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**Reaching the Policy Table: The Role of Knowledge &
Assessment Mechanisms in the Process of Promoting
Policy Coherence for Development**

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Abstract¹

The roots of the European Union's commitment towards promoting 'Policy Coherence for Development' (PCD) goes back all the way to 1992, when the Treaty on European Union included what later became known as the 'Coherence article'. During the years that followed, several political commitments were made at the EU and international level – most notably the 2000 UN Millennium Declaration and the 2005 European Consensus on Development – that have further reinforced Europe's acknowledgment of the need for development-friendly non-aid policies. The EU has however been criticised throughout this period for its demonstrated lack of ability to translate its strong commitments into increased development effectiveness.

Part of this disappointment can be explained away by the fact that there is neither a baseline nor an agreed set of specific goals to steer the EU's efforts: it would be an immense technical and political challenge to measure how (in)coherent policies are at a given point in time, and subsequently deciding how coherent they should have become after a set period. The EU has however made some progress by means of recent EU Council decisions that prioritised 12 specific areas for promoting PCD, invited the Member States and the Commission to put in place institutional mechanisms to promote PCD, and trying to better equip the Council itself. A milestone was recently achieved when the European Commission completed the first EU biennial report on PCD in September 2007.

This paper builds on the results of an evaluation that was completed in May 2007, which looks into three types of institutional mechanisms that have been put in place by the EU Member States and Institutions to promote PCD: (i) Policy Statements, (ii) Administrative & Institutional mechanisms, and (iii) Knowledge & Assessment mechanisms. This paper takes further the concept of the PCD System which the evaluation particularly advanced. This PCD system encompasses the three types of mechanisms and how they interlink, as well as their interaction with the broader context in which they operate. Following the discussion of these core elements of a theory of practice on PCD, this paper focuses particularly on the third type of mechanism within the EU: Knowledge & Assessment mechanisms.

Recognising that development friendly non-aid policies are an outcome of good policy coordination processes, this paper discusses the essential and relatively neglected role of Knowledge & Assessment mechanisms. The 2007 evaluation report identified ten such mechanisms in the EU: eight in the Member States, one in the Commission and one in the European Parliament. This paper examines two of these ten mechanisms in more detail and analyses how they try to ensure that relevant information successfully makes it to 'the table' of the policy making process.

Keywords: Policy Coherence for Development; European Union; knowledge management; power relations; policy making processes; evaluation

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Introduction: coherence and the EU's efforts to increase development effectiveness

Considered by some as a stowaway among the development cooperation objectives that were agreed in the 1992 Treaty on European Union, a single sentence introduced a legal requirement to make efforts to improving the coherence of European policies towards promoting development.² Although the word 'coherence' was not used in the treaty, and the obligation to 'take account of development objectives' in other policy areas likely to affect these far from being an ambitious one, it has nevertheless generally been seen as a big step forward.

Sixteen years down the road, the Draft EU Reform Treaty includes the same text as the original, albeit now unambiguously extending the obligation to the whole Union.³ This relative continuity in Treaty formulation is however not indicative of the significant developments and changes that have occurred in and around the concept of coherence. Among other things, these developments resulted in a much higher level of stated ambition in policy statements, including in the 2005 European Consensus on Development:

"(...) the EU's commitment to promoting policy coherence for development, is based upon ensuring that the EU takes account of the objectives of development cooperation in all policies that it implements which are likely to affect developing countries, and that these policies support development objectives" (paragraph 9).⁴

To respond to some of the earlier discussions on the direction of the concept, and clarify whether it should be seen as coherence or consistency⁵, the EU policy document 'reinvented' the concept as 'Policy Coherence for Development' (PCD). This increased conceptual clarity followed a more hectic period during the 1990s, when European Civil Society Organisations published and lobbied around several well-researched and concrete cases of incoherent EU policies that negatively affected its development effectiveness.⁶ These cases included EU-subsidised meat exports undermining European projects to encourage meat production, fisheries agreements which allowed European fishermen free fishing rights in developing countries' waters at the Community's expense, and pressures to lift the ban on cocoa butter alternatives.⁷

Whereas in more recent times EU Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) continue to research and expose significant cases of incoherent EU policies⁸, progress has also been made at the EU decision-making levels which has resulted in the further operationalisation of the Union's ambition. Building on a Communication from the EC that was published in the same year, the EU Consensus on Development identifies 12 concrete areas where it wants to make further progress. Subsequent EU Presidencies have among other things resulted in a 'rolling work programme' and a first EU Biennial report that was published in 2007 and analyses the EU's performance in the 12 areas. The methodology for the report followed a 'peer review' approach, based on a questionnaire covering the different areas that was sent to all EU member states. The content of the report has been met with some criticism from especially CSOs, who did not find the findings to be critical enough given the realities in policy making and also felt that the report's analysis lacked transparency. Nevertheless, the

² The specific article is Article 130V (available at http://europa.eu/eur-lex/en/treaties/dat/EU_treaty.html), which later became Article 178 in the Consolidated Versions of the Treaty on European Union and the Treaty establishing the European Community (<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/site/en/oj/2006/ce321/ce32120061229en00010331.pdf>).

