

Decentralised development cooperation: extension until 31 December 2003

2001/0243(COD) - 11/07/2003 - Follow-up document

PURPOSE : to present an assessment of the operations financed by the Community under the Regulation on decentralised cooperation **CONTENT** : this assessment was ordered by the Commission assessment at the beginning of 2003 in order both to fulfil its obligations under Regulation 1659/98/EC on decentralised cooperation and also to obtain information, in the form of recommendations based on the instrument's performance since the 2001 evaluation, to help it decide whether to extend the application of the budget line's (B7-6002) legal basis. The aim of this assessment was to : - assess the tool's relevance, value added, consistency with other instruments and the results obtained from its implementation in terms of efficiency, impact and viability; - make practical suggestions to render the instrument more operational in the future. The report shows that the overall conclusions of the assessment concern the consistency, relevance, value added, results and management of the decentralised cooperation line. Though decentralised cooperation is judged relevant, it appears to lack consistency because it is not sufficiently coordinated with other financial instruments pursuing similar goals and because a lack of resources prevents it achieving the desired impact. As for value added, the assessment sees it primarily in the instrument's flexibility, especially the possibility for actors from the South to conclude contracts directly, and the in-house dialogue at the Commission, which led, among other things, to the inclusion of civil society in the Cotonou Agreement. The line's management is considered to be too centralised in view of the devolution process under way and too heavily focused on contractual and budgetary considerations. This is at the expense of the technical monitoring and evaluation stages, which are seriously underdeveloped. There is, moreover, a failure to capitalise on experience, identify good practice and disseminate results, even though these figure among the obligations listed in the operational guide. The results are generally achieved in terms of activities, but they remain of limited viability, even though they are institutionalised. They show greater progress in the working of institutions than in participation in political dialogue. The assessment's recommendations concern improving the consistency and quality of proposals and results, the specific nature of the line and cost-effectiveness. The assessment proposes that the instrument's consistency and relevance be improved by having the new Regulation target the line more precisely. Two targeting options are put forward, each with its pros and cons: - broad geographic targeting (with three sub-options: by region, regional grouping or country category; - even tighter geographic targeting, confining the use of all the line's resources to the exclusive benefit of the ACP countries, where, the assessment suggests, there are currently neither decentralised cooperation programmes based on the "process approach" in the NIPs/RIPs, though the Cotonou Agreement provides for them, nor regional programmes comparable to the MEDA, Tacis and ALA horizontal programmes. As regards the quality of proposals and results, the assessment proposes a number of options: - The use of networks could be stepped up to increase the transfer of know-how from North to South by promoting one-to-one relations. - Technical assistance networks could be set up for actors in the South. - Monitoring and evaluation could be stepped up to help increase knowledge of the impact of operations and to provide a sounder basis for deciding whether to extend them. - The website's content could be improved by creating links to other decentralised cooperation partners (Member States, international organisations, etc.). To enhance the line's specific nature, it is suggested that: - the decentralised cooperation line be distinguished from the NGO cofinancing line; - the participation of all potential actors, and in particular those from the South, be fostered; - the arrangements for the participation of NGOs from the North be changed by focusing on their role as an interface with their counterparts in the South, offering them experience and know-how. In order to improve cost-effectiveness, it is proposed that the line's financial resources be increased, which will also enhance the impact of operations. The division of tasks between Commission Headquarters and the delegations should also be improved. Lastly, it is suggested that the minimum size of projects be reduced in certain instances from EUR 200 000 today to EUR 15 000-30 000. Of the options for the geographical focus, the one concerning countries with characteristics in common would seem to be the most appropriate

both in political terms and from the standpoint of the practical implementation of the decentralised cooperation instrument. It is reflected in the draft Regulation's proposal that support be focused on "difficult partnerships", in which official aid is unable to make any significant contribution to participatory development. The assessment report cites the advantages of targeting aid by country category as being: consistency with NIPs and the specific characteristics of decentralised cooperation in the country, the major impact achieved when the number of countries is limited, the possibility of targeting countries with similar problems and the possibility of achieving complementarity with other decentralised cooperation instruments in the country. Among the potential disadvantages or difficulties of this approach, the assessment report cites the possible scattering of funds across a wide area, the difficulty of carrying out network-style horizontal or regional projects and, lastly, the fact that setting priorities might prove complex. There should also be a special emphasis on the need for the decentralised cooperation instrument to make a significant contribution to diversifying the type of actors involved in activities under the heading to ensure that all groupings of civil society are represented, with a special emphasis on support for actors in the partner countries. Along the same lines, consideration should be given to reducing the eligibility threshold for Community funding (currently fixed at EUR 200 000) to enable partners from the South working in countries experiencing political, economic and social difficulties to submit admissible proposals. Last but not least, calls for proposals should also emphasise the need for a certain degree of consistency between the projects submitted and Community programmes under way or planned in the countries concerned and, in so far as is possible, with national and local development strategies. Such consistency would help ensure the long-term viability of operations and enhance their visibility.