

Decentralized
COOPERATION:

A NEW
EUROPEAN APPROACH
AT THE SERVICE
OF PARTICIPATORY
DEVELOPMENT

EXPLANATORY
SECTIONS



GLOSSARY

ACP	:	African, Caribbean and Pacific countries
ALA	:	Asian and Latin American countries
DCP	:	Decentralized Cooperation Programme
EC	:	European Commission
ECU	:	European Currency Unit
EDF	:	European Development Fund
EU	:	European Union
Lomé IV	:	Fourth Lomé Convention
MED	:	Mediterranean countries
NGO	:	Non-Governmental Organisation

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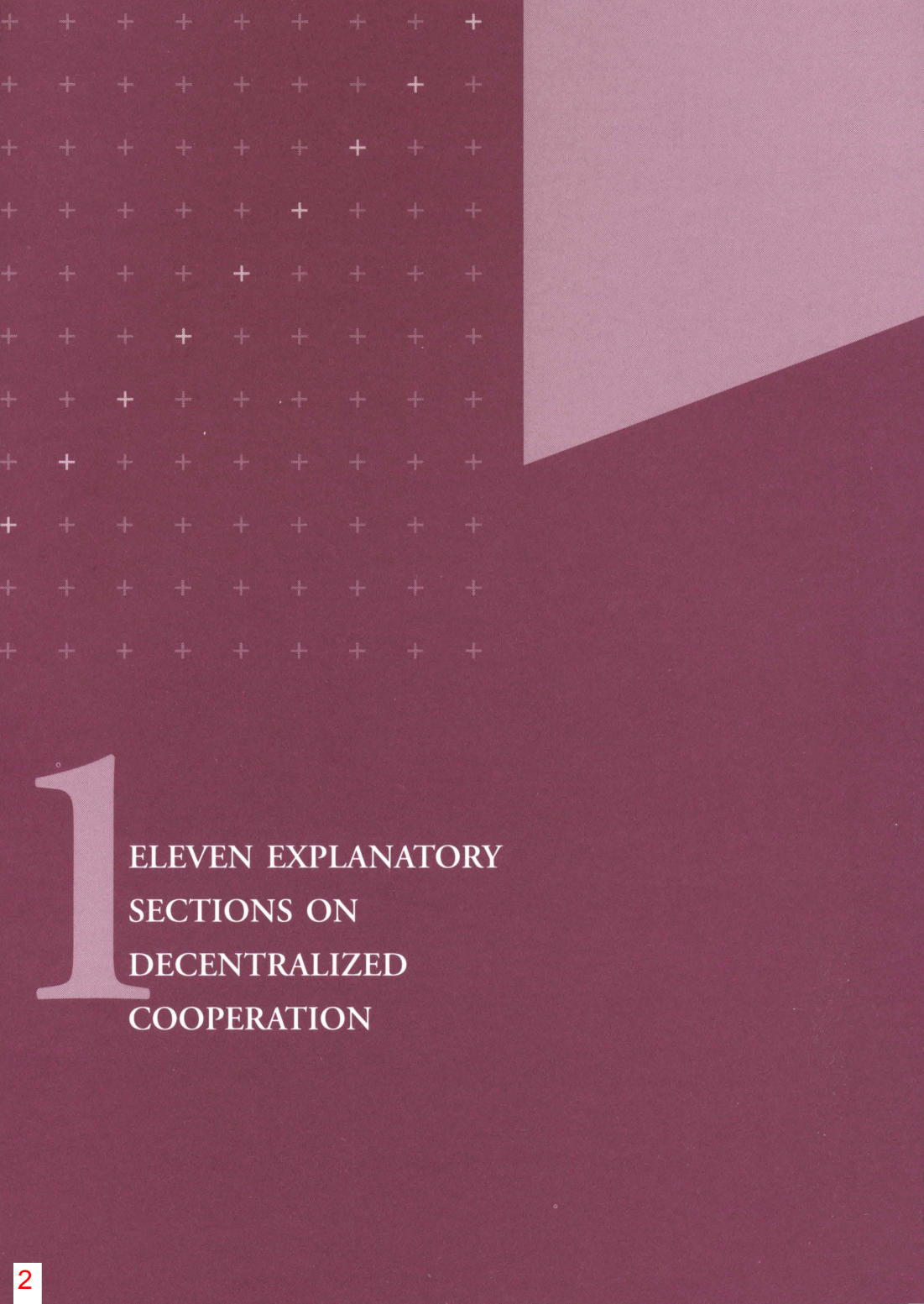
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1 ELEVEN EXPLANATORY
SECTIONS ON
DECENTRALIZED
COOPERATION

DECENTRALIZED COOPERATION: A NEW EUROPEAN APPROACH AT THE SERVICE OF PARTICIPATORY DEVELOPMENT

Decentralized cooperation is a process rather than a procedure, governed more by principles than by regulations.

It involves a gradual change in attitudes and methods among the various agents of cooperation in development and redefines their roles.

From principles to implementation, this dossier aims not only to increase awareness with respect to decentralized cooperation but also to provide guidelines for turning it into reality.

Each section responds to a key question and related questions.

The contents are as follows

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These explanatory sections form part of a set of educational and methodological documents* whose objective is to raise awareness with regard to the implementation principles and procedures of decentralized cooperation operations. This material can be used in the framework of decentralized cooperation training sessions. A trainer's guide has been written for this purpose.

For those who would like to find out more about a particular aspect of decentralized cooperation, each section refers to specific passages of the document "Decentralized Cooperation: a new European approach at the service of participatory development – Methodological study".

A summarised bibliography is also provided for each issue that has been tackled (a more detailed bibliography is provided in the annex of the above mentioned study).

* These documents are available at the European Commission (DG VIII/B/2)

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DECENTRALIZED
COOPERATION :
THE EUROPEAN
APPROACH
AT THE SERVICE
OF PARTICIPATORY
DEVELOPMENT

Decentralized Cooperation is not really a new tool or theme of action in development Cooperation. It is especially a different and innovative way of designing and implementing development cooperation. As such, Decentralized Cooperation covers several sectors of cooperation between the European Union and Southern countries. It involves a process of gradual change in traditional methods of implementing cooperation in development: it requires agents to take the risk of moving off the beaten track, to be innovative with regard to traditional forms of cooperation and to expand the relatively narrow and sometimes monopolistic circle of agents involved in cooperation.

The objective of Decentralized Cooperation is, above all, to guarantee "improved" development, by taking into account more of the needs and priorities as expressed by those concerned; in this way, it intends to strengthen the role and position of civil society in the development process. Decentralized Cooperation aims to bring together potential economic and social agents both in the North and South and to encourage collaboration between them at different levels of intervention. In addition, Decentralized Cooperation aims to bring about active and decisive participation by the direct beneficiaries in decision-making and in the different stages of actions concerning them. Thus, Decentralized Cooperation not only embodies a participatory method but also covers a wider reality, as a component of the political dialogue on cooperation.

→ OBJECTIVES

- To mobilise the people concerned and to be more inclusive of their needs and priorities.
- To strengthen the role and position of civil society in the development processes.
- To promote sustainable and equitable economic and social development through participation.

→ INSTRUMENTATION (AGENTS, METHOD AND MEANS)

- Decentralized Cooperation is based on a wide range of agents who consult with each other, while remaining autonomous in the choice of their objectives and management.
- Decentralized Cooperation promotes consistency in interventions through the planning of priorities and co-ordination of means. The actions draw on the experience of the agents whose right to learn and to make mistakes is recognised. They are carried out with a long-term view, in the search for a self-multiplying effect.
- In this regard, the aid system must promote the strengthening of organised agents' capacities, be receptive to initiatives from civil society and provide a flexible administrative and financial monitoring procedure.

Within the framework of the European development policy, the idea of Decentralized Cooperation appeared for the first time in the Fourth Lomé Convention, in relation to the objectives, principles and cooperation agents. For the European Commission, Decentralized Cooperation must be understood as the participation of various civil society agents in the discussion of priorities and in the implementation of development actions, on the basis of initiatives originating from these agents. The importance of Decentralized Cooperation has recently been reaffirmed in Lomé IV bis (article 12 bis):

"Recognizing the potential for positive contributions by the agents of decentralized cooperation to the development of the ACP States, the Contracting Parties agree to intensify their efforts to encourage the participation of ACP and Community agents in cooperation activities. To this end, the resources of this Convention may be used to support decentralized cooperation operations. These operations shall conform to the priorities, guidelines and development methods determined by the ACP States."