³ See Article 188D of the Draft Treaty amending the Treaty on European Union and the Treaty establishing the European Community, available at <http://consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cmsUpload/cg00001re01en.pdf>

⁴ More information on the EU Consensus on Development can be found here:

http://ec.europa.eu/development/policies/9interventionareas_en.cfm

⁵ The issue of the difference between coherence and consistency was further obscured by the different language versions of the Treaty's text. For a more elaborate discussion on the difference between coherence and consistency, please refer to Mackie et al 2007.

⁶ The term 'development effectiveness' is becoming increasingly used in the development sector to underline that the efforts to increase aid effectiveness should not be compromised by the effects of other policies on developing countries. The Development Assistance Committee (DAC) is for instance presently using the term in the context of its ongoing work on whole-of-government approaches in fragile states. see: http://www.oecd.org/document/4/0,3343,en_2649_33693550_35237252_1_1_1_1,00.html

⁷ A number of these cases have been documented in Koulaïmah-Gabriel, A., and Oomen, A. (1997) Improving Coherence: Challenges for European Development Cooperation. (Policy Management Brief No. 9). Maastricht: ECDPM. <http://www.ecdpm.org/pmb9>

⁸ See for example <http://www.eucoherence.org>

choice to use a questionnaire, which in some member states was jointly filled in by different ministries, resulted in much more awareness-raising and buy-in than a more externally driven process could have catered for.

In relation to this report, detailed Council Conclusions were agreed during the 2007 Portuguese EU Presidency, in which the EU commits itself to making further progress in each of the different areas. Among these Council Conclusions, the member states and the Commission are invited to "(...) *draw on the report to generate debates on PCD issues at the European and the national level, as well as with all development partners.*"⁹ Some few paragraphs onwards in the same document, the Council stresses the importance of constructive and fruitful exchange on PCD with non-state actors, both in the EU and in developing countries.¹⁰ The Conclusions also acknowledge the need for institutional reform to further strengthen the promotion of PCD, and to that end envisages the strengthening of the General Secretariat of the Council to better support the EU Presidencies in this area.

Despite the progress that has been made at the level of EU decision-making, it is generally held that only very limited gains have been made in the terms of actual increases to the development effectiveness of the EU's policies and operations. It can be argued that in today's globalising world, there is an even greater need for coherent EU policies for development. Progress at the practical level may have been hampered by the fact that the Treaty legally obliged the Union to make an effort, but did not require these efforts to be successful. Measuring progress in PCD is also challenging given that there is neither a clear 'baseline' available that makes clear how coherent the EU's policies are at a given point in time, nor any agreement on how more coherent these policies should have become at a certain point in time.¹¹

At a more general level, some authors have questioned the EU's institutional ability to be coherent, or went even further by arguing that "(...) *contradiction and incoherence are unavoidably a part of human life [and] (...) Incoherence exists because human imperfection exists*" (Fresco 2004). Available quantitative figures show how far the EU still is away from ensuring that its other policies support development objectives, such as the following which were mentioned by David Sogge in relation to a recently completed evaluation of the Dutch government's Africa Policy by the Policy and Operations Evaluation Department (IOB) of the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs:

"During the nine-year period under review by the IOB, Africa's wealth poured out of the continent in a rising gusher. Its recorded financial transfers to the rest of the world in 2006, net of aid and investment inflows, approached US\$100 billion. And then we're talking only about the recorded flows, as detected by the UN, not the shadow capital flight."¹²

Beyond such numbers, achieving coherence towards development objectives across the full palette of policy areas, both internal and external, presents a formidable challenge for any member state government, as well as for the wider Union. In the same commentary, Sogge observed that the challenges of ensuring a coherent foreign policy inside the Netherlands' ministry of foreign affairs already constituted a paramount challenge, and concluded: "*with at least 13 different official departments, each pursuing its own programmes with great verve, managing foreign policy is like herding cats.*"

Whereas these reflections and practical realities paint a compelling picture on how difficult it is to make progress in this area, it also amplifies the question of why the Union would want to make such an effort

⁹ The Conclusions are available at <http://register.consilium.europa.eu/pdf/en/07/st14/st14921.en07.pdf>

¹⁰ Back in 2000, article 12 of the Cotonou Partnership Agreement went much further than this by requiring the Commission to inform the ACP countries of any measures it intends to take that can go against the objectives of the agreement. At the request of the ACP countries, consultations can be held promptly to take account of their concerns as to the impact of those measures before any final decision is made: http://www.acpsec.org/en/conventions/cotonou/pdf/agr01_en.pdf

¹¹ In reaction to figures showing the damaging effects of the selling of European food in Africa at prices lower than locals could compete with, EU Development Commissioner Louis Michel recently stated to members of the European Parliament that anti-poverty activists were ethically and intellectually correct to point this out. However, he felt that they were perhaps politically not right, and argued: "*There are limits to what we can do. There are limits to what is feasible in political terms.*" Source: Cronin, D. 'Development Live With EU's Contradictions'. IPS News: <http://ipsnews.net/news.asp?idnews=43186>

¹² See David Sogge's full commentary on the website of The Broker: http://www.thebrokeronline.eu/en/dossiers/special_report_the_dutch_treatment/commentary/donors_still_in_the_driver_s_seat

in the first place. Ashoff (2005) has analysed a number of reasons for governments to decide to pursue PCD, which he clustered into the following three types of justifications:

1. **The negative justification:** *incoherence between development policy and other policies.* The 'traditional' and most commonly used justification for pursuing PCD is often motivated by collecting evidence on how other policies undermine or even negate the work of development programmes. These incoherencies can be caused in two ways: (1) because other policy interests – such as foreign policy or export promotion – overshadow development objectives leading to inconsistencies between declared objectives and development cooperation in practice; and (2) because development cooperation, implemented in accordance with declared objectives, is directly impaired by other policies whose objectives run counter to development cooperation's intentions.
2. **The strategic justification:** *policy coherence as a response to globalisation and as a requirement of global governance.*
An essential and widely recognised aspect of global governance is that various domestic policies will (have to) interact internationally more closely than in the past. Even those policies that were intended and formulated as inward-oriented are acquiring an international dimension due to the effect of globalisation. The traditional distinction between domestic and foreign policy is rapidly losing its analytical and empirical relevance.
3. **The substantive-programmatic justification:** *the guiding concept of sustainable development and the Millennium Declaration.*
The author remarks that the first two justifications do not necessarily indicate the direction which the goal of coherence needs to take. On what basis may development policy expect the subordination of other policy areas to its goals? For example, he points out that German development policy, like any national policy, is required by the Constitution to promote German interests and employment. However, there are regional and global agreements which override this objective and guide the direction of coherence, such as the conferences during the 1990s which shaped the concept of 'sustainable development cooperation', and the 2000 United Nations' Millennium Declaration.

Herding cats? Institutional mechanisms to promote Policy Coherence for Development

In the past two decades, different publications have proposed certain practical 'solutions' to advance the promotion of PCD. These solutions have gradually become referred to as 'mechanisms': formal and systematic efforts that can drive movements towards PCD in a given context (Mackie et al 2007). In recent years, the need to establish such mechanisms has become formally recognised, notably in the Council Conclusions of April 10 2006, in which the Council invites: "(...) *the Commission and the Member States to provide for adequate mechanisms and instruments within their respective spheres of competence to ensure PCD as appropriate*".

In 2002, a comprehensive joint evaluation programme was launched by EURES, the EU heads of evaluations services in the area of development. This evaluation programme, which consisted of six joint-evaluations, aimed at evaluating how the Union's guiding development aid principles, as reflected in the 1992 Treaty on European Union, had been translated into practice and with what impact.¹³ The evaluation initiative covered different themes and domains, including the use of country strategy papers, trade capacity building initiatives, assistance to local development, and humanitarian aid. One of these six joint-evaluations focused specifically on the mechanisms that had been established by the European member states and institutions, with a view to:

1. judging their relevance and effectiveness, as well as their efficiency, impact and sustainability within their specific context;
2. formulating proposals to improve the relevance and effectiveness of the mechanisms analysed; and
3. enabling politicians and officials in member states and European institutions to learn and apply lessons from experience about mechanisms for policy coherence for development.

¹³ These guiding principles are coordination, complementarity and coherence, commonly referred to as the "Three Cs". For more information, see www.three-cs.net

The following sections of this paper will explore and analyse some of the features and outcomes of this evaluation, which was completed in May 2007, while trying to further the debate on the role of information and power relations in the process of promoting PCD.

Before the term 'mechanisms' entered the European policy jargon, the OECD had already done quite some work on developing tools and checklists to help its members operationalise and promote PCD. An often cited and influential list was published by the OECD/PUMA in 1996:

Box 1: OECD/PUMA Tools for Coherence
<p>Commitment by political leadership is a necessary precondition to coherence, and a tool to enhance it.</p> <p>Establishing a strategic policy framework helps ensure that individual policies are consistent with the government's goals and priorities.</p> <p>Decision makers need advice based on a clear definition and good analysis of issues, with explicit indications of possible inconsistencies.</p> <p>The existence of a central overview and co-ordination capacity is essential to ensure horizontal consistency across policies.</p> <p>Mechanisms to anticipate, detect and resolve policy conflicts early in the process help identify inconsistencies and reduce incoherence.</p> <p>The decision-making process must be organised to achieve an effective reconciliation between policy priorities and budgetary imperatives.</p> <p>Implementation procedures and monitoring mechanisms must ensure that policies can be adjusted in the light of progress, new information and changing circumstances.</p> <p>An administrative culture that promotes cross-sectoral co-operation and a systematic dialogue between different policy communities contributes to the strengthening of policy coherence.</p> <p>Source: OECD/PUMA 1996 in OECD 2005</p>

The DAC Country Peer Reviews, which since the year 2000 include a specific chapter on PCD, have also proved to be useful for moving the process forward.¹⁴ The review process can as such be considered as a mechanism in its own right. The reviews' analytical and comparative approach allows the poor reviews to analyse concrete examples of actual or potential policy conflicts, and make an assessment of the political and technical efforts that are being made. However, the limited space that is available for PCD in these reviews, as well as their tendency to explore specific cases and particularities of the DAC member in question, make them less appropriate for comparison of performance.

Components and functioning of a PCD system

Various authors have noted that coherence can be promoted at various areas, all with an important influence on development effectiveness (e.g. Hoebink 2004, Picciotto 2004). These areas cover policy coherence for development:

1. within development policy;
2. across policy areas inside OECD countries;
3. across OECD countries;
4. at the multilateral level;
5. and in the partner countries.

It is important to note that only the first three are the responsibility of donors alone, whereas the latter two are a shared responsibility between the donor and the recipient countries (ECDPM and ICEI 2006).

