

INCREASING PUBLIC AWARENESS IN THE COMMUNITY OF DEVELOPMENT ISSUES- Council conclusions

The Council examined with interest a Commission paper on this subject presented by Vice-President NATALI. As a result of this examination, it adopted the following conclusions:

The importance of increasing public awareness

1. The Council recognizes that increasing public awareness of co-operation and development issues is an essential basis for the efforts made by the industrialized countries to support economic and social progress in the developing countries; that official aid programmes and other specific action to help these countries require the public's support; that the Community and the Member States must take responsibility for fostering such support by improving understanding of the programmes and of the international co-operation framework within which they are implemented.

The Council has also noted that certain international organizations are concerned to inform the public and increase its awareness, an important instance of this being the European publicity campaign to be organized in the Spring of 1988 by the Council of Europe.

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2. While public support can be counted on for emergency or short-term humanitarian actions, the same does not always apply, because of their complexity, to longer-term development issues and efforts based on the relationship of inter-dependence between North and South.

Moreover, public opinion in the European Community countries has difficulty in grasping the overall magnitude of the European effort as a whole in the area of development co-operation as well as of the individual action taken by the other Member States or by the Community. The same is true of the achievements of the developing countries themselves.

Although the problem is not equally acute in all the Member States, the Council feels that efforts should be made in future to remedy the situation.

#### Priority aims and topics

3. The Council feels that efforts to inform the public and increase its awareness should focus mainly on the following aims and topics.

- (a) to explain to the public what is at stake in North/South co-operation;
- (b) to present and bring home to the public the realities of the situation in Third World countries, the diversity of their situations, the difficulties which impede their development, the efforts they have made to overcome their difficulties and the progress achieved. Cultural exchanges can play a useful role here;
- (c) to provide details of action and initiatives undertaken as part of bilateral or Community co-operation policies, with regard both to aims and results;
- (d) to explain the broader implications of European co-operation in the Third World.

The need for increased collaboration at European level

4. Although they often have limited financial backing, the means which must be brought into play for this purpose are many and varied. They exist at government and official level in all the Member States and in the Community institutions, particularly the Commission. They also exist at the more decentralized level of education systems, the NGOs, regional or local authority bodies and of certain professional groups. Finally, they exist in the media themselves, which can have a considerable day-to-day impact on opinion.

5. While taking note of the action to date at these various levels and underlining the importance of continued and improved action concentrating on the priority aims and topics set out above, the Council considers that there are also many areas in which a multiplier effect might be obtained at European level by encouraging the various agents concerned to collaborate more closely by introducing a simple and non-compulsory process of exchanging experience and information which would enable existing potential to be tapped to the fullest extent.

6. In this connection, the Council notes with interest the possible areas mentioned in the Commission communication by way of illustration for national action and for collaboration between equivalent national and Community departments, namely exchanges of views, of experience and of material, the joint production of material, activities co-ordinated with other European or international organizations, efforts to inform and increase awareness of development issues (for example, action in schools, action with the possible involvement of NGOs, local authorities, professional groups and youth associations).

7. The Council considers that these possibilities and, where appropriate, others not yet identified at this stage are worthy of closer and more systematic examination by national and Community experts, and therefore asks the Commission to convene and hold the meetings necessary for this purpose.

The Council agrees to study and evaluate at a future meeting the outcome of such an examination and any specific proposals for action which may be submitted to it as necessary.

ROLE OF THE PRIVATE SECTOR IN THE DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

The Council held a wide-ranging discussion on this subject at the close of which it adopted the following conclusions:

1. The Council recognizes the importance of the role of a healthy and prosperous private sector for the balanced, successful development of the economy generally. It notes with satisfaction that many developing countries themselves have for a number of years shown increasingly clear and explicit recognition of the importance of that role.
  
2. The Community and its Member States have not been inactive in this area. Among the instruments created to promote and support investment and development of the private sector are certain forms of financial and technical co-operation, the European Investment Bank, the Centre for the Development of Industry (ACP-EEC) and instruments set up by Member States.

The Council nevertheless recognizes that, in view moreover of developments in current thinking in this area, there is a need to re-examine the policies pursued and the instruments used from the standpoint of stepping up and improving the effectiveness of the efforts and measures undertaken, in consultation with those of its partners wishing to embark upon this course of action.

3. The Council emphasizes that efforts to encourage the domestic and/or foreign private sector must be designed to complement and not to replace existing efforts and in no way imply any withdrawal by the Community and its Member States from their responsibilities in the field of official development assistance. The Council also considers that an efficient public sector provides a favourable framework for a growing private sector role in the development process.
  
4. The Council is mindful of the differences in situation between developing countries and of the variety of obstacles in the way of the domestic and foreign private sector's contribution towards development. The most serious of those obstacles is a discouraging economic environment. The Council considers that the progress to be made in this respect is of decisive importance.
  
5. With regard to existing potential for action and co-operation, the Council believes that efforts by the Community and the Member States will have to cover the following sectors:
  - (i) first of all, agriculture and the rural world:  
the agricultural production sector as such, together with related sectors upstream (production and distribution of agricultural inputs) or downstream (processing of products, storage and distribution of agricultural produce), or the development of the rural world in the broad sense (production and marketing of everyday consumer goods);



(ii) industry, where - in view of the small scale of the market in many developing countries - the priority call should be for action in respect of small and medium-sized undertakings, concentrating primarily on covering the abovementioned agricultural and rural needs and rehabilitating existing industrial units. Such action should also take into account the possibilities afforded by the development of South-South trade and regional co-operation;

(iii) services, particularly in the sphere of tourism, the marketing of agricultural products and inputs, transport, financial services (collection of savings, decentralized credit networks, insurance, information, training and technical assistance for SMUs, etc.), and in other areas in which private sector services may prove worthwhile and be encouraged to a greater extent than in the past (urban transport, water and energy supply, construction and maintenance of economic and social infrastructure).

6. The Council also confirms the importance of the role of co-operation between undertakings from the EEC and developing countries and of foreign investment and the advantages which they can have for the development of countries wishing to seek recourse to them as a privileged tool for the transfer of know-how (in the organization of production, technology adaptation, management, marketing, training of executive and skilled staff, etc.) and as a possible catalyst for further inflows of resources. The Council considers that medium and even small-sized European undertakings should constitute an instrument especially suited to this form of co-operation.

7. The Council calls upon its subordinate bodies, the Member States and the Commission to intensify their thinking on the contribution which the private sector can make towards development. Discussion, in which greater participation on the part of private operators in the Community would be desirable, should focus in particular on:

- support for the structural reforms mentioned above, with the aim of creating a more stimulating economic environment;
- intervention in the framework of technical and financial assistance;
- encouragement of co-operation between undertakings from the EEC and developing countries, principally in the case of European small and medium-sized undertakings;
- promotion and protection of investments and intellectual property.

The Council requests the Commission to submit at a later date both the outcome of this examination and any more specific proposals.

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