The political dimension of Decentralized Cooperation is clearly emphasised in the ACP-EC common declaration included in appendix LXXX of the Lomé IV Convention bis:

"With a view to encouraging the participation of the agents of decentralized cooperation in Fund projects and programmes and to ensuring that their initiatives are taken into account in the formulation and in the implementation of indicative programmes, ACP States will endeavour to organise exchanges of views with such agents. The ACP States and the Commission will also endeavour to provide information necessary for their participation in the implementation of the programmes."

Articles 251 (A-E) and 290 particularly emphasise the instrumental aspect of Decentralized Cooperation by defining an approval procedure for support programmes for grassroots initiatives. However, article 251 E specifies quite rightly that:

"...the ACP States may request or may agree to the participation of agents of decentralized Cooperation in the implementation of other Fund projects and programmes..."

With regard to non-Lomé Convention countries (Asia, Latin America), the 1992 regulation relating to Financial and Technical Assistance extends the field of beneficiaries of aid and cooperation partners to all types of decentralized agents (article 3).

With regard to Northern and Southern Mediterranean countries, different crossborder programmes (Med-Urbs, Med-Campus, Med-Invest, Med-Media, Med-Techno) are also accessible to different types of decentralized agents, with a view to creating partnerships and networks.

Until now, official cooperation with Southern countries was mainly channelled through governments and carried out by traditional expatriate technical assistance. Within the framework of Decentralized cooperation, the main concrete difference

consists of responding to decentralized initiatives and therefore designing and implementing projects and/or development programmes in partnership with organised agents from societies in the South and North (local authorities, academic institutions, trade unions, popular organisations, chambers of commerce, corporate organisations, associations, NGOs, etc).

Within this framework, partnerships between counterparts of the North and South will be encouraged, for example, through:

- cooperation between regions/municipalities/districts that go beyond twinnings intended mainly for cultural purposes; it will involve cooperation in specific technical, administrative, social or political areas (democracy, civil rights).
- inter-university cooperation;
- partnerships between NGOs;
- collaboration between companies;
- inter-trade union cooperation;
- alliances bringing together certain public, parastatal or private partners with complementary attributes and interested in the carrying out of common development actions and objectives at the local level.

In this way, Decentralized Cooperation will take on different forms, adapted to the contexts and requirements of partners; in other words, it will involve a "made to measure" system.

It should always be borne in mind that populations and their organisations are the fundamental beneficiaries of Decentralized Cooperation, whatever the decentralized agent one directly deals with.

The new partners and different forms of actions will, however, not be the only novelty for aid managers: Decentralized Cooperation will be based on fundamental principles, rather than on regulations or specific procedures, that promote transparency, dialogue, consultation, democratic procedures, the participation of agents and, in the longer-term, equitable and sustainable development, which is its purpose. These principles relate to the objectives of Decentralized Cooperation and to its instrumentation (agents, methods, means). Administrative management procedures should of course be applied (and adapted if necessary), but they should be applied **according to these principles**.

See also sections

n°3 - capacities

n°5 - participation

Read Methodological study

chapter I

chapter II.1 and 2

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A WIDE RANGE
OF AGENTS,
CHANGES[®]
IN ATTITUDE

Three types of institutional agents play a key role in decentralized cooperation: they can facilitate but also hamper the process. Obviously, it is not an easy task for institutions to promote decentralized and participatory policies when they themselves are hierarchical and centralised. Decentralized cooperation is an approach that requires considerable changes in attitude. For its promoters, it involves a certain level of risk-taking, inherent in the adoption of an innovative approach and which needs to be mastered.

1 DECENTRALIZED AGENTS

- civil society organisations in the South and North (*)
- local authorities in the South and North

2 GOVERNMENTAL AND MULTILATERAL DONORS

3 SOUTHERN GOVERNMENTS AND CENTRAL ADMINISTRATIONS

(*) Economic agents should also be mentioned. They have, however, not been included here because economic cooperation comes under specific instruments..

→ AN ENABLING ENVIRONMENT

The concept of "development" has for too long been reduced to an economic and social definition, i.e. the improvement of material conditions of life. It has been widened by at least two new concepts considered relevant for the implementation of a decentralized cooperation policy:

- democratisation, a political concept relating to the role of civil society and to the relations between the authorities and the population;
- sustainable development, an environmental, financial and institutional concept relating to the long-term viability of development.

Three factors favour the implementation of decentralized cooperation:

1. The strengthening of capacities appears to be a sine qua non condition for effective and efficient participation, likely to give the population an increased level of autonomy (section 4)
2. The participation of agents and beneficiaries is the keystone of decentralized cooperation, and, in a wider view of participatory development, that of the population in the various processes relating to their own development (section 5)
3. Support for the redefinition of the role of the State, demonstrated, for example, in the policies of deconcentration and decentralization, is an additional asset.

→ DECENTRALIZED AGENTS

In the South

role:

to promote participatory development on a local and regional scale

obstacles and possible risks:

limited structural and management capacities for the promotion of participatory development on a scale exceeding micro-actions; reinforcement of local elites

possible response:

proper management of programmes and co-ordination of interventions through concerted planning; setting up of autonomous, pluralistic and representative interfaces with the aim of guaranteeing transparency of the processes.

In the North

role :

to raise awareness among the general public and policy-makers with regard to the challenges of globalisation and with regard to solidary development, to put their Southern partners in contact with aid circuits, to conduct experience and skill transfers in the framework of partnerships

obstacles and possible risks:

a notion of partnership with the South that is still too centred on an aid per project approach; a difficult and slow process in the redefinition of their partnership relations with the South

possible response:

to promote a change in attitudes towards partnership with the South,

- reorientation and training of executives and members of organisations,
- support for the creation of networks of decentralized partners in the South and North
- reinforcement of the means made available to the organisations of the North for the task of sensitising the general public and decision-makers, as well as for supporting decentralized agents of the South within the framework of a redefined partnership.

→ DONORS

role :

to set up flexible administrative and financial mechanisms that encourage decentralized cooperation

obstacles and possible risks:

lack of political will vis-à-vis decentralized cooperation; an insufficient tradition of participation and delegation of power,

- persistence of sometimes out of date ideas of North-South relations,
- management of the project cycle, administrative and financial procedures and evaluation criteria which should be adapted,
- lack of specialised staff,
- gaps in the training of civil servants for the requirements of decentralized cooperation

possible response:

to promote a change in attitudes towards decentralized cooperation,

- recruitment of staff experienced and trained in participatory development,
- reorientation of current staff and the putting in place of stimuli,
- training,
- exchange of staff with other agencies (notably NGOs) which practice methodologies that prioritise participation.

→ SOUTHERN GOVERNMENTS AND DECENTRALIZED COOPERATION

role :

