governments, which was answered by Jaap de Visser who stated the importance of financial management as a very progressive framework but also emphasized its cumbersome aspects. These are e.g. monthly reports that occupy time that could be better invested in the creative involvement of civil society and also pointed out that ownership is an active process and not just proposed involvement on paper to be checked off as an action item. Before the discussion closed alternative energy possibilities (solar technic and agricultural oil seed production) were voiced by members of the audience as well as the fact that more than seventy percent of the poor people in Africa are women and in that sense proposed a great challenge to the efficiency of the free market ideology of participation momentarily in use.

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**Addressing the officials**

After a short break the panel discussion was opened by the moderator Alexandra Förderl-Schmid, from the Austrian newspaper Der Standard, who introduced the panel members and then announced Ghana's newly achieved World Cup victory 2:1, a message which was answered with applause.



On the importance of involving NGOs, Immaculée Ingabire began by expressing the fact that poverty in general is a main obstacle that keeps the voice of civil society weak. She also mentioned that civil society is the grass-root and that only they know the priorities of their regions. She emphasized the need to unite civil society and government with an example on reconstruction in Rwanda (1994) when the government, with support of the donor community, invested to guarantee internal security, reconstruct the economy and rehabilitate socio-economic infrastructures. She also expressed the importance of collaborations with Europe, e.g. at the conference itself where members of various civil societies recognize historical similarities and unite to take advantage of new opportunities.

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 Karin Scheele, Member of the European Parliament, voiced the opinion that in order to fulfill the objectives of the MDGs parliaments must join in compromise to produce a mutual report on how to make them work. She gave us a vivid example of how negotiation measures can be employed to promote awareness by selecting a small hot room for the

proceedings and allowing a single bottle of water. Ms. Scheele also emphasized the need to find new ways to work together with other organizations and ACP countries.

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 Abubakar Bawa-Bwari, Member of the Nigerian Parliament stressed the unbalanced situation in African countries where parliaments make all the decisions on paper but also need to focus on the implementations. He used the example of the Cotonou Agreement to show that parliaments have an important role and "know everything" and that very few people "members of civil society" have ever even heard of this agreement.

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 Jean Mfasoni, Head of the Permanent Office of the African Union to the European Union in Belgium, commented on the necessity to establish connections to develop a joint strategy based on discussions with the African Union. Asked if he had done enough to combat corruption, Mfasoni brought to memory that documents on African issues have been circulating since 1990 and that the time has come to liberate ourselves of paper that is incapable of solving the problems. Corruption for example is a two-way street, pressuring the question – what about the money that has been taken out of Africa - can it be returned?

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 Athanassios Theodorakis, Deputy Director General DG DEV of the European Commission, fully accepted the criticism that up till now the EU was unable to incorporate civil society since old methods revolve around government to government processes and stated that new methods are beginning to evolve that are based on cooperations between governments, regional organizations, the private sector and civil society. He stressed the need for a joint strategy and defined it as a most difficult thing to achieve since Europe has the task of working effectively and it is practically impossible to transpose successful projects to other African regions and countries; whereas on the African side the problems are very complicated and efficiency can only be achieved through national aid measures that include local participation and civil society. He closed with a statement on

the EU commitment to provide effective aid support for Africa and the need to review old processes and move on to



develop new methods. Theodorakis, questioned as to whether or not the EU could help build links for projects,

outlined the development of the EU processes with: first we had aid without trade, then aid with trade and now we are tending towards aid for trade with 0.7 percent as a clear commitment.

In answer to a statement that Africans don't want to migrate, and followed-up by a question on how the EU will change its strategy to tackle the root causes of migration; Theodorakis presented the alternative of less documentation and more action. Closing he stressed that we should all play the same game, be aware of the conditions, play a leading role in the fight against corruption and ensure more and efficient transparency - in the end we have to help Africa - since that is the commitment we made.