¹⁴ The DAC peer reviews are available for download on the OECD website:
http://www.oecd.org/department/0,3355,en_2649_34603_1_1_1_1_1,00.html

Arguably in the DAC Peer Reviews, but also in most recent EU decisions relating to the overall topic, much focus has been given to the relation between other policy areas and development policy, at the level of the member states and the European Commission. The PCD mechanisms evaluation also focused on this level and, further to a list of eight types of mechanisms that were identified by McLean Hilker¹⁵, identified three core types of PCD mechanisms:

- i. **Explicit Policy Statements** on coherence which translate external policy pressures into a declaration of what the government intends to do to, indicating intent, providing focus and guiding officials and other actors.
- ii. **Administrative and Institutional Mechanisms** (such as inter-departmental coordination committees in government, or a specialised coherence unit) to promote coherence in the definition and further refinement and mutual adjustment of different policies and the execution of the commitment
- iii. **Knowledge Input and Assessment Mechanisms** (information and analysis capacity) to support an evidence-based approach to policy formation which underpins and informs the need for policy coherence (Mackie et al 2007, ECDPM and ICEI 2006).

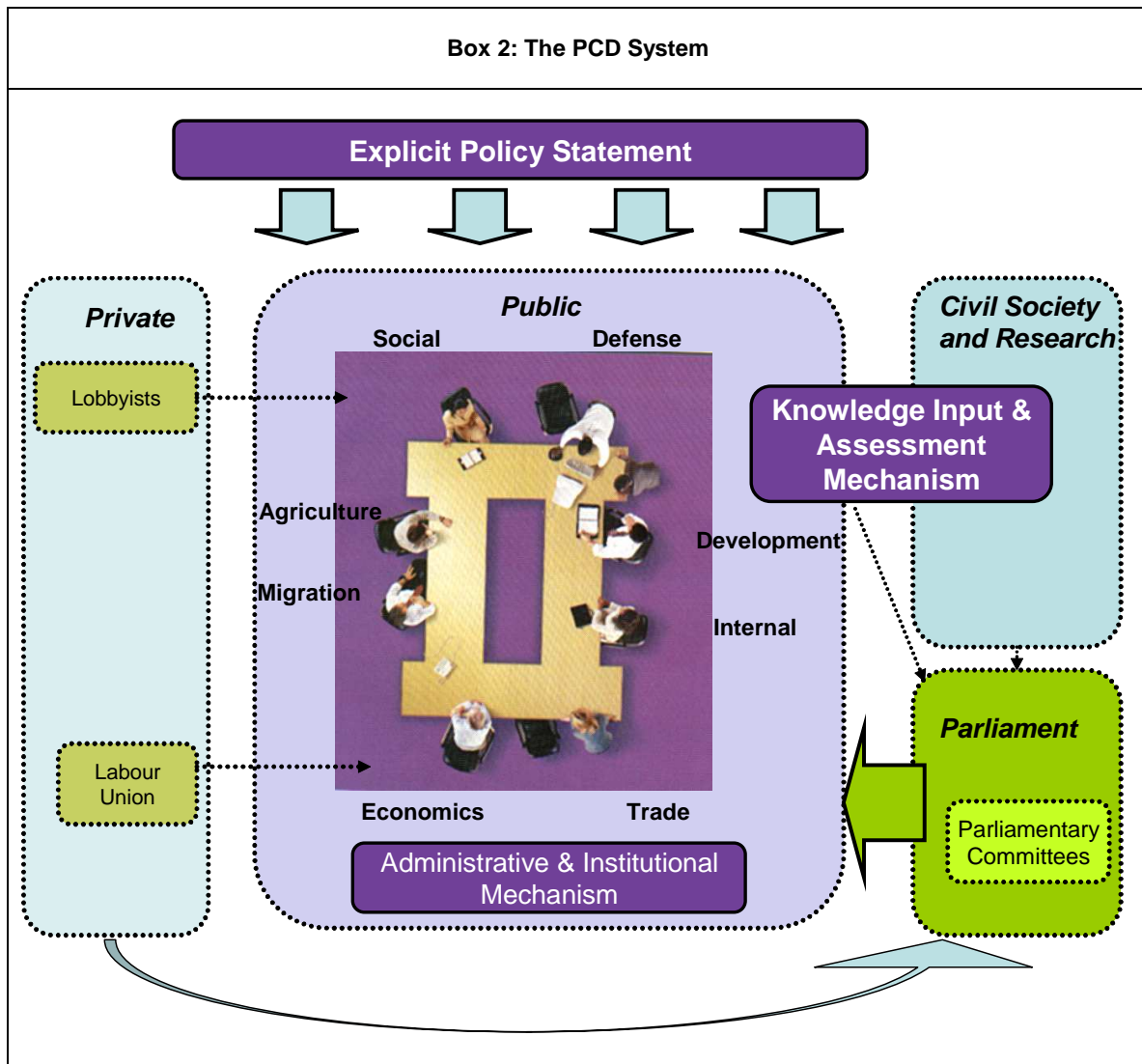
These mechanisms commonly comprise different features and vary from country to country depending on the national political and administrative context, and should therefore always be considered in this broader context. Promoting policy coherence should also not be studied in splendid isolation, but be seen as part of the regular process of policy formulation, refinement, adoption and change. Policies are continually being reviewed, improved and adjusted to make them more effective, and promoting PCD should therefore be seen as part of this wider process. Governments committed to coherence will seek to reduce or resolve such aspects, but there will often remain moments when trade-offs are inevitable. Formal PCD mechanisms will therefore mostly be found at the middle levels of government. Below these levels, efforts to seek coherence will tend to be of a more informal consultative nature. Higher up the process, on the other hand, political decision making and trade-offs will be relied upon in order to overcome unresolved aspects of incoherence (Mackie et al 2007).