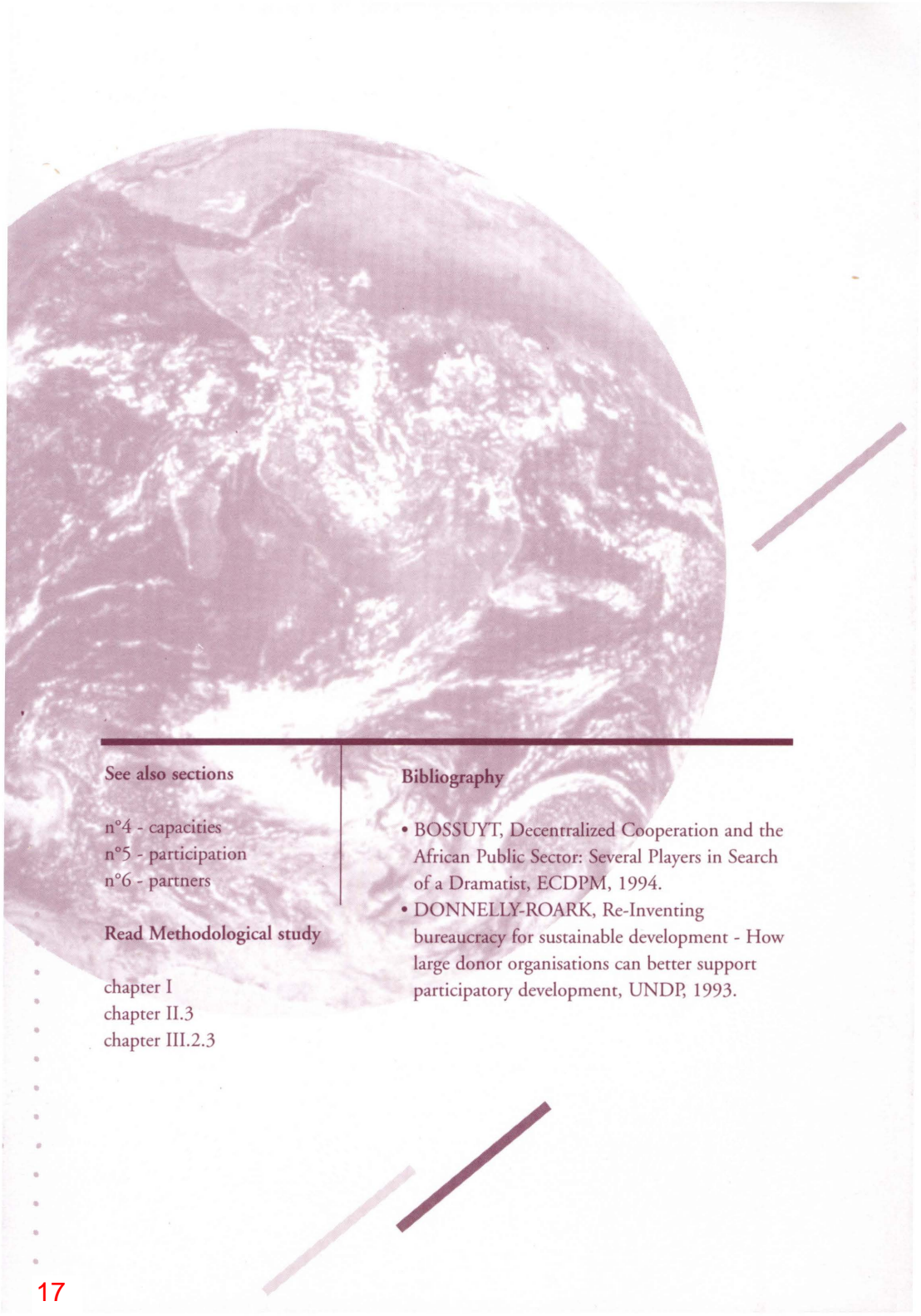
to guarantee a political, legal and administrative environment that enables participation

obstacles and possible risks:

lack of a political participatory tradition and democratic culture; weakening of the general role of the State with regard to public services (and the difficulty of gathering the necessary means for dealing with it) and of support for economic development

possible response:

support the State in its policies on the reorganisation and redefinition of its role and appropriate aid for developing public services for the population.



See also sections

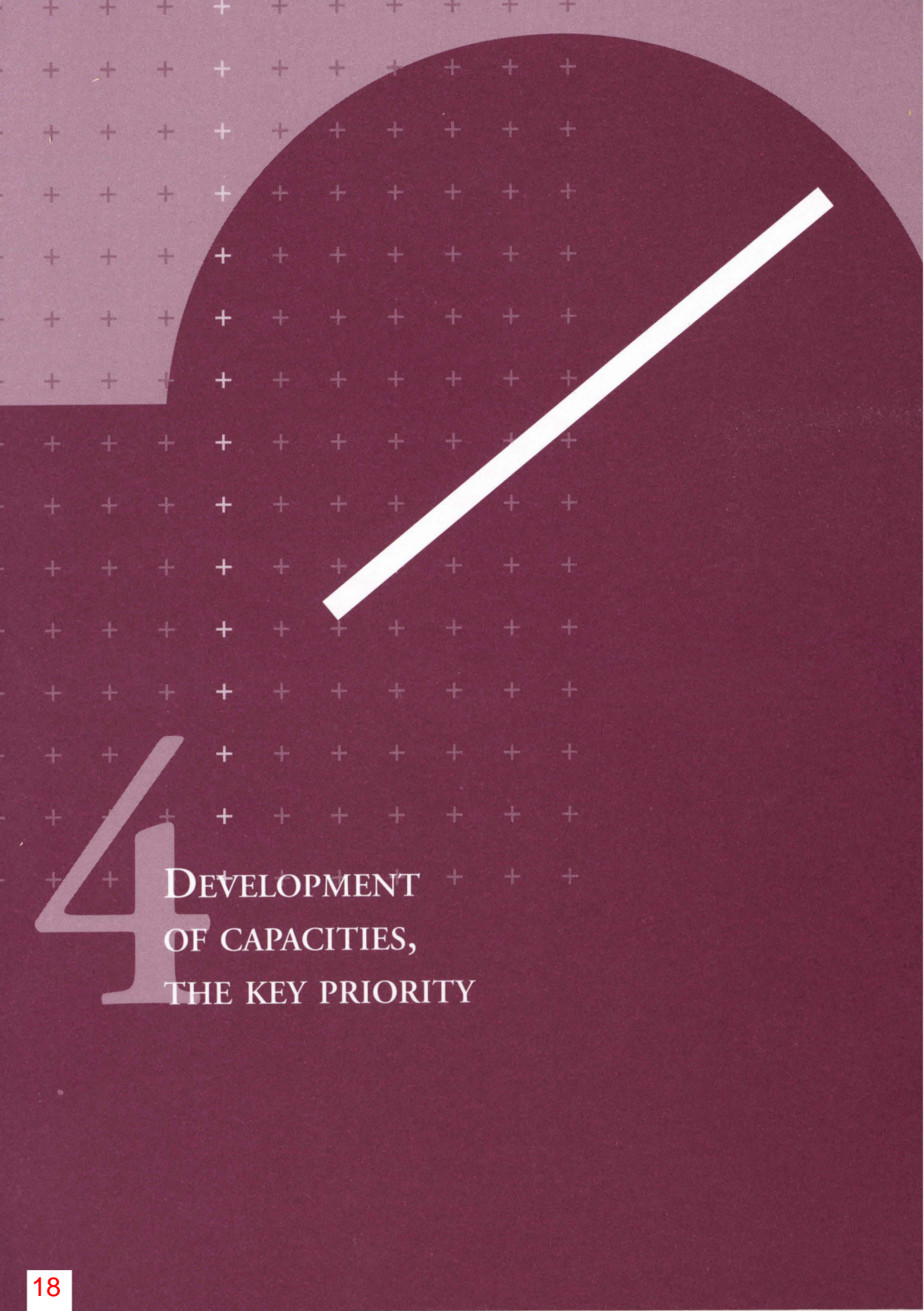
- n°4 - capacities
- n°5 - participation
- n°6 - partners

Read Methodological study

- chapter I
- chapter II.3
- chapter III.2.3

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4

DEVELOPMENT
OF CAPACITIES,
THE KEY PRIORITY

If the technical, professional and organisational capacities of decentralized agents can be restricted, then it is also true that they can be developed and strengthened.

The participation of beneficiaries in the different stages of actions implies that they can play an active role in the process. It also implies that they can master the issue of project design and implementation, and that they can take decisions with full knowledge of the facts. It is therefore of utmost importance to set up programmes whose objective is to enable the acquisition of the necessary capacities so that these demands can be met, or to include a component of this type in concrete decentralized cooperation programmes.

The central and final objective of the development of capacities is to make local agents autonomous. Local agents need to learn how to be flexible, how to negotiate, resolve conflicts, understand compromise, reflect and achieve improved efficiency of development actions.

THE NOTION OF DEVELOPMENT OF CAPACITIES COVERS:

- **Technical capacities**

- project implementation, quality and financial control and management skills, thus enhancing the efficiency of operators;
- ability to mobilise people and social groups;
- ability to discuss with a global view, forecast, organise and prioritise problems, select intervention sectors, define objectives, establish priorities, determine the levels of implementation;
- management of contacts and networks;
- efficient use of means.

- **Analysis skills**

In order to influence civil society projects, the grassroots level must strengthen its capacity to analyse, deliberate, draw up strategies,

negotiate, supply information and dialogue. In this regard, the grassroots level should set up strategies to strengthen community capacities, combined with synergies between decentralized agents, governments of Southern countries and the international community.

ALL THE AGENTS ARE CONCERNED. The development of capacities is relevant both to individuals and organisations that support the development process, i.e. governments, donors, support structures and grassroots communities.

BUILDING ON EXISTING MATERIAL. All populations possess know-how. Actions should be based on this know-how in order to structure or acquire new skills. The development of capacities is a process of change which cannot be separated from the culture and values of the society concerned.

The development of capacities assumes that the people concerned are fully informed each time there is a development proposal so that it can be accepted or refused in full knowledge of the facts.

SUPPORT STRUCTURES FOR GRASSROOTS GROUPS OR LOCAL AUTHORITIES ARE NECESSARY in order to train and assist grassroots groups, verify the technical capacities of operators, provide assistance for the implementation of actions and sensitise governments to be more inclusive of the needs of their societies, as well as to act as mediators between grassroots groups, administrations and donors.

