

Report on the European Commission – Civil Society Forum on the Millennium Development Goals

**Held on 15 October 2008 at the Burgers Park Hotel,
Pretoria, South Africa**

1. Introduction

The European Commission's (EC) relationship with civil society in South Africa, which dates back to the mid 1980s, has been significant both in terms of financial support and dialogue. Currently the EC supports South African civil society organisations (CSOs) to the tune of about R1-billion.

On October 15 2008, midway to the 2015 target for achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), about 80 CSOs, representing rural and urban constituencies across South Africa, came together at the European Commission (EC) - Civil Society Forum (CSF) held at the Burgers Park Hotel in Pretoria. The agenda for the day included three keynote addresses by Ambassador Lodewijk Briët, the representative of the European Commission (EC), Ms. Percy Moleke from the South Africa Government (SAG) and Mr. Jacob Molapisi from the South African National NGO Coalition (Sangoco), followed by discussions in breakaway groups in which civil society representatives shared their perspectives on policies, strategies and activities Government, donors and CSOs should adopt to achieve the MDGs. The groups focused on the topics: Poverty and Development (MDGs 1 & 8); Health (MDGs 4, 5 & 6); Education and Gender (MDGs 2 & 3) and Environment (MDG 7).

2. Presentations

2.1 The EC's Perspective

Ambassador Lodewijk Briët assured delegates that despite the turbulent global financial context, the EC remained committed to achieving the MDGs and fully intended to honour its commitments. Giving the background to the EC's commitment he explained that since the adoption of the Millennium Declaration in 2000 efforts by the international community to achieve the MDGs have been underpinned by a number of key drivers: The Monterrey Consensus on Financing for Development, the Paris Declaration, the Accra Agenda on Aid Effectiveness,

the commitments made under the 2005 European Consensus on Development and, most recently, the European Union (EU) Agenda for Action on MDGs.

Focusing in particular on the commitment to Aid Effectiveness Briët said there were three major challenges to progress: Country ownership; the building of more effective and inclusive partnerships, and achieving results. More and more effective aid is needed to achieve the MDG targets. In Accra it was agreed that this would involve: Predictability of aid; better division of labour so that donors respond effectively to partners; and better alignment to national priorities and policies in order to accelerate output and limit bureaucracy.

The EU believes that civil society plays a crucial role in “in tackling poverty, unemployment and social exclusion and delivering social services as well as monitoring good governance and human rights, including empowering the victims of poverty and violence.” Briët stressed the importance of dialogue between EC and civil society and said the EC saw the participation of CSOs in the Mid-Term Review (MTR) of the EU-SA Country Strategy Paper 2007-2013 as critical. The MTR will take place in 2009.

2.2 The South African Government’s (SAG) Perspective

The SAG representative emphasised that global MDG targets and indicators need to be adapted – not merely adopted – to reflect national development priorities.

Outlining South Africa’s achievements in addressing poverty and hunger (MDG 1); providing universal access to primary education (MDG 2); and promoting gender equality (MDG 3), Ms. Moleke said although progress had been significant, the gap between the rich and the poor remains one of the highest in the world. Income poverty is declining but inequality has not been reduced.

Progress with regard to reducing child mortality (MDG 4) and improving maternal health (MDG 5) has been slow and although there has been progress with regard to combating malaria and other diseases (MDG 6) the challenges in the context of the HIV and AIDS pandemic are still considerable.

Moleke said in the South African context, ensuring environmental sustainability (MDG 7) involves not only forward planning, but also tackling the legacies of the separate development policies of apartheid, which resulted in extensive soil erosion, deforestation and a loss of biodiversity.

South Africa’s commitment to developing global partnerships for development (MDG 8) has been expressed through advocacy and awareness-raising efforts in

respect of the MDGs in other African countries and through the SAG's promotion and strengthening of South-South co-operation for the purposes of promoting equitable global development.

2.3 Sangoco's Perspective

Jacob Molapisi, the Sangoco representative, said development in South Africa is inextricably linked to the development of the rest of the continent. Molapisi said the vision of Sustainable Human Development (SHD) reflects the ethos and aspirations of the Freedom Charter and the Reconstruction and Development Programme, South Africa's initial blueprint for socio-economic transformation. An SHD approach acknowledges and responds to the shortcomings of a private market system and advocates an active developmental state approach with pro-poor policies. Whereas neo-liberal policy, in Sangoco's view, promotes "low growth rates, environmental degradation, increased unemployment, inequities in wealth, the undercutting of social services, infrastructure and small enterprise development," an SHD approach judges the utility of all aspects of the development path (growth, technology, macroeconomic policy etc.) by the criterion of their contribution to sustainable human development.