Just as the functioning of these mechanisms should be seen as part of the process to improve the effectiveness of policy, the effectiveness of these mechanisms should also not be assessed in isolation. Put differently, a government or inter-governmental institution's ability to successfully promote PCD will to a large extent be determined by its ability to combine and connect these mechanisms for the purpose of achieving goals associated with PCD. This combining of different types of mechanisms needs to be agreed in a more or less formal manner, also given that the way in which these types of PCD mechanisms work together will vary from case to case. The relative strength or weakness of each mechanism within the system will be dependent on the needs and the nature of the political and government context in which the system operates. The mechanisms can also be imagined to operate at different levels in the government policy formulation hierarchy, and this positioning will affect the authority and role of the mechanism (Mackie et al 2007).

While not being the focus of the evaluation, the study also referred to the importance of informal processes, including their roles of interacting with the three types of mechanisms and their respective integration in the wider functioning of the approach to government and policy change. Analysing approaches towards promoting mutual accountability in development cooperation, Rosalind Eyben recently argued to enrich the presently dominant substantialist thinking (mostly focusing on 'things') with relational thinking (focusing on processes): "*mechanisms and standards can support and sustain processes of mutually agreed and desired transformation; they cannot create those processes*" (Eyben 2008: 39).

The following diagram presents a possible way of visualising the functioning of these three types of mechanisms and situates some of the key actors that can be involved in the policy making process:

¹⁵ McLean Hilker, Lyndsay (2004). A comparative analysis of institutional mechanisms to promote policy coherence for development. Case study synthesis: The European Community, United States and Japan. Paper prepared for the OECD policy workshop "Institutional Approaches to Policy Coherence for Development", 18–19 May. <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/0/31/31659769.pdf>



The need to ensure that various mechanisms that work to promote coherence function as a system was also underlined in the EU Council Conclusions in relation to PCD of November 2007, in which the Council "(...) notes with satisfaction that a number of organisational PCD mechanisms have been put in place at Council, Member State and Commission levels, but acknowledges the Report's finding on the need to pursue efforts to ensure that EU's commitments continue to be met. The Council invites all parties to develop and improve such mechanisms and use them in a more systematic manner, when necessary."¹⁶

The following section will present an overview of the different mechanisms that were identified in the joint-evaluation, after which the design and functioning of knowledge input and assessment mechanisms is discussed in more detail.

Knowledge = power? Current PCD mechanisms in the EU

Given the lack of available information on the efforts that are made to promote PCD in the Commission and the member states, part of the joint-evaluation essentially had to devote itself to 'fact-finding'. Profiles for the EU member states and institutions were thus set up on the basis of available public official sources and literature, and subsequently cross-checked with relevant development policy officials in each country or institution. The following table shows the 'harvest' in terms of the PCD mechanisms that were identified through this exercise:

¹⁶ The Council Conclusions are available here: <http://register.consilium.europa.eu/pdf/en/07/st14/st14921.en07.pdf>

Box 3: Identified PCD mechanisms (Mackie et al 2007)

Explicit Policy Statements	Administrative / Institutional	Knowledge Input and Assessment	Total identified mechanisms
30	45	10	85

Although this overall picture obviously does not show the high diversity in the EU member states, with some having a relatively full palette of mechanisms and others having yet to formally recognise the need to promote PCD, it is interesting that only 12% of the mechanisms concern the third type. Annex 1 to this paper lists all ten knowledge input and assessment mechanisms that were identified by the evaluation, each accompanied by a small description. The overview shows that the majority of these mechanisms (e.g. the UK, Germany, the Netherlands) tend to focus on a limited number of high quality reports or high-level events, which can be highly influential but may be more difficult to link up with the efforts by other PCD mechanisms operating in their context. Other mechanisms, such as the Finnish Development Policy Committee and the European Parliament Development Committee, are better equipped to more independently time their inputs into the policy making process, and may therefore be more effective within the overall PCD system.

What could be the reason for this relative underinvestment in knowledge input and assessment mechanisms? First of all, the evaluation found that many of the 85 mechanisms that were found already existed before in a different form, but their mandate was later broadened to allow them to formally work on PCD. It can be argued that most government bureaucracies will show a higher number of structures with an administrative/coordination function compared to structures with an evaluating/advisory mandate. Nevertheless, it is clear that the quality and legitimacy of coordination and administration efforts inside government would depend on the quality and timing of information inputs, as well as depend on regular monitoring and evaluation to inform possible necessary changes. Underinvestment in this area could also mean that only well known cases of incoherence receive sufficient attention, while other less well known or unrecognised cases are not sufficiently taken into account (Mackie et al 2007).¹⁷

Such an analysis would however rest on the premise that, given good coordination structures and sufficient political and administrative will to move ahead with PCD, an improvement in the provision and quality of knowledge and assessment would translate into improved policy coherence. In an attempt to test this hypothesis in a different context, the International Centre of Excellence for Conflict and Peace Studies (INCORE) examines how government civil servants use research in the policy process relating to ethno-political conflict. The study found that the policy makers interviewed for the study were generally not expected to stay current with the latest research. In fact, 25 percent of the policy makers that were interviewed had never looked outside their own institution for research findings. These policy makers argued that they were only expected to have a general awareness of current issues and developments, as well as an ability to find out about specifics when needed. Policy makers who did feel the need to keep up with research did so because department heads or ministers had expressed this as a performance expectation. However, even when this expectation exists, time- or motivation-related aspects may hinder compliance. Related to this, half of those policy makers who were required to use research acknowledged that genuine strategic policy development through research was considered to be rare (Church 2005).