NETWORKING PROMOTES EXCHANGE OF EXPERIENCES and facilitates access to the extended services of technical assistance, to a variety of skills and a higher level of financing.

BUT,

- the objective of capacity development programmes is a change in attitudes, which is difficult to evaluate;
- the obligation to obtain rapid and tangible results is an obstacle;
- the achievement of self-management involves costs, time for the consolidation of structures, specific skills and the mastery of all the elements involved.

IN CONCLUSION, capacity development is a global and complex strategy and a long-term process that is costly in terms of time and means. It should be owned and not just accepted by Southern populations. Its costs are investments that should be seen in the context of economic and social impact.

It is both a means of working effectively with the people concerned and an end in itself, because it contributes towards the strengthening of civil society.



THE "REGIONAL DECENTRALIZED COOPERATION NETWORKS" APPROACH

These networks function according to a certain number of common principles:

- to encourage European and Southern NGOs and local authorities to group their initiatives and resources around common priorities and actions;
- to promote, through decompartmentalization, the North-South and South-South exchange of views, training and the sustainable strengthening of Southern decentralized agents;
- to promote collective learning through action, notably when these networks carry out concrete development projects.

For instance, as a result of twinnings, several town networks are today extremely active in the mobilisation of local representatives and populations with regard to the improvement of urban management, the environment, living standards or employment.

See also sections

- n°3 - agents
- n°5 - participation
- n°7 - consultation
- n°9 - interfaces

Read Methodological study

- chapter III.1
- chapter V.4

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5

PARTICIPATION
IN THE
DEVELOPMENT
PROCESSES

→ PARTICIPATION: AN ESSENTIAL REQUIREMENT

It is now generally agreed that the participation of decentralized agents is an essential requirement for the achievement of sustainable development. It remains to be seen whether it merely involves seeking greater efficiency in the carrying out of development actions in accordance with an imposed model, or strengthening the control that the people concerned have over their own development, which implies empowerment.

It is the latter notion that decentralized cooperation intends to promote: to strengthen capacities at the grassroots level so that those concerned can influence policies and generate changes in society. In this way, decentralized cooperation contributes towards democratisation of society.

PARTICIPATORY DEVELOPMENT

implies the setting up of mechanisms that involve the agents concerned in the different stages of the development process from the start, by taking into account the following three levels of decision-making:

the **micro** or **local** level, where decisions relating to actions to be undertaken with regard to the people concerned are made;

the **meso** level, where operational decisions relating to programmes and application of policies by decentralized structures are taken;

the **macro** level, where global or sectoral policies are defined, for example, EDF indicative programming.

→ THE PROS AND CONS OF PARTICIPATION:

advantages

- improved identification of the needs and priorities of the people concerned
- monitoring the relevance of development processes
- improved understanding of the reality, more adequate programming
- improved balance between human resources and physical capital investments
- greater transparency and better sharing of responsibilities
- greater fluidity in the exchange of information
- improved equity through involvement of beneficiaries
- self-multiplying effect
- greater commitment by agents with increased ownership of development policies
- strengthening of agents' capacities
- strengthening of solidarity links between beneficiaries.

restrictions

A decentralized cooperation project or programme involves a learning process. It is an investment which presents two possible restrictions:

- **time:** participatory development is a long process requiring continuity and, as such, long-term commitment by agents. Setting up a participatory process requires a slow approach where results may not be visible in the short-term.
- **cost:** the participatory approach involves increased accompanying costs, mainly during the design and preparation phases, but also with regard to the co-ordination and training of staff. These costs must be considered in the context of long-term benefits which result from greater viability and sustainability of actions. However, it is desirable to appreciably reduce the costs of expatriate technical assistance.

Linkages between the three levels of decision-making should allow the people concerned to exert influence on the debates and design of global policies.

To this end, it will be useful to implement participation mechanisms as follows:

→ PARTICIPATION MECHANISMS:

Pre-conditions
for ensuring a
real
participation
of agents

1. Sharing of information

distribute written or oral information, if possible in the language of the different agents, organise information meetings linked to the programmes and projects.

2. Consultation

conduct consultations and interviews in the field at different stages of the programme.

3. Identification, monitoring and joint evaluation

use participatory methods.

conditions
necessary for a
true sharing of
power with
regards to
actions,
decisions and
resources

4. Shared decision-making

use participatory programming and planning techniques, organise workshops for negotiating priorities and define respective roles, distribute draft versions of documents and have them reviewed by the agents concerned.

5. Collaboration

form programme steering committees composed of representatives of the different agents.

6. Strengthening of capacities and empowerment

strengthen the capacities of individual agents and organisations that are representative of the different agents, delegate management power, support new initiatives proposed by agents.

→ AGENTS AND PARTICIPATION

Donors in the North

In participatory development, donors become external agents. They have a role of support and guidance in the processes under way and no longer one of direct intervention. The implementation of a true participatory approach requires a high level of flexibility on the part of aid managers. To this end, the

"project cycle" management must be adapted.

DONORS

European Union, bilateral official cooperation, multilateral agencies, private agencies

Decentralized agents of the North

Decentralized agents of the North should redefine their roles and undertake a role of support rather than one of execution or merely financing. They could also play the role of facilitator by encouraging contact and dialogue between local agents. Additionally, they could take

part in the identification of structures of decentralized partners in the field.

CIVIL SOCIETY

ORGANISATIONS
local authorities, foundations, NGOs, social movements, the private sector, etc

LOCAL AUTHORITIES

Governments of Southern countries

Governments can encourage or stimulate participation by putting concrete mechanisms in place. This could be conducted through the rebalancing of power in favour of the civil society, notably through deconcentration and decentralization policies that promote private initiatives and the development of economic activities.

GOVERNMENTS
AND CENTRAL
ADMINISTRATIONS
OF DEVELOPING
COUNTRIES

Decentralized agents of the South

Beneficiaries and civil society organisations are the centrepiece of participatory development. Support structures also play a major instrumental role in stimulating participation at the grassroots.

However, these structures could represent particular vested interests. In this connection, it is important to monitor the democratic character of

their functioning, their legitimacy and the participatory content of their work.

CIVIL SOCIETY

ORGANISATIONS
local authorities, grassroots groups, representative movements, support NGOs, the private sector, etc

LOCAL AUTHORITIES

→ SOME RECOMMENDATIONS

- To build actions on experience, skills, potential, leadership and local structures whether governmental or not.
- To give priority to pilot projects in order to test participatory mechanisms.
- To facilitate the exchange of experience and meetings between communities.
- To bring together the partners concerned by the action whether they are favourable to or critical of the initiative.
- To encourage the negotiation of contractual agreements between the different intervening parties and the people concerned.
- To support the governments of Southern countries in their reform and democratisation policies.
- To stimulate the governments of Southern countries to adopt policies on the redistribution of public finances that give priority.

