

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Civil Society and Local Authorities play an important role in the field of Development Cooperation. Therefore, the European Union has aimed to include these actors by promoting their participation and including them in the development processes and in the broader political, social and economic dialogues at all levels. In this vein, the EC launched a first round of consultations known as the Structured Dialogue (SD). The final statement of the SD, known as the Budapest Declaration, recommended the establishment of a regular space for multi-stakeholder policy dialogue with Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) and Local Authorities (LAs). The result of these initiatives was the set-up of the Policy Forum on Development (PFD) at the end of 2013.

The PFD is governed by the “PFD Charter”, adopted by all members, which sets the objectives and defines the membership criteria. The PFD has three objectives: 1) Facilitating dialogue on cross-cutting issues related to the role of CSOs and LAs; 2) Promoting policy debate, consultation and exchange of information and experiences on EU development policies and initiatives; 3) Supporting and regularly following-up the implementation of the Structured Dialogue’s recommendations, providing a room for regular update and peer review by all actors. The Policy Forum for Development is a multi-stakeholder development platform for discussions about development policies. It provides a space in which to strength ongoing dialogue processes between the EC, civil society organisations and local authorities associations. However, the PFD is not a negotiation table, nor does it distribute resources.

Conceived as a trust-building mechanism, the dialogue process involves a regular cycle of global, regional and stakeholder PFD meetings. Yearly Global Meetings in Brussels are the most important in the sense that they bring together all the Members and many EU decision-makers, as well as other relevant development stakeholders, to discuss key development topics. Aside from these meetings, the PFD includes other outcomes and activities, such as a consultation tool kit, a research programme, and various communication tools.

The PFD platform includes 61 networks of CSOs and LAs, representing five major world regions (Africa, Asia and Pacific, Latin America, Europe and the European Eastern and Southern Neighbourhood). Additionally, a number of global actors, so-called “networks of networks” of LAs, private sector and CSOs also have membership seats in the PFD. Member organisations have a mandate of two years.

DEVCO is responsible for the overall organisation, mainly through Unit B2 which chairs and ensures the secretariat for the Forum. The PFD is co-chaired by one representative of the CSOs and by one representative of the LAs. The PFD Task Team, consisting of a core group of 15 persons selected among the membership, steers and programmes the activities, ensures communication flows, undertakes preparatory work and is responsible for promoting collective ownership and accountability. A small Technical Assistance team supports the various activities and provides technical expertise.

The PFD Charter states that a review of the Forum and its ways of working would take place after an initial two-year period of operation. This review was conducted from September 2015 to June 2016 by a team of two external consultants. The objectives of the review were to take stock of two years of working of the PFD platform and to formulate, where necessary, recommendations for improvement. The review used a tailor-made, qualitative methodology based on half-open interviews with PFD Members and other stakeholders. In total, 48 out of 61 PFD Members were interviewed, as well as seven representatives from EU Member States, a number of EC staff and other relevant stakeholders. In total nearly 90 stakeholders were consulted.

The review covered four areas of analysis, roughly parallel to the OECD-DAC criteria, although the review is not an evaluation and the PFD is not a project. The four main areas of the review were: Relevance (Objectives), Effectiveness (Mandate and Representativeness), Efficiency (Work Modalities) and Impact.

**Relevance** was determined by an examination of the relevance of the objectives of the PFD from the viewpoint of its various stakeholders. The study findings show that the three Objectives as stated in the Charter are supported by the great majority of PFD Members. The opportunity to engage in a structural dialogue process with such a wide range of global stakeholders was highly valued by all. However, the interpretation of those objectives and what PFD means to each Member varies. Additionally, many Members believed that the PFD's relevance would improve with increased involvement of other EU institutions. Regarding contents of the dialogue, Members raised concerns about the lack of true in-depth participatory dialogue with the ability to impact policies, with many perceiving the PFD on-going agenda as too one-sided.