Although existing knowledge input and assessment mechanisms in the EU are in many cases part of government and therefore better positioned to stay in more regular, informal contact with relevant civil servants and policy makers, it is a matter of fact that policy making processes are often characterised by very selective use of knowledge. In the context of the European Commission's efforts at environmental integration, Robins (1997) has argued that the promotion of coherence is often considered by those in other parts of government as a one-way, extractive process. In such cases, the officials tasked to promote environmental coherence play a role of 'policemen' or 'watchdog', instructing other parts of government. Robins concludes from his analysis that integration of policies cannot be imposed from outside, but can only be the result of mutual, collaborative efforts.

¹⁷ Paul Hoebink, in an influential paper on PCD that was published in 2001, also referred to this issue by differentiating between intended and unintended coherence (Hoebink 2004).

The findings of the joint-evaluation confirm this general point, and the case studies that were made provide some important nuances on how information is used in policy making processes in different member states and the EU institutions. In the case of Spain, for example, it was found that officials from the Foreign Ministry do not always have the right debating and persuasion skills to argue the case for PCD and persuade their colleagues in other ministries. This was considered as resulting from the different types of training received by economists and diplomats in Spain. In Finland, it was found that the Development Policy Committee works inside a 'development sector bubble', as the Committee clearly found it more difficult to project and communicate its concerns to the 'outside world' (Mackie et al 2007).

It can thus be argued that different sectors and sections in government may apply different criteria to what they consider to be legitimate and relevant information to use for feeding into policy decisions. This may go as far as leading to what Pierre Bourdieu referred to as 'symbolical violence', an act which can effectively undermine the legitimacy of certain sources and types of information. In Western thinking around the concept of power, the Weberian tradition has been dominant, in which power is generally defined as the "(...) *ability to achieve a wanted end in a social context, with or without the consent of others*". However, in more recent times theorists have gone beyond such relatively static and 'commoditised' conceptualisations of power. According to their thinking, power is considered as a relational concept, which by definition is socially constructed and does not exist independent from human interaction (Vermeulen 2005).

Further to Norman Long, the context in which policy options are being considered, and where PCD can be promoted, can be defined as an 'interface': "(...) *social situations or arenas in which interactions become oriented around problems of bridging, accommodating, segregating or contesting social, evaluative and cognitive standpoints*". In such a context, knowledge can be seen as resulting from the encounter of different perspectives. Such an analysis would assume that the incorporation of new information can only take place on the basis of already existing knowledge and generally uncontested evaluative points of views, which themselves are also re-shaped through this process. In this process, knowledge emerges through "(...) *interaction, dialogue, reflexivity, and contests of meaning, and involves aspects of control, authority and power*" (Long 1999). In other words, this conceptualisation of the knowledge production process would confirm Robins' point that PCD is best served by mutual collaboration rather than one-sided confrontation (Robins 1997). However, it should be added that collaborative efforts will often be confrontational for all involved.

Two case studies: knowledge and assessment in the promotion of PCD

This section will briefly describe how the knowledge input and assessment functions are taken care of in the case of Sweden and the European Commission, followed by an analysis of the interaction of information and power relations in these and other cases.

Case 1: the Swedish Policy for Global Development¹⁸

The Swedish Policy for Global Development (PGD) was adopted by the Swedish Parliament in December 2003. The PGD has been shaped around the overarching goal of equitable and sustainable global development, which is to be attained through a more coherent policy and increased collaboration and co-ordination with other countries and actors. In the government Bill, the goal has been formulated so that it applies to different national policy areas and activities. The PGD's overarching objective is informed from two distinct albeit partially overlapping perspectives: a rights perspective, and the perspectives of the poor on development. These two perspectives "(...) *combine to create an approach to the work of contributing to equitable and sustainable global development in every policy area*" (Government of Sweden 2006).

The overall coordination of the policy's implementation has been entrusted to a specific department in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs: the Department for Development Policy. The department currently has staff members which specialise on certain aspects of the PGD, such as the rights-based perspective, and the area of trade and development. In addition to this, a decision by government to locate the Expert Group on Development Issues (EGDI) within this department ensured for (1) a better connection between research and the practice of the PGD; and (2) the production of information which

¹⁸ This case draws on the case study of the Policy for Global Development for the joint-evaluation of PCD mechanisms (see www.three-cs.net), as well as a seminar that was organised by Sida and ECDPM in Stockholm on the 29th of November 2007.

can increase the knowledge among the department's staff which in turn can lead to increases in performance of the department. The new Swedish Government, which took office in October 2006, however decided to discontinue the expert group, with the Ministry now continuing to work on long-term analysis in the field of development policies with other means, and in other forms.¹⁹

Whereas the department and other parts of government will therefore continue to have access to relevant information for the implementation of the policy, progress in the policy's realisation has been hampered by the absence of a systematic and result-oriented assessment process. This has made it difficult to judge how successful the implementation of the policy has been and on the basis of this judgement inform specific actions. The new government has recognised this need for improvement, and the next communication on the PGD is presently being prepared for presentation to parliament in March 2008. This report will try to sharpen the original Bill's focus, clarify the policy and set out priorities for its further implementation.