See also sections

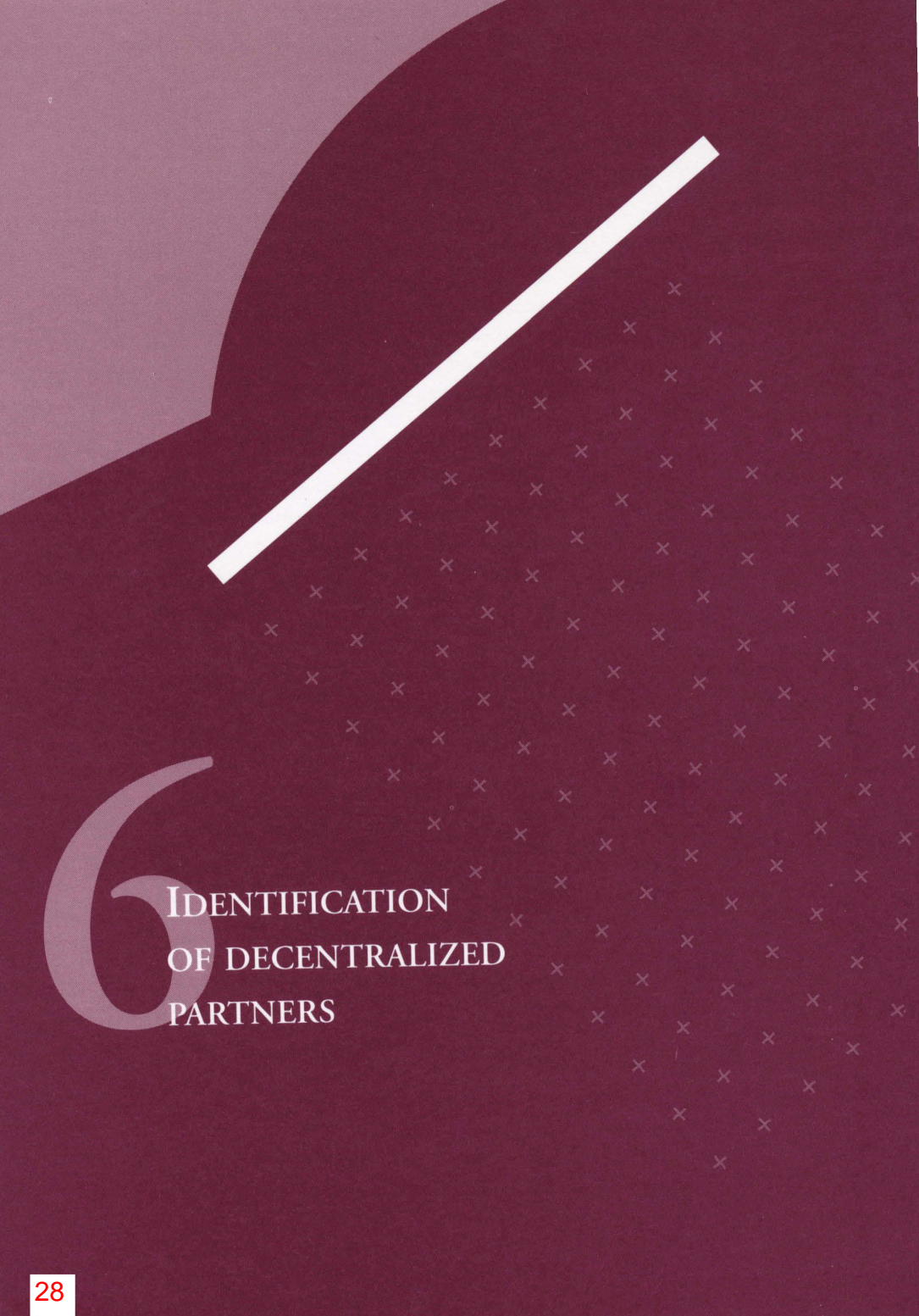
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Read Methodological study

chapter III.2

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6 IDENTIFICATION OF DECENTRALIZED PARTNERS

→ INITIATING DECENTRALIZED COOPERATION

6

Identification of key agents and institutions is a pre-condition for the implementation of decentralized cooperation operations. The aim is to determine potential partners and to identify their strengths and weaknesses. Furthermore, familiarity with the networks that link identified agents aims to make dialogue between decentralized agents, the State and donors a reality.

The main potential decentralized agents, i.e civil society organisations and local authorities are party to the participatory process without exclusion or monopoly. The process is to take place in a context of coherence of interventions, complementarity of actions and concerted planning of development.

ONE OF THE GOALS OF DECENTRALIZED COOPERATION IS TO BRING TOGETHER DIFFERENT AGENTS IN THE FIELD WITH THE VIEW TO VALIDATE THE COMPLEMENTARITY OF THEIR STRENGTHS AND, IN SO DOING , REDUCE THEIR WEAKNESSES

AGENTS	POTENTIAL STRENGTHS	POSSIBLE WEAKNESSES
Local authorities Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • permanent structures • invested with varying powers and financial capacity • democratic legitimacy if elected 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • inadequate resources in the absence of a decentralization policy • role of implementor of services rather than one of organiser of local development • management by "clientelism" rather than by participation
Support organisations (local NGOs, public technical services, professional federations)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • proximity with grassroots groups • more participatory intervention methodologies • familiarity with cooperation mechanisms • capacity to provide services to grassroots groupings • organisational and co-ordination capacities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • lack of a social base • financial dependence • more or less democratic way of operating • absence of legitimacy vis-à-vis the people concerned • structures that are more vulnerable and less permanent • tutelage that often weighs heavily on grassroots associations
Representative organisations (grassroots groups, social movements, federations of groupings,...)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • organisations that are representative of communities or certain sectors of society • legitimacy to present a programme of actions on behalf of their members 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • representativeness and legitimacy limited to those concerned • geographical restriction except where regional or national federations are concerned • gaps in the technical, organisational and support capacities • lack of material and financial resources

→ HOW TO PREPARE A DECENTRALIZED COOPERATION OPERATION

1. A PRELIMINARY STUDY

The first task in the setting up of a decentralized cooperation programme is to carry out an identification survey with the aim to:

- select the objectives and priority areas of intervention,
- identify and mobilise potential partners,
- decide on the selection criteria for operators,
- propose an institutional and operational framework,
- select one or more interfaces.

2. WITH WHOM?

All economic, social and cultural agents are concerned and may be supported in their development efforts. Their eligibility depends on their skills and capacities. As far as possible, they may benefit from a legal status.

Nevertheless, a distinction should be made between direct beneficiaries and operators managing interventions on the ground. All parties must participate in the process without any of them being assigned a particular role of co-ordination.

3. ACCORDING TO WHAT ANALYSIS CRITERIA?

a. legitimacy:

are the agents recognised by others involved in the process?

b. willingness:

do they want to collaborate?

c. capacity:

are they capable of doing so?

Using these criteria implies making choices particularly with regard to programmes and interfaces.

4. FOLLOWING WHAT STAGES?

a. A general context approach involving the study of specific themes such as the human and local socio-cultural environment, legislation, existing and projected programmes, organisation of authorities, local socio-economic structures, popular organisations and social movements, aid programmes.

b. A field study with the aim of providing the necessary additional information for analysing agents.

c. A local context approach (if a localised and multiple-agent dimension is included in the programme) and the identification of institutional agents, on the basis of their areas of specialisation and geographical areas of action, in such a way as to identify potential alliances:

- administration at district level
- identification of member communities,
- identification of formalised and organised local organisations, on a local or larger scale
- identification of relationships between local agents.

5. USING WHAT MEANS?

Resources must be provided from the EC cooperation funds agreed upon with the country concerned (see section 8).

PARTNERSHIP: A PRACTICE TO BE ENCOURAGED

North-South or South-South partnership is also a method of gaining maximum advantage from the strengths of agents and reducing their weaknesses, as shown in the following two examples.

1. **Partnership between counterparts of the South and North**, such as twinings between universities, co-operatives, social movements, NGOs, municipalities or regional entities. The action may involve a research project, an exchange programme, technical and methodological support, transfer of skills and real achievements in the field.

Cooperation between towns has developed considerably. Initially intra-European, twinings have gradually extended to other continents, including countries in the South. The importance of cooperation between local authorities is the diversity of agents involved and the variety of subjects covered. It can bring together not only elected representatives and specialised civil servants but also different agents in a community, thus favouring exchange and collaboration between civil societies in the North and South. By virtue of its concrete nature, cooperation plays an important role in the development education of people in the North.

2. **South-South cooperation** to promote rapprochement and collaboration between producers' organisations, NGOs, popular movements, human rights committees from different countries, regions or even continents, in the implementation of integrated regional programmes.

See also sections

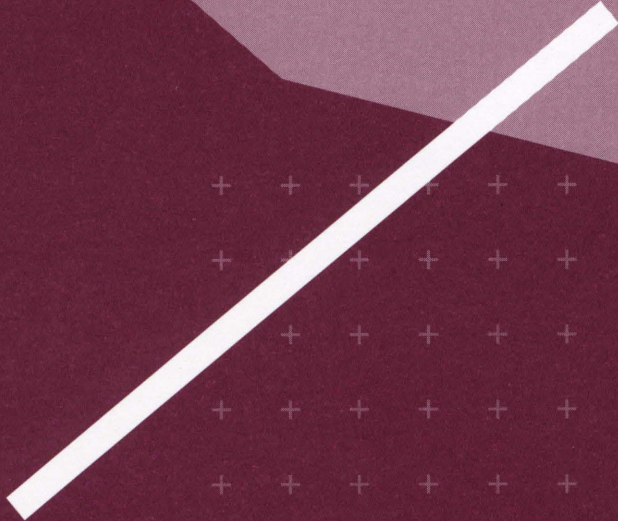
- n°3 - agents
- n°4 - capacities
- n°5 - participation
- n°7 - consultation
- n°9 - interfaces

Read Methodological study

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7

NOTHING IS POSSIBLE
WITHOUT
CONSULTATION

CONSULTATION

There is a growing number of decentralized agents. However, too often, a climate of mistrust underlies the relationships between non-governmental agents and public authorities. Consultation is, therefore, the narrow path to success.