For Sangoco, high rates of income poverty and income and wealth inequalities; high levels of service deprivations; HIV/AIDS and human vulnerabilities; high levels of unemployment and underemployment; an insufficient and anti-poor growth path; and the fact that a significant portion of the population live in environmentally unsafe conditions are all indications of SHD gaps.

2.4 Civil Society Organisation's Perspective

CSOs remain outside the realm of policy development and are often "voiceless" in the wider development arena. Representatives stressed that unless CSOs are allowed to speak for themselves, the impact of their work will not be conveyed appropriately. However, there was a recognition that civil society must become more organised and engage the MDGs from a common platform.

It was noted that CSOs do not partner or compliment each other. They tend to work in isolation and/or in competition for scarce resources. In some cases donors are funding several organisations doing exactly the same work. There should be a strategy for facilitating partnering and developing collective programmes.

Government accountability and efficiency in particular was raised as a fundamental challenge. Government policies tend to focus on quantitative and not qualitative service delivery

In many areas where CSOs are active, constitutional rights are still paper rights and there are vast areas where basic services are scarce. However, the privatisation of services will not address the needs of the poor and representatives were very vocal in their rejection of privatisation.

CSOs also called for more communication, more accountability and consultation and more sensitivity from both donors and Government to the challenges confronting CSOs and their capacity limitations for navigating complex procurement procedures and meeting requirements that are cumbersome and time-consuming and often experienced as an obstruction to essential activities.

3. Breakaway Groups

3.1 Group 1: Poverty and Development (MDGs 1 & 8)

Setting the Scene

John Kane-Berman, the South African Institute for Race Relations representative, gave a presentation based on a report produced by the Presidency entitled, 'Towards a Fifteen Year Review' and a recent Quarterly Labour Force Survey. He said poverty reduction in South Africa has primarily been addressed by the Government's social security programme. Beneficiaries of child support grants increased from 34,000 in 1999 to 7.8 million in 2007. The proportion of children going to bed hungry dropped from 31.2% in 2002 to 16% in 2006. He speculated that to meet the MDG target to halve poverty by 2014, the Government would have to make welfare payments to millions more people and not only children. Kane-Berman said the Government has consistently rejected the notion of a Basic Income Grant but that it might be forced to reconsider its opposition. To halve unemployment by 2014, he suggested an annual average of about 483,000 jobs would need to be created between 2007 and 2014.

Highlighting what he referred to as the 'political minefields' that the Government consistently avoids, Kane-Berman said there is a recognition that for the poor to be enabled to enter the labour market, barriers to market entry will need to be addressed, but the issue is 'put on the back-burner' because it is seen as too sensitive and contentious. Likewise in the education arena, it is acknowledged that education is in crisis but fixing the system is impossible because militant trade unions have too much power.

Kane-Berman said the conventional idea that two parents and their children live together as a household in a nuclear family does not apply in South Africa. Some 248 000 child-headed households were counted in the 2001 census. There were 2.1 million AIDS orphans in 2003, a number which UNICEF expects to rise to 3.1 million two years from now, accounting for 19% of all children up to the age of 17. Some 43% of all urban parents are single parents, of whom 75% are women and of whom 21% have no income. Nearly one-third of young women become pregnant in their teens.

Key Challenges identified by CSO representatives

- At the policy-making level, interaction between CSOs, donors and Government is limited and/or selective. CSOs continue to be poorly represented in policy development structures despite the fact that many have the capacity and ability to voice development priorities.
- CSOs struggle to access donor funding. Procurement requirements of donors are often difficult to understand, presented in unfamiliar language, tone and format, particularly for CSOs based in rural areas. Procurement requirements are sometimes rigid and unrealistic and donor funding cycles are not always aligned to cash flow and programme cycles of CSOs, making sustainability a challenge.
- A monitoring and evaluation (M&E) policy for CSO service delivery has not been developed. Their function as service deliverers is as important as the role they play in advocacy and should be monitored and evaluated as such. CSO programme objectives and outcomes do not necessarily speak to the MDGs specifically.