Case 2: the European Commission's Impact Assessment procedure²⁰

In 2002, the European Commission set up an Impact Assessment procedure with the aim to simplify the regulatory environment and improve policy making in the Commission. As designed, the impact assessment process functions as an ex-ante analysis tool for improving the coherence of measures under preparation. Through this process, the Commission identifies the likely positive and negative economic, environmental and social effects of proposed policy actions, and outlines potential synergies and trade-offs in achieving competing objectives, thus enabling informed political judgments to be made about the proposal. The standard process would always involve a preliminary assessment, if necessary combined with a more extended second impact assessment.²¹ The assessment process involves thorough consultation with different stakeholders and coordination across the different Commission services.

A recent evaluation by the Centre for European Policy Studies (CEPS) of PCD in the EU Council's policy-making processes which also covered the work of the EC noted that the Impact Assessment's thoroughness limited its usefulness – and in fact its impact – in the decision-making process. The study noted that the evaluation of the existing situation is often still going on when the new proposal has already been drafted and is finding its way through the EC's Inter-Service Consultation process. The report referred to recent studies that had been done and which indicated that the impact assessment focuses more on environmental sustainability criteria than on the possible effects of the potential policies on the livelihoods of people living in developing countries.

Several cases that were done in the context of the CEPS study furthermore suggested that DG Development is not actively engaged in the impact assessment process, for reasons including the technical and demanding nature of the process, and a lack of financial and human resources to be involved. A case on fisheries, as well as a separate study by the CEPS from the same year, also shows that the Impact Assessment is often used to justify preferred policy options, rather than exploring alternative ones.

An external evaluation of the Impact Assessment procedure, which was completed in April 2007, included a survey in external stakeholder were asked whether the Impact Assessment(s) which they followed or participated in examined the most relevant policy options in an appropriate level of detail. The report mentioned that only 24% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that this was the case, whereas 55% disagreed (strongly) and a remaining 21% were either neutral or responded "don't know". The evaluation, which screened a total of 20 assessments, also found that stakeholders outside the EU had only been consulted in three of the cases, of which all had a clear development / external co-operation component.²²

¹⁹ More information is available at <http://www.egdi.gov.se/>

²⁰ This case draws on the case study of the European Commission's Inter-Service Consultation that was done in the context of the joint-evaluation of coherence mechanisms (see www.three-cs.net), as well as on Egenhofer, C. et al (2006) Policy Coherence in the Council: Strategies for the way forward. Brussels: Centre for European Policy Studies (CEPS) <http://www.ceps.be>

²¹ Preliminary assessment is required for all proposals submitted in the context of the annual policy strategy or work programme that the Commission adopted the year before.

²² The evaluation report can be accessed here:

http://ec.europa.eu/governance/impact/docs/key_docs/tep_eias_final_report.pdf

PCD and the politics of technicalities

The two case studies of Sweden and the EC show a high degree of sophistication with which PCD is sought to be promoted, and are clear examples of how EU member states and institutions have in recent years taken steps to move from recognition at the level of overall policy objectives to actual changing practices. However, despite the increasing technical nature of the debate on how to promote PCD, the effects of policy incoherencies have remained concrete and down-to-earth. This is why in recent years actors outside the public sector have remained engaged in exposing cases of incoherence and calling for action to address these.²³

Beyond working on these 'dossiers', it is challenging for actors outside the public sector to engage in the actual practice of promoting PCD. The emphasis on the coordination of policy options inside government has given the PCD agenda a rather technical and a-political character, which has increasingly branded it as an 'internal government process' that correspondingly lacks in terms of public transparency and predictability. As non-state actors get insufficient access to the policy-making domains, they initiate more parallel information production and sharing efforts at the interface of PCD. Although the November 2007 Council Conclusions invited the EC and the member states to invest further in broadening the debate to new actors in and beyond Europe, both the policy makers and the to-be-included actors are at odds on how this debate could feed into the 'wheeling and dealing' that characterises policy-making.²⁴ In the light of this analysis, though, it should be made clear that it is not the specific responsibility of PCD mechanisms with a knowledge input and assessment function to ensure sufficient transparency of the overall process. Sufficient levels of accountability and transparency is rather a specific requirement that needs to be taken care of by the overall PCD system.

Due to the lack of transparency of the policy-making process, and the absence of strategic and systematic participation of non-state actors, the involved public actors are not held accountable for the way in which they consider available evidence to make informed and optimally coherent policy decisions. In such an environment, existing power relations help to reproduce a process in which policy actors can selectively use the available evidence to strengthen the decisions they take. Given the existing structures, the relative power of policy actors mostly resides in their ability to decide on who beyond themselves is to be offered a place at the policy table. The mystification of the policy making process, as well as the portraying of promoting PCD as a technical, internal process, plays an important role in consolidating this situation.

