

The logo for GCCA+ (The Global Climate Change Alliance Plus Initiative) features the text 'GCCA+' in a bold, sans-serif font. Below the text are five horizontal bars of different colors: blue, green, yellow, orange, and grey.

THE GLOBAL CLIMATE CHANGE ALLIANCE PLUS INITIATIVE



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# **GCCA+ EDD 2017 Lab Debate: The role of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in supporting the climate change and sustainable development**

## **8th June 2017, 13:30, Brussels**

### Summary report

“This is the place to be”. With this phrase, Felice Zaccheo, Head of Unit DEVCO/C6 for Energy and Climate Change, opened the Lab Debate underlining that the theme of the debate was key to climate change action and resilience, due to the importance of partnerships. Mr Zaccheo also reminded the participants about the major policies developed since 2015 including the Sustainable Development Goals, the Paris Agreement and more recently the new European Consensus on Development. Acting on sustainable development is a shared responsibility between development stakeholders; and while civil society was always involved in contributing to these policies, stronger participation is desired.

The Global Climate Change Alliance plus (GCCA+) works as an interconnected network of partners, who are associated in policy dialogue and implementation of climate actions. The debate intended to better define how the EU can improve, in concrete terms, partnerships with Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) to enhance their role as planners, advocates, implementers within the GCCA+.

Marcus Oxley (Global Network of Civil Society Organisations for Disaster Reduction - GNDR) indicated there was an explicit recognition of civil society as strategic stakeholders in international agreements. He presented a multi-layered system from global, regional, national, down to the local level. Mainly, while climate negotiations and planning are organised between the global and the national levels, a gap exists between the national and local level where policy has to be translated into action. CSOs are agents of accountability, supporters of field level implementation, and also make a junction with monitoring and backup systems. CSOs work under the premises of a “contract” between the state and citizens: this implies space must be given to CSOs.

Mr Oxley also underlined how vulnerability is linked to exclusion, as can be seen with unequal land rights, social rights, lack of access to assets, etc. While policies tend to use multiple pillars and complex architectures (e.g., the SDGs have 17 goals), people just use practical, yet holistic approaches to respond to crises. Therefore, there is a need to understand how people deal with complex risk environments. Policies should recognise people as primary bearers of risk and support the implementation of owned strategies.

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Government cannot implement all disaster risk reduction activities. Buh Wung Gaston (Coordinator, Views from the Frontline, Cameroon) explained that CSOs have many roles. They can act as implementing bodies with regular activities with communities, but also capacity builders, connectors between stakeholders, citizens and local authorities. They use local knowledge to improve policy implementation, they are monitors of international frameworks such as the Sendai or climate change frameworks, they also act as knowledge sharers, advocates, and identify gaps of what needs to be done. As a conclusion, CSOs need space in dialogue to contribute to climate change action, notably between the local and national level.

The approach to disaster risk reduction (DRR) is often too much top-down in practice. Ninety percent of natural disasters are related to hydro-meteorological events, with climate change increasing the frequency and intensity of these events. Communities that have the ability to organise themselves and work together, put their own adaptation strategies in place, and lessons learned from the past can increase their core resilience. Views from the Frontline, for instance, gathers opinions from people on DRR coping strategies and barriers to implementing them, so as to feed future policy with “what works” from the communities’ perspective.

Rosario Bento Pais (Head of Unit, Civil Society, Local Authorities, DG DEVCO/B2) indicated that CSOs were the first to push the climate change agenda. Since 2012 the European Union works with CSOs not only as service deliverers, but also as actors of development, and as actors of governance. This is supported by a multi-stakeholder process that goes from the global to the local level. According to Ms Bento Pais, what needs to be done is to strengthen and fine tune processes that reinforce participation of CSOs.

One challenge in climate change is to ensure that decision-makers keep to their promises: what seems negotiated and agreed can still change in the future. CSOs can play a role in monitoring and supporting policy attaining its objectives. This is why there is a need to foresee specific spaces for civil society to work at local and national level. The roadmaps prepared by the European Union at country level provide an outlook of the context and environment where civil society may evolve, prioritise issues (related to governance, organisational, institutional or other issues), and make recommendations to improve the profile of CSOs in the country in question.

Also, civil society needs to involve local authorities to act. The territorial approach to local development allows making a link between various stakeholders and building pressure on leaders and decision-making bodies to the interest of the community groups.

Maria Theresa Nera-Lauron (CSO Partnership for Development Effectiveness) reminded why citizen participation is critical in climate change discussions at international level. Entities with conflicting interests in climate change dedicate resources to influence global negotiations. Large corporations such as fuel companies are well organised and may have an undue advantage in terms of influence, when compared to communities. Partnerships engaged by institutions must also recognize that a better balance between partners is needed, notably CSOs and community representatives.

Ms Nera-Lauron also underlined that financial interest may occur even in situations of crisis. For instance, after the chaos caused by super typhoon Nuri in the Philippines in 2014, rehabilitation led to multiple cases

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of corruption, privatisation of land for construction purposes leading to displacement of communities, and a stronger military control.

During the Questions & Answers session, suggestions from the participants included:

- Monitoring and evaluation processes should be harmonised at international level, so as to be able to strengthen lessons learned and decision making.
- Funding directed to society organisations should be better tracked. An OECD report issued in 2016 indicated about €1.9 billion annually programmed by the EU for civil society and local authorities.
- GCCA+ should continue to support the learning pillar of projects. There is still a difficulty to translate climate change issues to communities and citizens.
- It is critical to work with countries to ensure there are foreseen spaces for civil society participation and involvement, respecting civil society potential roles as actors of development.

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