Nonetheless, consultation has its own requirements. The capacity of local agents to become involved in a consultation process raises the wider issue of capacity development (section 5), as well as the need for initial guidance and, eventually, technical assistance (section 9).

The atmosphere of mistrust between public authorities and civil society agents would lessen if the latter were involved as early as possible, in the design stage of the operation in which they are to be involved; if they could continue managing their internal affairs and financial administration autonomously and, if programmes were operated transparently and some of the programme staff were well acquainted with decentralized agents because of having previously worked for or with them. Finally, a promotion campaign could prove useful in informing decentralized agents about the programme and in guaranteeing their independence and freedom of initiative.

Consultation (discussion, dialogue, co-ordination) should not be confused with other technical and decision-making functions such as identification, appraisal, selection, implementation and monitoring, which result from it. The first function is consultative whereas the others are executive.

Consultation may give priority to a global or regional approach. It may be conducted on the basis of general themes or sectoral priorities. Also, it may be formal or informal, short-term or permanent.

Additional or new consultation fora need to be developed only when they take on clearly defined and key functions in the cooperation process. It is always more valuable to build on existing structures.

POSSIBLE CONFIGURATIONS

- **Intermediate consultation fora** bringing together decentralized agents and grassroots representatives for occasional meetings lead to the setting up of permanent structures.

- **Central consultation fora** where the government, local authorities, the European Commission delegation, representatives from other bodies of cooperation and from associations can consult each other and maintain the necessary co-ordination.

See also sections

n°3 - institutions
n°5 - participation
n°6 - partners
n°9 - interfaces

Read Methodological study

chapter IV.2

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8

DECENTRALIZED
COOPERATION
AND THE
PROGRAMMING
OF EC AID
FOR DEVELOPMENT

→ INCORPORATION OF DECENTRALIZED COOPERATION IN INDICATIVE PROGRAMMING

There are several possibilities of setting up decentralized cooperation operations. It is a form of cooperation that can be applied to the majority of EC cooperation interventions.

As a global approach of cooperation in development, decentralized cooperation should, as far as possible, involve civil society organisations and local authorities in the drawing up of EDF indicative programmes (cf ACP-EC common declaration, cf section 2). Decentralized cooperation does not necessarily imply devaluation of the role of the State with regard to the definition of priorities and co-ordination of policies. On the contrary, the role of the State must be reaffirmed: for decentralized cooperation to have a significant impact, the involvement and joint efforts of different public and private agents, with regard to development is a definite condition.

Subsequently, decentralized cooperation could either be conducted through specific programmes or be used as a method in existing programmes or programmes to be implemented. It could also benefit from an envelope that is part of the indicative programme in support for initiatives by decentralized agents.

→ FUNDAMENTAL CHARACTERISTICS OF DECENTRALIZED COOPERATION PROGRAMMES (DCPS)

- ▶ Programmes whose initiative, as far as possible, comes from the people concerned by decentralized cooperation and decentralized agents; for instance "bottom-up" programmes where decentralized agents co-ordinate themselves and make programme proposals to donors. In other cases, the aid programme could seek out grassroots initiatives. Also, certain stages of the project cycle may be entrusted to decentralized agents.
- ▶ Programmes that, regardless of their origin (governmental or from decentralized agents) give priority to the participation of the people concerned and local agents at all stages of the process. The scale of this type of participation is variable and depends, above all, on the attitude of intervening parties and their methods of intervention.

TWO DECISION-MAKING MECHANISMS

The decision-making mechanisms are defined by Articles 288 and 289 in the Lomé Convention. By dispensation (Article 290), there exists a simplified mechanism to be used in the financing of pluriannual programmes intended for supporting small grassroots initiatives.

1 DECISIONS MADE ON THE BASIS OF A FINANCING PROPOSAL (ART. 288 AND 289)

The Commission makes decisions on the basis of a favourable EDF Committee (made up of Member State representatives) opinion.

ADVANTAGES

- Guarantee of a programme's conformity with the indicative programme
- Facilitates monitoring and evaluation

DISADVANTAGES

- A slow and costly preparation process
- Inflexibility in the implementation phase as a result of predefined options
- Internal division of the programme into sectors and a reduced range of possible interventions
- Supposes the existence of a constructive dialogue between state authorities and decentralized agents

2 DECISION-MAKING ON GLOBAL AUTHORIZATION (ART. 290)

The Chief Authorizing Officer (Commissioner or Director General depending on whether the amount in question is above or below 2 million ECU) makes decisions on behalf of the Commission.

ADVANTAGES

- Ease and minimal cost in programme identification and appraisal
- Relative swiftness of the mechanism
- Flexibility in the management of implementation with possibilities for programming to be adapted
- Better adapted to support for small grassroots initiatives
- Decentralization at the decision-making delegation level on individual actions

DISADVANTAGES

- Danger that the programme may be reduced to a pay office for financing local initiatives thus losing coherence and opportunities for concerted planning
- Runs the risk of supporting marginal activities in relation to the sectors of concentration defined in indicative programmes
- Runs the risk of "clientelism"
- Requires follow-up, monitoring and evaluation means that are more difficult to implement

TWO EXAMPLES OF SPECIFIC DCPS

1 Either programmes that are most often presented as an instrument for co-financing local initiatives. They may benefit from the simplified decision-making mechanism (article 290 of the Lomé Convention). They may either be in the form of (adapted) micro-projects or of "ad-hoc" decentralized cooperation. Initiatives are generally of limited extent but can achieve a certain level, the financial ceiling per action being 300,000 ECU (article 215D of the Lomé Convention).

The decentralized cooperation approach should give decentralized agents a maximum sense of responsibility, contractualise their relationships with the donor, strengthen their capacities, promote local consultation and autonomy of implementation, etc. Interface here takes the form of technical assistance (but with a different profile and roles). There may be one or several interfaces.

2 Or programmes that are set up according to usual EDF procedure, that is, where objectives and methods are predefined (traditional decision-making mechanism), more structured, where actions are envisaged on a larger scale and, if possible, designed and prepared by decentralized agents with the required status (farmers' or trade union federations, local authorities, professional organisations etc). If this is not the case and the initiatives are "top-down" (proposed by the donor or the State), it is essential that decentralized agents be involved, as closely as possible, in the preparation of programmes.

A programme may be presented by a support structure playing the role of interface between grassroots groups and the European Commission and the State. It may also be the type of programme that brings together several key agents whereby, the different stages of the programme are carried out by different organisations with different target groups. Within the framework of the programme, precise identification of the actions to be implemented in a participatory manner with regard to the beneficiaries may be conducted during the accomplishment of the programme.

FREQUENTLY IMPLEMENTED CASES

- **"Ad hoc" decentralized cooperation programmes:** a few million ECU, one or more interfaces, support for different grassroots initiatives.
- **Local development programmes:** integrated, planned in consultation with a wide variety of local partners (NGOs, private agents, etc), for instance on the initiative of a farmers' federation or local authorities. Examples: rural integrated development programmes, support programmes for medium-sized towns.
- **Sectoral or thematic programmes:** dedicated to a technical area (health, education, a village water supply programme, agricultural production, etc) or to a specific theme (women, natural resources, etc). The choice of programme depends on the circumstances of the country, development opportunities, national priorities and the European Union cooperation programme. Examples: health programmes, village water supply programmes, agricultural development programmes with a component for self-promotion.

CHARACTERISTICS OF OPERATIONAL SET-UPS

- There must be agreements between the National Authorising Officer, EC delegations and interfaces (agreement protocols).
- The interface(s), either responsible for the programme or chosen to carry it out, depending on the individual case, must provide guarantees with regard to their implementation capacity. Their approach and methods must comply with the basic principles of decentralized cooperation (cf section 2), for instance, with regard to participation and transfer of responsibility to decentralized agents. Their role should not be restricted to mere programme management and must include an aspect of support, guidance, co-ordination and strengthening of operators' and beneficiaries' capacities. It is only in these circumstances that the responsibility of interface may be entrusted to decentralized agents.
- Programme funding must include interface costs (but co-financing is possible and to be encouraged).
- The breakdown of the budget presented within the framework of the programme must have an indicative character.
- The programme must be split into phases with intermediate evaluations.
- Flexibility does not mean lack of strictness: evaluation indicators, both qualitative and quantitative, must be established.

SOURCES OF FINANCING:

- The European Development Fund for ACP countries
- Financial and Technical Cooperation for ALA/MED countries
- Counterpart Funds (all countries) that may finance the costs of a co-ordination or interface structure and actions, in the strict sense of the term
- A large number of sectoral Budget Lines for a particular geographical area or theme accessible to non-governmental agents, including the budget lines for the promotion of decentralized cooperation and rehabilitation actions.