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Hans Winkler, State Secretary of the Austrian Foreign Ministry and in the same time representing the EU Council, highlighted the importance of coherence, not only in relation to Africa but also in cooperation with the Member States and voiced his firm belief that civil society must be engaged to make things work. He stated that governments alone cannot do anything and that to implement actions a nation has to rely on good cooperation with members of civil society, but also that parliaments, among others, must also be recognized as important tools to control financing. He noted that the national parliaments controlling the budgets for the implementation need to have a say in the developing of the strategies and not only the EU Parliament. On the trade question Winkler noted the need for a common position on subsidies as a kind of EU-AU blueprint program to counter the exploitation of natural resources or at least ensure that the profits benefit the African people. He appealed with the audience not to underestimate the power of documents but rather to criticize the fact that the authors do not carry the responsibility for their concepts.

Winkler mentioned that Member States will never have done enough although they must hold to the principals of the EU-Africa Strategy. He also emphasized the need to move away from top-down methods of politician talking and move on to actions rising from the grass-root upwards and to generate visible results.

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In the open discussion that followed a question on the need for a "Marshall Plan for Africa" was commented on by Bawa-Bwari noting that if it could be adapted to the African situation and strengthened the weak governments in their long development processes it wouldn't matter what you called it. He continued to say that in the long run the two-way approach needs stronger institutions on both sides,

e.g. to turn money-washing activities into investments in the African economy. Further themes from the floor included comments on the lack of involvement of civil society actors in Africa as well that of Africans in Europe, keeping arms trade outside of development policy issues, the lack of equal participation of women in parliaments and the need of support women, and that there is definitely something wrong when despite an unbearable degree of poverty the African mission is regarded as accomplished.

### **23rd of June: Approaching major issues together – towards a joint development matrix!**

Johannes Trimmel opened the second day of the conference by highlighting five of the major issues that had evolved from the previous discussions.

These included the involvement of civil society and civil society actors, questioning its existence as



pure rhetoric or its focus of perception as a switch to be turned on and off or used as a basis prerequisite for the implementation of successful development aid projects, the role of other actors and donors, e.g. China and America, implementation issues as a responsibility of the authors, achieving peace and security and addressing conflicts and migration by addressing the root causes rather than the management of security and migration, and last but not least African solutions for African problems, e.g. the logical presumption that African research cannot be based on European perspectives. Trimmel then explained the proceedings for the workgroups whose aim was to discuss and improve the draft version of the "SOUND OF AFRICA VIENNA DECLARATION, NGO-Response to the EU-Africa Strategy", which was till then based on the recommendations of the preparatory seminars.

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After the workgroups had concluded their work and all were strengthened with a good lunch provided by the international Team of Diakonie – Protestant Refugee Service, the afternoon was opened by Gerda Daniel, Vice Chair of the Austrian EU-Platform. The rapporteurs of the workgroups highlighted the results for the plenary.

The first issue was "Peace and Security" presented by Florent Sebban, from Eurostep who thanked his workgroup for the interesting discussion on the unbalanced but not

joint strategy presented in connection with these issues. Examples from the group's report include the recognition that confidence, slow in its development, is, in such matters, indispensable and that it must be built-up with care, that education is essential for the development of peace, that some officials must be pressured to regard the importance of civil society, that emphasis must be placed on the participation of women in peace building issues and that in a long-term solution the root causes of conflicts have to be addressed.

The report on "Human Rights and Governance" was given by Jaap de Visser, from the Good Governance Learning Network, who highlighted the lack of consultation that tends to weaken the status of the legally binding strategy with regard to these issues and emphasized concern on the continuation of top-down processes. The demands voiced included the need for a rights-based approach to development and, instead of just more money, the need of a simplified access to financial resources for effective implementation. It was also mentioned that the EU response to African examples of good governance and developments is shadowed by broken promises between global and local levels of government. Therefore, decision makers must be held accountable, this could be made possible by promoting tools and mechanisms for a broad participation and by strengthening the capacity of the local government level.

"Trade and Integration" was reported by Frank Mugenyi, from CfAD, as being a critical issue, since even the thought of EU-AU trade being one of equal



partners generates a lot of confusion, noting that this outlook must be revised to develop a real balance of power. He also mentioned the need to acknowledge the well-known threat that few will benefit from liberalization and poor people will gain very little. The need to create employment possibilities for youths and women while steering away from top-down recommendations, the need for an agreement to counter the lack of transparency with regard to ownership, as well as the need to promote regional trade while taking measures to make regional integration work were acknowledged. An issue of mutual agreement was that trade must address the poor in Africa

instead of just European interests or the interests of an African elite.

