

Kristian Schmidt/Susanne Höck

Interview with Kristian Schmidt

Susanne Höck conducted this interview with Kristian Schmidt, Director for Human and Society Development of Directorate General for Development and Cooperation (EuropeAid) of the European Commission.

Introduction

One and a half years ago (Nov 2010), the so called DEAR Study (Development Education and Awareness Raising) – “DEAR in Europe – Recommendations for future interventions by the European Commission” was published. The purpose of the study was to give “added value to the EC’s DEAR approach in coherence with the Member States and other major actors’ interventions.”

With regard to the external relations between the EC and other DEAR actors in the EU the study proposed that the EC needs to deal with the five following issues in order to improve the EC’s DEAR performance: development and application of a policy and strategy; effective use of DEAR resources to also leverage other resources in the Member States; coordination of EC efforts and other DEAR initiatives especially in the Member States; improvement and promotion of learning in DEAR and application of learning to the funded initiatives; an expanded perspective of DEAR by relating DEAR initiatives in the EU to relevant experiences both in the North and South, especially to the social dimension of globalization.

With regard to the DEAR practice within the EC, additional recommendations were put forward: the need for the EC to be better informed of DEAR activities in the EU; the need to establish synergies with other relevant EC-programs in other DGs; the need for restructuring the management of the program in order to free up time of program-staff; the need to simplify grants application and administration; the need to learn from funded activities and make learning results available to stakeholders. In sum, the study proposes a variety of recommendations with substantial changes of the EC’s DEAR program.

Keywords: *European Commission, Development Education and Awareness-Raising (DEAR), DEAR-Programme, DEAR-Study, European Strategy on DEAR, Global Learning*

Schlüsselworte: *Europäische Kommission, DEAR–Entwicklungs-politische Bildungs- und Öffentlichkeitsarbeit, DEAR-Programm, DEAR-Studie, Europäischen Strategie für die Entwicklungspolitische Bildungs- und Öffentlichkeitsarbeit, Globales Lernen*

Kristian Schmidt: Let me first and foremost underline that I am very happy to take part in this interview and contribute to this issue. Development Education and Awareness Raising (DEAR) is a matter that is very important to the European Commission and I am pleased to be able to discuss our work on it here.

Let me start by giving you a brief introduction to our programme: Development Education and Awareness Raising is part of our cooperation with Civil Society and Local Authorities. The European Commission makes around €30 million per year available to co-finance activities proposed by civil society organisations and local authorities that promote raising public awareness of development issues and formal and informal education for development.

The purpose of these initiatives is to mobilise greater public support for action against poverty and to raise awareness of the issues and difficulties facing developing countries and the people who live in them.

As a particularly important milestone, I would like to mention the 2010 DEAR Study, which sought to better define the EU’s DEAR strategy and to put in place a meaningful dialogue with its stakeholders, so that we could be better aware of their needs and how to best respond to them.

Susanne Höck: Thank you for this introduction. In fact, the DEAR study proposes an array of recommendations with quite fundamental changes of the EU’s DEAR programme. Thus, ZEP readers are certainly interested in learning more about how the findings of the study have been dealt with by EuropeAid so far and how they are being followed up. Hence, I would like to ask you, how in general did and does EuropeAid perceive the recommendations put forward by the study?

Kristian Schmidt: The purpose of the study was to initiate a dialogue with stakeholders and to map out a strategy on development education and awareness-raising, which better reflects the needs of both Member States and other stakeholders. That is exactly what the study has achieved. In that respect, the study has really been a big step forward for the Commission.

We can already see the results today, with the Commission being considered a much more important stakeholder in the field of development education and awareness-raising.

In terms of how we work with Member States, the study did not propose a grand design, but very practical and easi-

ly implementable steps to ensure that all actions in the field of formal education are coherent with those of Member States. Hence, the study can be seen as a big success for the European Commission.

Susanne Höck: This leads me to the next question: To what extent does EuropeAid share the core recommendations concerned with the concept of DEAR, especially the aspects of quality defined in recommendation 4 and the approach of Global Learning and Campaigning/Advocacy mentioned under recommendation 5 of the study?

Kristian Schmidt: Let me start by underlining the general principles. This is a study which was commissioned by the European Commission. It was undertaken by five external experts, who were asked to provide their independent input; it does not necessarily reflect the opinion of the European Commission. In fact, we were able to use and adopt the majority of the recommendations, but not all of them.

Recommendation four, which you mention here, concerns “aspects of quality of the EU’s DEAR programme” and puts forward eight points that characterise – in the experts’ opinion – quality in DEAR. However, after careful consideration, and taking into account the fact that we implement the majority of our DEAR programme through a Call for Proposals, we decided not to introduce these eight points as they would have – in our opinion – restricted organisations making a proposal under the Call too much.

With regard to recommendation 5, this recommendation introduces a distinction between two approaches; “Global Learning” and “Campaigning/Advocacy”. In our opinion, the introduction of this distinction is very useful, as it allows us to make our work more efficient, by dividing DEAR in these two approaches. We have therefore introduced this distinction in the recent Call for Proposals.¹

Furthermore, this distinction will hopefully lead to a better selection of projects, as well as better projects themselves, as the selection process in each lot will compare similar projects, instead of totally different ones.

Susanne Höck: Do you see any difficulties to work towards the proposed changes?

Kristian Schmidt: Yes, definitely – improving a process, introducing a strategy and creating a meaningful exchange are very big challenges. I am proud to say that we have, to my mind, achieved a lot already, but obviously, there is still a lot to do.