See also sections

- n°6 - partners
- n°7 - consultation
- n°9 - interfaces
- n°10 - procedures
- n°11 - project cycle

Read Methodological study

- chapter IV.3
- chapter V.2
- chapter V.5

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THE ROLES
OF THE INTERFACES,
BOTH ENDS
OF THE PROCESS

→ THE NEED TO RELY ON INTERFACES IS TWOFOLD

- By virtue of their proximity, interfaces support operators in the field, by relieving them of onerous administrative and financial restrictions.
- By applying the rules of the system, interfaces reassure upper echelon administrators by relieving them of the difficult task of dealing with a large number of different agents.

Decentralized cooperation is based on a principle of maximum delegation of responsibilities of power to decentralized agents: obviously, this principle goes hand in hand with increased monitoring of decentralised agents. This role is, among others, to be entrusted to an interface.

TYPES OF INTERFACES

Whether it is a support programme for small local initiatives or a more traditional programme, given the number and diversity of decentralized agents, the creation of an ad hoc management/co-ordination committee is often necessary so that these roles can be carried out neutrally and independently. For example, various operators (acting as interface with regard to beneficiary groups), headed by a management/co-ordination committee can be envisaged.

However, in the case of less complex programmes, where intervention is by the same type of decentralized agents, the use of existing interfaces can be envisaged, especially when these legitimately represent potential beneficiaries of actions.

Such an interface could, for instance, be a federation of representative and legitimate grassroots organisations, and which can, therefore, represent its members in consultations, submit a programme of action and subsequently implement it.

This also applies to networks of organisations, most often active on the same theme; the network's co-ordination office could act as an interface between members of the network, the donor and the administrative authorities.

It could also apply to a programme whose management and co-ordination are entrusted to a structure arising from consultation between local agents.

ROLES OF INTERFACES

Although interfaces are responsible for programme management co-ordination, they may play a wider role. In all cases, they should be invested with fundamental responsibilities in the areas of appraisal and selection of projects to be financed. Furthermore, they have a fundamental role of support for grassroots agents.

If this structure becomes permanent, then relations between civil society organisations and the government can be stabilized. For donors, such a structure could facilitate the implementation of a co-ordinated and long-term policy.

If the services provided by the above mentioned structure are not already provided locally, and if the structure rapidly acquires true autonomy vis-à-vis the State, this autonomy is precious in that it enables the structure to resist pressure during the selection of operators or projects. To this end, the structure needs the support of a project selection committee.

A pluralistic make-up of the project selection committee could include representatives of the government, European Commission delegation, programme management and co-ordination structure, local administration or elected representatives from the region, as well as operators. Participation of prominent figures, representatives of different sectors of civil society in the committee, but with no particular allegiance, should be considered.

The main role of the committee would be to propose the allocation of financial resources managed by the management and co-ordination structure in accordance with predetermined criteria and priorities.

Other roles include formulation of the basic direction of the programme; planning of budget allocation; approval of proposals on budget re-allocation; supervision of management, administration and the management and co-ordination structure staff and supervision of both internal and external evaluation processes.

A service contract, covering the interface's running costs must be concluded between the interface and the donor.



See also sections


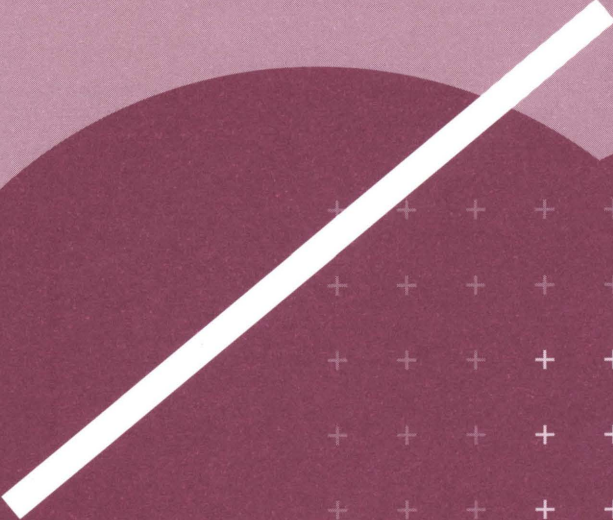
- n°2 - principles
- n°3 - agents
- n°6 - partners
- n°7 - consultation
- n°10 - procedures
- n°11 - project cycle

Read Methodological study

- chapter IV.3
- chapter VI.2

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10

IMPLEMENTATION
PROCEDURES:
STRICTNESS AND
FLEXIBILITY

10

For a programme following the traditional decision-making mechanism (cf. section 8), the first three stages of the procedure described below occur before the drawing up and signing of the Financing Agreement.

In the framework of a programme following the simplified decision-making mechanism (cf. section 8), these three stages may occur after the signing of the Financing Agreement, when decisions on the individual actions to be implemented are made.

THREE CONDITIONS FOR A SUCCESSFUL IMPLEMENTATION PHASE

Whether or not the appraisal of individual actions precedes the financing agreement (traditional programme or programme for financing local initiatives), the conditions for a successful implementation phase of a decentralized cooperation programme are the same.

1. adoption of adequate and participatory implementation methodologies, centred on the development of capacities;
2. continuity of donors' support and financing ;
3. flexibility in administrative and financial procedures.

Planning and monitoring methods including the logical framework or project cycle must be adapted such that, they take into account a long-term process and readjustments during the course of implementation: they are characteristic of participatory development (cf. section 11).

APPRAISAL AND IMPLEMENTATION PROCESSES OF A DECENTRALIZED COOPERATION OPERATION

1. PREPARATION OF THE DOSSIER RELATING TO AN INDIVIDUAL ACTION

The priority of the dossier is to present the promoter (future operator) - the promoter's structure, objectives, methods, internal functioning.

The dossier also includes a description of the envisaged actions - objectives, the people concerned, methodologies, identification of sectors for intervention.

2. DRAWING UP OF THE BUDGET AND FINANCIAL PLAN

Apart from NGO co-financing, the Commission may provide up to 100% of the cost of actions. However, a contribution from the project promoter is often appreciated. According to the Lomé IV Convention bis (art. 251D), a contribution from the beneficiaries is now a condition in programmes financing local initiatives (as with EDF micro-projects). Whatever the type of programme adopted, financial or material participation by the interested parties should be encouraged in order to promote a sense of responsibility among the beneficiaries, and to facilitate ownership of the intervention at the grassroots level.

3. APPRAISAL OF THE DOSSIER

With regard to programmes financing local initiatives, a body is usually created by the National Authorizing Officer and the EC delegation: a management and co-ordination committee (interface, cf section 9), with contractual staff, charged with the preparation and monitoring of decisions. It is also necessary to set up a committee responsible for the selection of projects and allocation of resources. Applications for financing are to be submitted, depending on the case, to the EC delegation or the management and co-ordination committee which appraises the dossiers. The project committee then carries out the selection.

In the case of more traditional programmes but with decentralized initiatives, the interface is most often the promoter of the project/programme with regard to the National Authorizing Officer or EC delegation.

Given the objective of promoting participation pursued by decentralized cooperation, the effective participation of the agents involved forms an essential criterion of appraisal and involves visits in the field.

4. THE CONTRACTUAL AGREEMENT

With regard to programmes financing local initiatives, once the decision to finance the action has been taken, it is subject to a contractual agreement between the promoter and the interface (management/ co-ordination committee). The agreement could then be signed by the appropriate authorities (National Authorizing Officer, EC delegation), who do not assess the appropriateness of the actions presented but their conformity with global criteria.

For more traditional and larger projects/programmes, the contractual agreement is to be negotiated directly between the promoter (who in most cases will become the interface, cf point 3 above) and the Commission and/or the National Authorizing Officer.

5. IMPLEMENTATION

An operation should be implemented on the basis of an impressed account managed by the management and co-ordination committee or the interface, and the advance funds passed on to operators. The funds are released in accordance with a budgeted yearly working plan (or estimate-programme). The following tranches are then released, depending on the justification of preceding advances and on operators' cash requirements.

Operators' running costs are considered within the framework of a strategy of strengthening agents' capacities. They need not necessarily be directly linked to the activities. These expenses have to be accounted for as an investment in civil society organisations, and are necessary for the implementation of a decentralized cooperation operation.

The setting up of an adequate book-keeping system, i.e. computer equipment that can be used by everyone, is essential. The system should be the responsibility of the management and co-ordination committee. The restrictive character of this control system should be compensated for by regular, rapid and adequate cover of cash requirements, thus avoiding interruptions in the flow of funds. The control system needs to be complemented by a financial audit system of the committee/interface and operators.