Key Recommendations by CSO representatives

- The Government, in particular, should increase efforts to engage in partnerships with CSOs across all sectors in respect of policy development.
- The EC should revisit its procurement procedures for CSOs and commit to making them more accessible, lenient, and where possible, aligned to financial and programmatic cycles of CSOs.
- CSOs should refocus and better align programme objectives and outcomes to the relevant MDGs.

3.2 Group 2: Health (MDGs 4, 5 & 6)

Setting the scene

Mrs. Shoane Mohlakoana, the (Marie Stopes SA representative), made a presentation on the health MDGs in South Africa. The targets for the health

MDGs are: to reduce child mortality for children under five by two thirds between 1990 and 2015 (MDG 4); to reduce the maternal mortality rate by three quarters between 1990 and 2015(MDG 5); to halt by 2015 and begin to reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS (MDG 6 Target 7); and to halt by 2015 and begin to reverse incidences of malaria and other major diseases (MDG 6 Target 8).

Progress in attaining the health MDGs has been significant in some areas and slow in others. South Africa was declared polio free by the Africa Regional Certification Commission in October 2006 and by the end of 2008, national immunisation coverage had increased by 83%.

While there has been some progress in terms of reducing child mortality, there is still a long way to go to meet the target of 20/1000 by 2015. Child mortality figures dropped to 57.6/1000 live births in 2003 from 60/1000 in 2002. Efforts to reduce child mortality included increasing the number of health workers trained in the Integrated Management of Childhood Diseases (IMCI). By March 2007, 71% of health facilities in which children are seen had more than 60% of their health workers trained in IMCI and the Household and Community Component of IMCI was implemented in 70% of health districts.

The HIV/AIDS pandemic remains the greatest challenge in South Africa and throughout the continent. Progress to note includes a reduction in prevalence in the under 20 age group (from 15.9% in 2005 to 13.7% in 2006) and in women between 20-24 (there was decline from 30.6% in 2005 to 28.0 in 2006).

Prevalence in older ages groups (over 30) remained at similar levels to 2005 and in some instances increased, though not significantly.

The most significant development was the introduction of a Comprehensive Plan for HIV/AIDS and an Intersectoral Strategic Plan for HIV/AIDS for 2007-2011 by the South African Government. Presently 90% of the public health facilities provide VCT and PMTCT and by May 2007, 300,000 patients had been put on ARV treatment. The proportion of PLHIV/A, TB, and other conditions receiving nutrition supplements increased from 56% in 2005/6 to 81.8% in 2006/7.

Key Challenges identified by CSO representatives

- The Government policy is not understood by people at community level. It is often neither translated nor adapted to local or provincial contexts and in many cases it is cumbersome, inflexible or entirely out of touch with conditions on the ground.
- Government accountability with respect to service delivery is weak. There is also inefficiency in the management of sector funds, budget allocations and programme-specific monies, which directly affects progress towards MDGs.

- CSOs lack the capacity and the power to hold Government accountable. This is exacerbated by what CSOs experience as a general lack of interest on the part of Government in the work and untapped potential of CSOs to partner in the delivery of health-related MDGs.

Key Recommendations by CSO representatives

- There is a need for more analysis of official policy on the part of civil society groups. CSOs must develop an ability to understand and interrogate Government policy. Donor assistance in the form of training and/or facilitating dialogue between the CS sector and the Government would likely lead to CSOs better equipped to hold Government accountable, particularly in respect of service delivery, financial management and the overall implementation of policy.
- The Government should improve its relationships with CSOs and pay more attention to the role it can play in capacity building and financial support for CSO activities.

3.3 Group 3: Education and Gender (MDGs 2 & 3)

Setting the Scene

Education

Salim Vally (Wits Education Policy Unit) said there have been significant achievements in turning apartheid education around in the first 14 years of democracy, levels of universal primary education and the gender balance in schools go beyond the requirements and targets set to be achieved by 2015, which can only be enhanced by the current moves toward fee-free schools, with more than 40% to 60% of poor schools already targeted for such interventions. Achievements in the wider education system include:

- The amalgamation of apartheid education systems and establishments into a single national department;
- A massive emphasis on the education budget with some 6% of GDP and approximately 21% of the national budget being allocated;
- The introduction of Outcomes Based Education (OBE);
- An increase in the number of students writing Senior Certificate exams;
- The merger of 120 colleges of education into university education departments, 36 institutions into 21 universities and universities of technology, and some 150 FET colleges reduced to 50 through the 1998 FET Act;

- Black student enrolment at universities and technikons grew from 191 000 in 1993 to 343 000 in 1999 (81%) to 449 000 in 2003. Black students made up 59% of university headcount in 1999 and 64% in 2003. Of this number 53% were women.

