

Case Study: Climate Change in the Context of Development Cooperation

By Alan Hudson

1. Introduction

In November 2004, the Council – in its General Affairs and External Relations configuration – adopted conclusions on climate change in the context of development cooperation, along with an Action Plan. The initial proposal had been made by the Commission in March 2003, in the format of a Communication. The purpose of the strategy and Action Plan is to mainstream climate change into the EU's programme of development cooperation, and to enable developing countries to integrate strategies to deal with climate change into their development plans, in particular by supporting them in the implementation of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Kyoto Protocol (see climate change fiche for details of the history of the EU's engagement with climate change issues).

2. Implications for development

Climate change has tended to be seen as an environmental issue, but it is of great significance for development and developing countries. Climate change puts at risk efforts to reduce poverty and make progress towards the Millennium Development Goals. This is because the negative impacts of climate change are felt more severely by poor people and countries, which are more dependent on natural resources and often lack the capacity to cope with climatic variability and extremes. For donors of development assistance such as the EU and its Member States, it is essential that climate change is mainstreamed into their development cooperation activities because otherwise their efforts to promote poverty reduction in developing countries may be rendered ineffective. In short, incoherence between approaches to development, and to climate change, will lead to inefficient use of resources.

The Action Plan provides a menu of options from which Member States can select, organised into four key themes. The first is about raising the profile of climate change, with policy makers in both developing countries and EU Member States. The second is about supporting adaptation to climate change, and mainstreaming such efforts into national strategies for poverty reduction. The third concerns supporting the mitigation of the causes of climate change, for instance as regards energy supply, energy use and transport infrastructure. And the fourth is about supporting capacity development; working with the public sector, the private sector and civil society in developing countries, to enhance their capacity to deal effectively with climate change issues.

3. EU (Council) players, processes and development inputs

DG Development, on behalf of the Commission, produced its Communication on climate change in the context of development cooperation, in March 2003.¹ Throughout the process of policy evolution, DG Development was in the lead for the Commission, although there was close cooperation with DG Environment, in particular through the inter-service consultation. There was also relatively good cooperation between development ministries and environment ministries in Member States, something which was very important for an initiative which aimed to mainstream climate change (an “environmental” issue) in development cooperation.

¹ Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament on climate change in the context of development cooperation, 11 March 2003, COM (2003) 85-final.

In December 2003, the Council – in its General Affairs and External Relations configuration – agreed Council Conclusions, welcoming the Communication but asking that further work be done by the relevant Council Expert Group to elaborate the Action Plan.² In November 2004, once further work had been done on the Action Plan, the Council agreed to adopt the strategy and Action Plan.³ Climate change tends to be dealt with by the Environment configuration of Council, but as the strategy is about the EU's relations with developing country partners, GAERC was the relevant Council configuration.

Below the level of Council, the Working Parties on Development Cooperation, and on International Environmental Issues (the climate change configuration of this Working Party) were very active. The Working Party on Development Cooperation was in the lead, as it was the expert group the GAERC had in mind when taking its decision in December 2003. However, the International Environmental Issues Working Party was regularly consulted and in fact its subordinate Developing Countries Expert Group was asked by CODEV to take care of most of the preparatory discussions on the action plan given its expertise on the issue. This feature of the process – involving Working Parties from development and non-development streams – is particularly noteworthy and provides a significant contrast to, for instance, the case study on fisheries.

In terms of Expert Groups, the Developing Countries Expert Group was particularly active, informing the work of the Working Party on International Environmental Issues. Its members included strong representation from Member States' development agencies, including those of the UK, Sweden, the Netherlands, Denmark, Portugal and France. Relationships between the more developmental and more climate-change focussed Working Parties and Expert Groups seem to have worked well. Indeed, there was much overlap between memberships, with most of the people on the Developing Countries Expert Group also involved in the International Environmental Issues and Development Cooperation Working Parties.

The presidency too played an important and constructive role, with the Irish presidency pushing the issue forward in the first half of 2004, and the Netherlands presidency bringing the initiative to conclusion. Under the Irish presidency the Action Plan was revised through a process which involved consultation with developing countries and civil society organisations (CSOs); it should be noted that CSOs had criticised the initial Action Plan for lacking detail on responsible actors, time-frames, target groups, funding and monitoring. The Irish presidency also worked to ensure that developing countries – the Ministries of Finance and Planning in particular – were part of the process, something which will be essential when it comes to implementation. And, the Irish presidency also introduced some useful innovations as regards the ways in which the EU deals with climate change issues, making it more outward looking and more inclined to engage with developing country partners, instigating the practice of having lead officials to push on particular issues, and improving relationships between Working Groups.

4. Lessons for policy coherence for development

The evolution of the EU's strategy and Action Plan on climate change in the context of development cooperation holds a number of lessons in terms of policy coherence for development:

² Council conclusions on climate change in the context of development policy, 5 December 2003. See also "NGO comments on the draft text of the revised Action Plan", EU Consultation Workshop, 14 June 2004.

³ Council conclusions on climate change in the context of development cooperation, 22 November 2004.

- The Action Plan framed climate change in terms of development cooperation. This ensured that development concerns were central. It would appear that this developmental-framing came about because of the drive given to the initiative by the Dutch and Irish Presidencies, and the leadership provided by the development community.
- Coherence at EU level was only possible because of close formal and informal cooperation between environment/climate change and development ministries in Member States' capitals. No country objected strongly to climate change being dealt with, for the purpose of the Action Plan, as a development issue.
- Even if coherence is achieved on paper by the EU, attaining coherence in practice depends on implementation, within the EU and in partner countries. Involving developing countries – and particularly the decision-makers in their governments – is essential if the strategy produced is to be implemented effectively.
- Effective relationships, and even overlapping memberships between Working Parties and Expert Groups approaching the issue from “development” and “non-development” angles can be very helpful for delivering coherence. But, rather than leaving this to chance, when non-development issues are likely to have significant developmental impacts there should be some formalization of relationships between “development” and “non-development” work-streams.
- Presidencies can play an important role in pushing issues forward, and ensuring that development dimensions are to the fore. They can also play an important role in re-shaping institutional procedures (e.g. deciding which Council formation and WP deals with the issue, and allowing non-presidency lead negotiators to be involved in external representation, etc.). For efforts to attain policy coherence for development to be effective, there needs to be good coordination between Presidencies to ensure that issues are taken forward.