6. MONITORING AND EVALUATION

A monitoring and evaluation mechanism should be set up. It should respect the participatory aspect of decentralized cooperation as well as establish a balance between the demands of the exercise and the pragmatic nature of the approach.



See also sections

- n°6 - partners
- n°7 - consultation
- n°8 - programming
- n°9 - interfaces
- n°11 - project cycle

Read Methodological study

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11

PROJECT CYCLE
AND
DECENTRALIZED
COOPERATION

→ THE INTEGRATED APPROACH OF THE PROJECT CYCLE

European Commission projects/programmes financed within a bilateral framework have for some years used the same management method, i.e. the integrated approach of the project cycle. This means that the same essential stages (identification, appraisal, monitoring, evaluation) of the projects/programmes are studied throughout their duration. The main aim of this method is to standardise the management methods used in interventions and to facilitate the evaluation of interventions on the basis of comparable indicators between phases of a particular project and between different projects.

The six phases of the cycle :

- **Indicative programming**
Establishment of guidelines and principles of cooperation with a country (sectoral and thematic focusing, ideas for projects/programmes) ;
- **Identification**
Analysis of problems ; development of project ideas (objectives, results and activities) ; implementation of a feasibility study ;
- **Appraisal**
Definition of the detailed aspects of projects ; internal examination by the Commission ; drafting of the financing proposal ;
- **Financing**
Examination of the financing proposal ; financing decision ; drafting and signing of the financing agreement ;
- **Implementation**
Drafting of the Plan of Operation ; implementation of the resources provided for achievement of the desired results and the purpose of the project ; drafting of monitoring reports ;
- **Evaluation**
Analysis of the results and impact of the project during or after implementation with a view to propose possible remedial action and/or framing of recommendations for the guidance of similar projects in the future.

Each project phase is studied in accordance with the logical framework. This method consists of an analytical process whereby results are laid out in such a way that the objectives of the project and their causal links can be systematically and logically set out. The method also indicates how to ascertain whether objectives have been achieved and establishes means of influencing its success.

The main results of this process are summarised in a matrix which shows the key aspects of a project : a cross-referenced reading of the overall objectives, the purpose of the project, the results and activities, and the intervention logic, objectively verifiable indicators, sources of verification and assumptions.

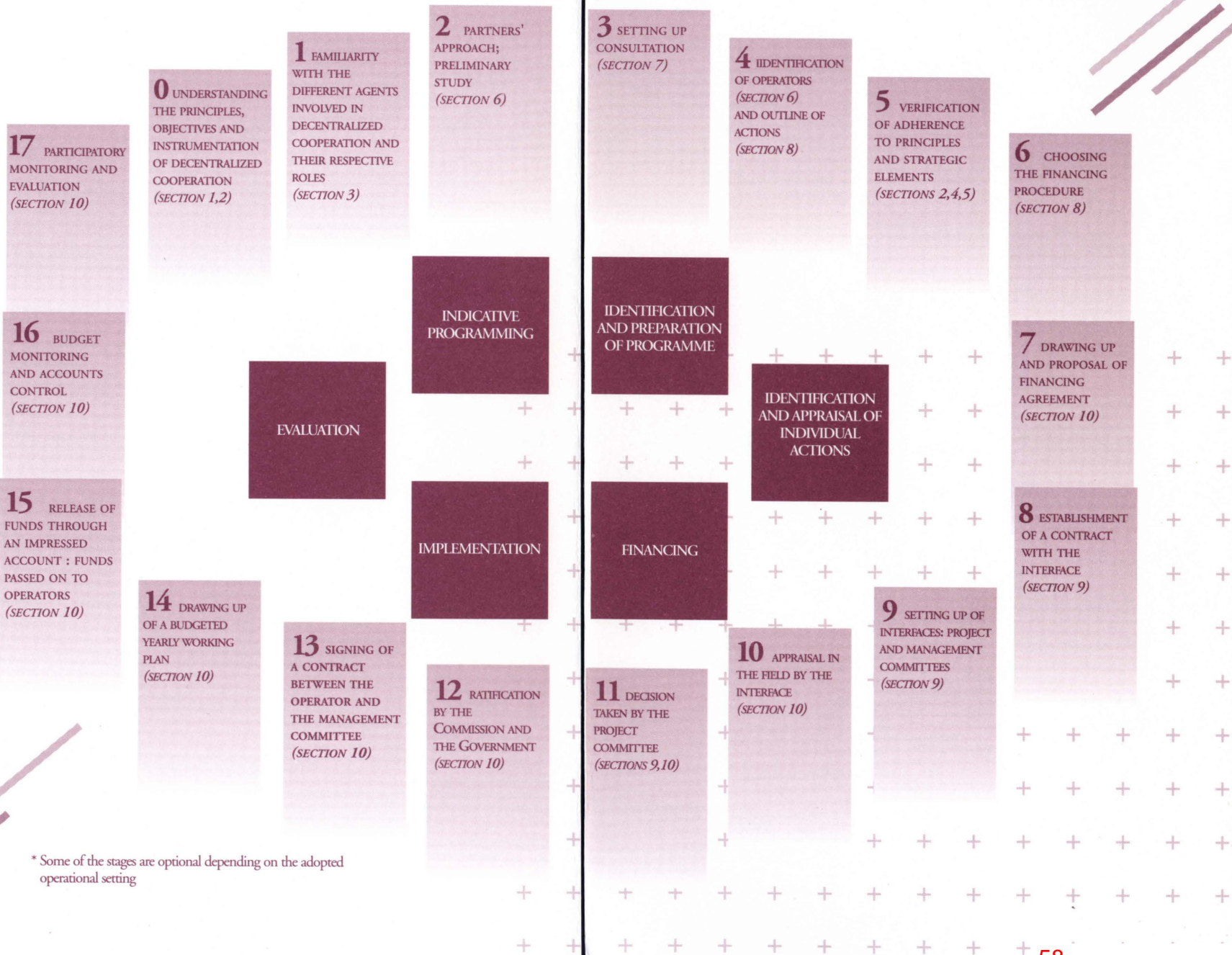
→ LIMITATIONS OF THE METHOD

This method may turn out to be very useful, especially for organisations which no longer plan their activities in the short or medium term, in the sense that it obliges promoters to carry out a rational and logical presentation exercise of their project outline. However, the majority of potential operators of decentralized cooperation, both in the North and South, are not acquainted with this management method of the Commission. Moreover, they are not familiar with the documents required by its departments. Furthermore, it is highly unlikely that potential operators of decentralized cooperation will have the necessary capacities in terms of skills, logistics and time to implement the management system as it is.


It is worth noting that participatory actions at the grassroots level do not often adapt easily to a rigid management of the project cycle. In this regard, it would be desirable for the Commission to be flexible in the application of its project cycle management system. Making flexibility part of the project cycle management involves adjustments that are necessary at different stages of the project, depending on the results obtained.

In fact, procedures must be considered solely as tools at the service of a policy, a strategy of decentralized cooperation and of objectives to be achieved, notably in terms of participation and democratisation. They must be adapted to field practices, that is, the project cycle management method must not become an obstacle or turn into a dogma.

PROJECT CYCLE AND EC PROCEDURES IN A DECENTRALIZED COOPERATION PROGRAMME



* Some of the stages are optional depending on the adopted operational setting



See also sections

- n° 8 - programming
- n° 10 - procedures

Read **Methodological study**

chapter VI

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Decentralized cooperation is now one of the priorities of EU aid and development policy. Its aim is to create a form of cooperation more in line with the needs of the people concerned, the social and economic agents by granting more room for manoeuvre and more autonomy and responsibilities to the active forces in civil society. From the point of view of the countries of the South, decentralized cooperation offers an improved and wider vision of participatory development and the role of local and decentralized authorities. For Europe, it is an opportunity for the various non-state agents, such as associations, local authorities and professional organisations, to establish partnerships and horizontal cooperation and thus provide not only their contribution but also their experience of development at the grassroots and participatory level.

The aim of this guide is to propose some simple and concrete criteria for the implementation of programmes and projects responding to these proposals. The guide is based on the reading of pilot studies carried out in recent years within the framework of official funds (EDF, Developing countries-ALA and Mediterranean funds) or the budget line "decentralized cooperation".

It is mainly intended for agents on the ground who are confronted with the real problems of setting up and co-ordinating decentralised projects.

They may not find complete solutions here but may find food for thought and guidance for training.

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