The gains need to be offset against significant problems, which include:

Poor education system; low teacher morale; curriculum complexity and lack of the required skills and experience; disjunctures and mismanagement particularly between national and provincial departments; ineffective school governance systems and lack of leadership; and a range of 'external' factors impact on education, from HIV/AIDS (infected teachers and learners, child-headed households) to poor transport, gangs, poor nutrition and housing, electricity in the home, to lack of support in communities.

A comprehensive, co-ordinated approach to education policy is needed. Planning, targets and priorities for the medium term need to be developed. A clear national consensus among stakeholders needs to be elaborated.

There is an imperative for a strong, principle-driven commitment to increased involvement in the education arena. A range of non-school interventions must be coordinated and drawn together to support formal education and provide for opportunities for employment and the empowerment and participation of citizens in building democracy and development across the region.

Gender

Dr Oshadin Mangena (Consultant) said it is difficult to measure achievements in gender issues in South Africa. Until 2001 there was no co-ordination between Government departments regarding gender at all. Mangena said that intensive and continuous education is necessary on the meaning of gender equality, by both Government and CSOs and there should be systematic coordination on gender equality between all Government departments. The EU should advise on this and support activities to address the imbalances in CSOs and in the Government.

Key Challenges identified by CSO representatives

- MDG indicators in respect of education and gender focus on quantity rather than quality. Policy formulation is not linked to indicators that support more nuanced and sometimes less obvious trends in education.
- Internal efficiency, particularly in the education sector, remains a daunting challenge. The quality of teacher training and service delivery (teaching standards and teacher conduct, for example), the lack of community

involvement in the maintenance and protection of schools and violence in schools are particular problems.

- The focus on primary education is overwhelming and detracts from other excellent school programmes. The gender focus is on girls and women at the expense of boys and men and there is a lack of understanding of gender in both Government and CS sectors.
- Donor support to Government sometimes stops at the door of Government and does not get channelled efficiently to communities.

Key Recommendations by CSO representatives

- Policy should reflect a balance of quality and quantity in respect of education and gender. Improving policy formulation in this regard might contribute to more realistic and workable indicators.
- CSOs need to be more organised in their efforts to promote community ownership of, and responsibility for, school infrastructure and to lobby for support around issues of protection of property and violence in schools.
- Policies and programmes of Government and CSOs need to address all levels of education and training.
- Intensive and continuous education to improve knowledge and understanding about gender and gender issues is vital in both Government and CS sectors. More progressive and critical thinking is needed to counter and transform social standards and stereotypes imposed by a historically skewed education system.
- Donors should put aside more money for CSOs and/or redirect or roll over funds not spent by Government.

3.4 Group 4: Environment (MDG 7)

Setting the scene

Michelle Pressend (Institute for Global Dialogue) said there are political, social and economic challenges that an emerging economy like South Africa has to confront when making a choice for a more sustainable development approach. On the one hand there is the pressure to fulfil economic growth objectives and on the other the threat of environmental degradation caused by climate change accelerated by standard economic practices. Currently South Africa's sustainable development aspirations are not integrated into industrial development, urban and rural planning, infrastructure, agricultural and other related policies. For this integration to happen, public engagement, initialisation of design, technology and innovation, skills development and public investment to mitigate climate change are necessary.

South Africa has been proactive in international negotiations and committed to many multilateral environmental agreements. However, one of the key challenges in South Africa is to devise strategies, programmes and policies for sustainable development that improve the well being of citizens.

CSOs should strengthen their political influence so that they can hold the Government accountable.

More integrated policy frameworks are needed. International, regional and national dimensions of environmental governance are often kept separate but what are needed is a unified vision and more coordination and coherence.

Meaningful linkages must be forged between social, economic and environmental dimensions. Perhaps one way to achieve this is for governments to establish cross-cutting objectives that might include improving the quality of life, decreasing the loss of biodiversity, promoting renewable energy, social cohesion, food security, and sustainable consumption and production patterns.