In the report on "Key Development Issues" Mary Mwingira, from TANGO, noted that documents in general must be shortened so that they can be read and their message more easily ported to civil society actors. She emphasized that it is crucial to stop using rhetorical phrases and to deliver on existing commitments now. Moreover there should be a focus on

women's organizations to ensure that women's rights are justly regarded and include sexual as well as



reproductive rights. She closed leaving us with the image that each African community is a specific issue in itself and has to be regarded as such.

Klaus Zillikens from the Austrian Foreign Ministry followed with a short summary of the development and updating perspectives of the joint implementation matrix. The implementation matrix was presented as a European document that originally expected the Africans (government and civil society) to speak for themselves. It was not originally a two-way concept and therefore it requires the dialogue with the African side to be able to develop into a document with concrete goals. It was emphasized that work on the joint strategy will be continued in Brussels in about two weeks and that the matrix must be seen as a living document that will be updated at least every three months. The next goal envisioned is an African-European Summit to be held during the Portuguese Presidency in 2007. The conclusions of the workgroups and their recommendations found their way into the "SOUND OF AFRICA VIENNA DECLARATION, NGO-Response to the EU-Africa Strategy", which was entrusted to Klaus Zillikens to hand over to Finland's EU-Presidency and also for him to follow-up on this issue under the German Presidency. Klaus Zillikens will again be dealing with the EU-Africa Strategy under the Germany Presidency, in his home country.

Closing words from Gerda Daniel called on us to regard the process as being as important as the outcome and the Vienna Declaration as our willingness to cooperate with one another. Klaus Zillikens addressed the audience and Jake Bharier, member of the board of CONCORD and Johannes Trimmel, Chair of the Austrian EU-Platform closed the conference. The civil society actors were left with bits and pieces of the big puzzle and thoughts to no longer just accept the



words, but to demand plans for the implementation of money spent and a transparent view of the outcome, to acknowledge that we are all in the same boat and that the role of civil society is about accountability, that European NGOs will address Mr. Zillikens again under the German Presidency, at the latest, to see which promises turned into reality, to acknowledge that politicians have short lives but that the NGOs are always there, to call for long-term thinking **and** to consider what will happen after 2015 when we do not listen to the **Sound of Africa**.



Sound of Africa – A way out of poverty? was organised by the Austrian EU-Platform in collaboration with CONCORD

In the Austrian presidency the beginning of the implementation of large decisions made at the EU-level concerning development cooperation as the Development Policy Statement or the EU-Africa Strategy took place. To find out more and in order to support the Austrian EU-Platform's work during the Austrian Presidency of the EU and the following Finnish presidency project, please visit [www.richpoorworld.at](http://www.richpoorworld.at)

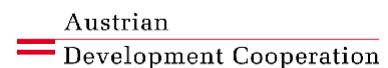
**About the Austrian EU-Platform:**

The Austrian EU-Platform of Non-Governmental Development Organisations is the network of over 40 Austrian-based organisations in international development and development education. [www.eu-platform.at](http://www.eu-platform.at)



The Presidency Project of the Austrian EU-Platform is supported by the European Union.

with funding from



Photos:

- 1 from left to right: Caroline Gudenus, Johannes Trimmel, Joanna Maycock
- 2 Karin Scheele (centre) in discussion with a participant from South Africa
- 3 Mary Mwingira
- 4 Immaculée Ingabire
- 5 Ely Dembele (left) and Florent Sebban
- 6 Jaap de Visser
- 7 Mikaela Gavas
- 8 Peter Hulényi
- 9 from left to right: Athanassios Theodorakis, Immaculée Ingabire, Hans Winkler, Alexandra Föderl-Schmid, Abubakar Bawa-Bwari, Karin Scheele, Jean Mfasoni
- 10 The only seats left were those of the speakers
- 11 Networking at Sound of Africa
- 12 Frank Mugenyi (right) and Jaap de Visser
- 13 from left to right: Gerda Daniel, Jaap de Visser, Frank Mugenyi, Klaus Zillikens
- 14 Handover of the Vienna Declaration: representatives of the pre seminars together with Klaus Zillikens (Austrian Foreign Ministry, centre) and the organisers Johannes Trimmel (left) and Sabine Rehbichler (right)