Regarding PFD **effectiveness**, the review addressed whether the PFD objectives were being achieved, focusing specifically on the mandate and representativeness of Members, according to the Charter principles. There is a general feeling of success when referring to the implementation of the global, regional and multi-stakeholders meetings. However, some of the salient issues raised by participants included unclear definition of the composition and membership of the Forum, different levels of active participation among Members, unclear distribution of roles and responsibilities for the Task Team, the absence of renewal procedures and rotation modalities and the need to improve transparency and accountability. While the PFD Members are highly diverse, there is no clear rationale for deciding on PFD Membership, leading to issues of representativeness, ownership and accountability. One of the major issues discovered from the review is the need to increase accountability, and thereby ownership, of all PFD actors at all levels (Members to constituencies, Task Team to all Members they represent, PFD Members to Task Team, etc.). Some Members believed new categories should be invited to the PFD and many believed the current composition of regional seats should be re-evaluated. Therefore, an internal discussion regarding membership selection criteria and actual degrees of representivity, as well as levels of active participation, is seen by many stakeholders as a strategic priority.

To assess **efficiency**, the review addressed the working modalities of the PFD Meetings as they represent its main tangible activity. These are well-organized following international standards. The programming of sessions and interventions is coordinated by the Task Team (TT) and supported by the Technical Assistance (TA) team. One of the main findings of the review is that the majority of Members and observers perceive that there is a need to adjust the Meeting formats in order to make them more flexible and participatory so that all Members can intervene and be heard. However, this contradicts with some other Members who would prefer high-level, political plenary sessions. This disconnect in ideal format is largely due to differing expectations from meetings and should be addressed. Another point regarding efficiency is communication strategies and tools. Communication is perceived by many as insufficient to maintain a sense of ownership. The Forum has developed various communication tools for internal and external use (web platform, newsletter, PFD in Brief, videos, tool kits) which are known by most Members, but not used extensively. Additionally, an explicit gender approach and intercultural perspective must be developed for more effective meetings and to add value to the PFD. The monitoring and evaluation system of the PFD was seen to be not interactive enough, but it appears as central to help ensure adequate accountability and proper reciprocal feedback. It was also believed that the capacity of the Task Team, Technical Assistance team, and DEVCO team should be reinforced.

The review assessed the **impact** both for the participating networks and for EU development policies. At the moment there has been limited policy impact, but there is a large potential. The SD process played a key part in the preparation of the EC Communications on the role of CS and LAs in development, but the PFD has either not had the opportunity to or has not been able to influence major EU policy documents so far. For PFD Members, the impact of participation on their work is limited but real. Notably, many have become more acquainted with the European Union and EC development cooperation. Many Members value PFD for contact with the EC which has sometimes led to concrete programmes, while some (mostly European-based) Members already had this access. Contacts through PFD with other EU offices or with EU country Delegations are weak, while stronger links with relevant European bodies and Member states are expected. The opportunity for CSOs and LAs to start knowing

each other and debate in a common space is perceived as an asset, directly responding to the EU policy trends and the Structural Dialogue spirit. Unfortunately, there is still very little “South-South” cooperation or peer-to-peer interaction exchanges between PFD Members. In 2015 the PFD began a research activity to enhance policy debate and promote ownership and collaborative engagement. This initiative has a good potential for internal and external impact.

The review concludes that the PFD is a *valuable and enriching asset for the development policy landscape*. It demonstrates both the importance and the feasibility of global, multi-stakeholder policy dialogue, and has the potential for many further contributions. PFD as a multi-stakeholder space must continue to build on the added value and complementarities brought by the different actors, in their capacity to contribute to analysis and design of policy and to act as a watchdog when necessary. For CSOs and LAs, the PFD is also an opportunity and a relevant mechanism to develop new dynamics towards influencing the policies of the European Commission’s Development Cooperation in the regions. Clearly one of the benefits of the PFD is that it offers a unique platform where there is exceptional knowledge, experience and social capital cumulated through all PFD stakeholders. In this sense, all participating actors have a lot at stake and much to contribute in terms of influencing development policies.