We recently held a seminar to contribute to the definition of a new strategy, and we are currently working on a Staff Working Paper to take stock of everything achieved so far, including the progress made recently through the DEAR Study, the outcomes of the Structured Dialogue and of the various workshops dedicated to DEAR. This will enable us to draw lessons for future EU involvement in this area, including strategic partnerships with Member States.

Susanne Höck: Which priorities have been identified to deal with the recommendations?

Kristian Schmidt: We have identified five priorities: Complementarity with Member States, strengthened European dimension, capitalisation, capacity building and a clearer theoretical concept for DEAR.

I will go through each point now in more detail: First, with regard to complementarity with Member States, this is implemented on two levels. On the programme and strategy level, we have more and more exchange with Member States regarding their and our respective strategies.

On the level of individual co-financed initiatives, it’s worth underlining that this has particular importance only for a very particular part of our programme – for the global learning projects within the formal education sector. This is self-evident: While our programme is based on the principle of the “right of initiative” of civil society and local authorities, as soon as a project attempts to work within the formal education sector, it requires the approval of the relevant educational authority. Hence, in our opinion, with this approach, covering the strategy and individual initiative level, this objective can be achieved.

Furthermore, for awareness raising projects, we have introduced the requirement of a “European dimension”, giving priority to actions which produce results at a European level.

With regard to the concepts of capitalisation and capacity building, this refers to the capitalisation of on-going initiatives; Drawing, for example, lessons learned, and then – to build capacity – feeding these lessons learned and other worthwhile information back to on-going and particularly new initiatives, to ensure that each project does not have to “re-invent the wheel”.

In order to assure that this is accomplished, we have launched a pilot initiative, the “DEAR Support team”. We have recruited two experts, who put in place a dedicated programme to ensure that capitalisation and capacity building are going ahead. I can report that a first workshop for on-going projects has already taken place, where projects in their 2nd and 3rd year were invited to identify lessons learned. We have planned to organise a second workshop for November, where these lessons learned will be provided to new projects, selected through the current call for proposals.

With regard to a clearer theoretical concept for DEAR, we have amended our specific objective in our Call for Proposals to clarify and focus on the “raison d’être” of our DEAR programme.

Hence, from my point of view, we have made best use of the recommendations of the study, identifying actions on the level of programme, strategy and individual action, to assure that the quality of the overall Commission DEAR programme is improved.

Susanne Höck: That is quite impressive, what is still outstanding?

Kristian Schmidt: Thank you. As I said before, we have come a long way, but there is still a lot to do. For the moment, the services are drafting the Staff Working Paper that I mentioned before. This Staff Working Paper will be one of the bases for the development of the 2014–2020 multi-annual strategy for the future Civil Society Organisations and Local Authorities thematic programme, which will include the DEAR component.

Susanne Höck: Referring again to the DEAR Study, and in particular to recommendation 7, 8 and 9, the study emphasizes more coherence and co-ordination of DEAR policies between the EU and Member states. What kind of co-operation do you wish to obtain with the various international stakeholders and with the actors in the Member States to help the EU in its efforts for more coherence?

Kristian Schmidt: To answer your question, I would like to first clarify which stakeholders we are talking about: Civil Society Organisations (CSO), Local Authorities, Member States, national as well as European CSO and Local Authority platforms, as well as some specific groupings such as the GENE network, North South Centre and the Multi-Stakeholder Group on Development Education.

Secondly, I would underline that with regard to co-operation, we are interested in co-operating with all of these groups. Hence, taking civil society and local authorities as an example, we want to exchange with them on a policy level, by continuing our exchange within the structured dialogue with them.²

In terms of individual initiatives, we will continue our exchanges with these in the seminars organised by the DEAR Support team. You can see that from policy to projects, on all levels, and with all stakeholders, we will continue to foster our exchange and cooperation.

To respond to the second part of your question about coherence between Member States and our initiatives, we intend to launch a policy exchange between the Commission and Member States, as well as to ensure on a project level the coherence of our DEAR initiatives with Member States' policies and initiatives.

Susanne Höck: Which challenges do you see regarding the broad spectrum of approaches in the 27 Member States?

Kristian Schmidt: This is a very big challenge. About half of Member States have a defined policy for DEAR. In some Member States, development education and awareness-raising is dealt with on a national level, in some on a regional or other level, and in some on several levels. Hence, a "one-size fits all" approach from our side would not solve this problem.

Therefore, our approach requires flexibility. I am convinced we have found a very pragmatic and unbureaucratic way of doing this: All "Global Learning" project proposals in formal education must provide the approval of the relevant Member States' educational authority.

Having said this, I would like to underline that the current Call for Proposal, which has introduced these modifications, is still ongoing. Hence, only once this process is closed, and all projects have been contracted and are on-going, will we have to make an assessment; Looking at whether this approach has improved our DEAR approach by making our initiatives more complementary to the Member States' own initiatives in this area.

Susanne Höck: Thank you for this very interesting interview.

Anmerkungen:

- 1 Call for Proposals for DEAR published on 1st of October 2011, under reference number: 131141, (Online im Internet: URL: <https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/europeaid/online-services/index.cfm?do=publi.welcome&nbPubliList=50&orderby=upd&orderbyad=Desc&searchtype=RS&aofr=131141> [12.10.2012])
- 2 (Online im Internet: URL: http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/who/partners/civil-society/structured-dialogue_en.htm and https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/aidco/index.php/Structured_dialogue [12.10.2012]).

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Informationen zum DEAR-Program: (Online im Internet: http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/how/finance/dci/non_state_actors_en.htm. [12.10.2012]).

Informationen zur DEAR-Studie: (Online im Internet: https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/aidco/index.php/DEAR:_Development_education_and_awareness_raising [12.10.2012]).

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