Key Challenges identified by CSO representatives

- Although the environment underpins every development goal there is a fundamental lack of priority attached to environmental policies and practices, largely the result of a lack of political will. Policies are relatively unknown, suffer from poor implementation, focus on the quantity rather than the quality of service delivery and relate more to the urban wealthy than the rural impoverished.
- The environment is seen as a cost to, not a catalyst for development. Opportunities for countries to dictate their environmental priorities are lacking and donor funding tends to be limited in scope and burdened with conditions.
- Sustainable development is not promoted or translated to communities that do not have access to media.
- There is a lack of cohesion and capacity within the CSO sector and as a result opportunities for monitoring and evaluating Government policies, contributions to international best practice and analysis and learning exchanges (South/South in particular) are not optimised.

Key recommendations by CSO representatives

- Political will is vital to prioritise and popularise environmental policy as the foundation of sustainable development and to translate it into practice.
- The scope of donor funding and procurement procedures in the environment sector should be revisited and wherever possible adapted or restructured to improve breadth and access.

- Mechanisms to promote sustainable development in communities that do not have ready access to media should be explored as a matter of urgency. New technology to promote sustainable environments should also be popularised.
- CSOs should work to build partnerships and learning exchanges around common environmental challenges. Advocacy around the energy crisis, for example, would increase knowledge and promote action from those stakeholders who continue to dismiss the crisis as a “non-issue”.

4. Conclusion

At the end of the day, key challenges and recommendations revolved around the interaction of CSOs with Government; the interaction of CSOs with donors (and with the EC in particular); and interaction between CSOs themselves and with their own constituencies.

CSOs/Government issues

- Many CSOs feel that they are not being heard by Government. They want more engagement around policies and strategies and more inclusion of civil society in decision-making. CSOs concede, however, that the issue of representation will need to be tackled.
- Policies in themselves were not heavily criticised. The main bone of contention appears to be with the implementation of policy; accountability and transparency, particularly in the health and education contexts; and problems relating to Government's capacity to spend funds. The communication of national policies to provincial/local level is viewed as problematic, with obstructions at every level as a result of unnecessary bureaucratic processes.
- The privatisation of basic services renders services unaffordable to the majority of South Africans and is therefore widely rejected by CSOs.
- CSOs called for more local economic development/community development.
- An appreciation and respect for the MDG targets was expressed by CSO representatives but concerns were raised about the quality of services offered and it was felt that more attention needs to be focused on quality. The need for services delivered by CSOs to be monitored was also raised as a concern.
- CSOs see their role in advocacy and service delivery (e.g. advocacy in energy issues/service delivery for education/Early Childhood Development, water and sanitation, home based care).

CSOs/Donors/EC Issues

Issues raised in this context included:

- Difficulties with accessing funds. It was felt that the private sector is not supportive enough;

- Difficulties with donor procurement requirements. Donors' procedures should be streamlined (one set for all donors in the spirit of Paris Agenda) and adapted to small operators;
- There is a need for training/capacity building around procedures. Currently they are not accessible and generally not understood;
- Dialogue with the Government could be promoted by donors;
- The issue of sustainability and the diversification of NGO funding was noted.

CSOs/CSOs and Communities Issues

In this context it was suggested that:

- CSOs should have a vision that extends beyond their own mandates and constituencies on larger issues;
- CSOs should have 'more teeth' and prepare to use whatever power is given to them for the broader CS community;
- CSOs should communicate more intensively with their communities in order to better represent and defend them;
- CSOs should also play a role in empowering communities by encouraging ownership in terms of service delivery and mobilizing them around sustainable development.

Mr. McGovern (EC Delegation) drew attention to the common threads between the CS presentations and in particular the frustrations expressed about lack of "voice", capacity and about access to funding. He said that CSOs and Government together needed to re-engage in the policy-maker – service provider – citizen triangle, stating that Government cannot do the job itself.

Ambassador Briët picked up on the presentation by the Environment Group and agreed with the group that environmental issues have too low a profile in South Africa. He said it is an area where an important dialogue has been set up between the EC and the Ministry for Environment and Tourism and stressed that if this particular goal is not met, there is a high risk for failing in many other areas. He said irrespective of the MDGs and irrespective of what sector individuals are representing, these are issues that affect everyone world wide. He went on to stress that there are many issues that cannot be solved at a local level or even a national level, for which global solutions must be found.

He thanked participants for their openness, for the quality of the dialogue and for their willingness to exchange experiences. He said dialogue between the EC and civil society in South Africa should be seen as ongoing, alive and well and confirmed further meetings were possible next year, in the context of the Mid Term Review of the joint EU-SA Country Strategy 2007-2013.