However, some essential improvements must be made in order to allow the Forum to scale-up. The review formulates short-term and long-term **recommendations** based on the four criteria analysed. Below is a summary of the main recommendations per review area:

#### **Relevance of PFD Objectives**

- Undertake a critical, participatory reading of the fundamental and operative PFD documents to ascertain if they continue to be fully valid as formulated, and if they correspond with current practice and needs of the PFD.
- Make the scope and objectives of the PFD more explicit and operational, including through stimulating an internal discussion on this topic, and ensure that the contents of the dialogue align with these.
- Evaluate the benefits and constraints of improving interaction with officials of the various EU Institutions, EC DGs and DEVCO Units, the EEAS system, Member States, and the European Parliament, both on the global and the regional level.

#### **Effectiveness of Mandate and Representativeness**

- Conduct a full mapping of all stakeholders, Members and their constituencies, to gain a better understanding of the diverse membership including their roles, capacity (constraints), legitimacy, interests and dynamics, particularly in the focal sectors of EU cooperation.
- Further define the expectations, roles and responsibilities of PFD Members. Consider inviting new categories of actors into the Forum.
- Establish procedures for selecting Members (organisations and individual representatives) in order to increase transparency. Formulate an explicit PFD Member organisation optimal profile.
- Evaluate the current distribution of seats and processes for determining Members so that all seats are efficiently used, ensuring equal representativeness by region and category. Consider redistributing seats (e.g. to address “ghost seats”).
- Continue to ensure gender balance and mainstream gender responsive strategies, including supporting EU GAP 2016-2020, to enhance PFD accountability towards cross-cutting issues and in alignment with sustainable development priorities.

#### **Efficiency of Work Modalities**

- Reconsider Meeting formats and agendas in order to increase more active, participatory and inclusive dialogue.
- Systematically evaluate and improve communication techniques among all stakeholders (governance, Members, constituencies, etc.).
- Increase accountability, and therefore ownership, of all PFD actors at all levels (Members to constituencies, Task Team to the Members they represent, PFD to Task Team, etc.)

through maintaining a fluent and transparent feedback loop and defining roles of PFD Members.

- Increase the multicultural approach of the PFD.
- Ensure gender balance and facilitate women's networks encounters.
- Improve the interactivity of the Meeting evaluations.
- Strengthen the PFD process in order to progressively turn it into a structural consultation mechanism for EC development policy.
- Set an independent agenda.
- Evaluate and reinforce the TA team, the TT, and DEVCO staff for PFD.

### **Impact on Development Work**

- Adapt methods and support mechanisms to reinforce peer-to-peer cooperation, in-country as well as globally, to be more focused on the added value of the PFD specific actors and to develop collaborative governance towards constituencies.
- Provide opportunities for Member knowledge sharing, including developing regional initiatives and study cases.
- Strengthen the collaboration with other relevant European bodies and EU Delegations, including better visibility and information dissemination about PFD within the EU institutions and EU Delegations.
- Adjust the PFD calendar and timing to the main EU cycles and global policy calendar in order to increase the chances to influence decision making.
- Reinforce the Research programme and scale up its potential to generate innovative and cross-country knowledge.

### **General Recommendations**

- Further promote active participation and collective ownership to help ensure transparency and mutual accountability.
- Undertake another Review in two years. This Review could be less exhaustive than the current exercise, and focus more on results and impact than on the nature and objectives of the PFD. A clear roadmap should be designed for this study in order to identify the needs and implement all targets and suggestions presented. The Task Team and a small consultative panel of non-TT PFD Members should be involved in the design of the review follow-up.

This report is structured into five parts. Chapter 1 outlines the purpose of the review and the background to the PFD. Chapter 2 then briefly presents the methodological approach guiding the review process. In Chapter 3 the main review findings are presented, while Chapter 4 lists the main conclusions and lessons learnt. Finally, Chapter 5 introduces sets of recommendations according to each of the reviewed criterion.