It could be argued that, given the typical dynamics of policy making processes, increasing transparency would actually reduce possibilities for promoting PCD due to the presence of often much stronger domestic lobby groups. The results of the joint-evaluation of PCD mechanisms however indicate that it could become easier for non-state actors to find ways of working with government once more concrete, time-bound targets are agreed on what the PCD agenda should achieve. In other words, whereas much of the emphasis of recent publications and evaluations of approaches to promote PCD have mainly focused on *ex-ante* accountability – governments being accountable for the ways in which they use available evidence to inform coherent policy decisions – there would also be much scope to invest in *ex-post* accountability. The 2007 EU Biennial Report on PCD is a good example of this, but other approaches such as annual reports, or a specific parliamentary reviewing the work of internal PCD coordination mechanisms could be explored to this end. One recent example is that since 2007 onwards, the UK Department for International Development's annual report to Parliament has to include an assessment of the effects of UK Government policies and programmes on poverty reduction and sustainable development in other countries. This is one of the requirements of the 2006 International Development (Reporting and Transparency) Act.²⁵

²³ Examples include the EU's tight Sanitary and Phytosanitary Standards (SPS) which make it difficult for developing countries to export their products to Europe, and ambitious EU targets for the use of bio-fuels which may have negative impacts on the environment and food security in developing countries.

²⁴ One example is the case of Sweden, where the PGD called for establishing a citizen's forum to promote a broad multi-stakeholder debate on the Swedish development policy, but where only tentative steps have so far been taken to realise this forum.

²⁵ The electronic version of the Act is available here:

http://www.opsi.gov.uk/Acts/acts2006/pdf/ukpga_20060031_en.pdf

Concluding reflections

In recent years, progress made in establishing mechanisms to promote PCD have been eclipsed by examples that illustrate the difficulty for the EU to ensure more coherent action for development, as well as reluctance among some member states to move into more concrete areas in the EU Council concerning PCD.²⁶ At the same time, a limited number of developing countries are becoming openly critical towards the EU's performance in the area, also strengthened by the fact that some of the so-called emerging donors present a more coherent package than the EU is presently capable of doing.²⁷

The analysis in this paper would support the conclusion that current approaches to development policy making might become less sustainable in the long run, and that policy makers should urgently consider options for increasing the diversity of actors and views that are invited to the policy table. Whereas progress has been made in improving conditions for developing countries to take more ownership in development cooperation, there is a need to also involve developing countries more systematically in helping to improve EU development effectiveness (also given earlier commitments to this end in the Cotonou Partnership Agreement). Broad-based political will would also be required to reform existing power relations between the different actors, as well as to better specify the goals that should be achieved in terms of increased PCD.

Improving goal setting in PCD could also help to improve the accountability function of the PCD system. Based on the available evidence, it can be tentatively concluded that the effective functioning of a PCD system would depend on a balanced realisation of both ex-ante and ex-post accountability functions. In case there is too much emphasis on ex-ante accountability, public and non-state actors would continue to have differences on what is being achieved, as well as about the desired level of ambition. On the other hand, overemphasis on ex-post accountability would obscure the policy-making process itself and would consequently force external actors into a 'watchdog' role, confining them to retrospective analysis and keeping them away from the policy table.

To conclude this paper with one forward-looking observation with regard to this last point, it has been argued that taking further steps towards mutual cooperation between different policy areas would require moving towards 'two-way-street' or even 'win-win' approaches to PCD.²⁸ Recent trends around an increasing politicisation of development cooperation and experimentation with more joint-up approaches do indicate that when the development sector invites itself to have an opinion on other sectors, other sectors may also want to express their opinions concerning development cooperation. On the other hand, if development cooperation were to increasingly accommodate more short-term political objectives, such as human rights and climate change, there could be some friction with the partner country-led approach which today is central to development cooperation.²⁹ There thus appears to be an interesting but challenging period ahead for EU development cooperation.

²⁶ In a recent letter of the Dutch Minister for Development Cooperation to Parliament, it was observed that there was a tendency at the EU level to focus on 'convenient/easy' topics such as brain-drain and the link between research and development. On the other hand, more contentious topics such as the Doha 'development' round and the negotiations for the Economic Partnership Agreements are not often identified and put on the agenda as PCD issues. The full letter, in Dutch, is available here:

<http://www.minbuza.nl/nl/actueel/brievenparlement,2008/05/Kamerbrief-inzake-evaluatie-van-co-rdinatie--compl.html>

²⁷ Although it should be added that the overall goals and objectives of the activities of the emerging donors are less vulnerable to policy incoherence, such as the overarching goal of 'mutual benefit' which underpins China's actions under the 'development' label.

²⁸ This is not a new topic, but has earlier been subject to discussion in various aid dialogue fora, such as during the 2003 UNDP seminar 'Achieving the MDGs: Strengthening Mutual Accountability'. See the contribution by Otto Genee, Ministry of Foreign Affairs the Netherlands:

http://www.undp.org/oslocentre/flagship/achieving_mdgs_strengthening_mutual_accountability.html

²⁹ This point was made during as well as a seminar about the Three-Cs evaluations, which was organised by Sida and ECDPM in Stockholm on the 29th of November 2007.

Annex 1: Knowledge input and assessment mechanisms in the EU

Czech Republic	Development Centre	The Development Centre is located in the ministry and has several functions: cooperating with relevant departments and institutions to implement foreign cooperation projects, coordinating the work of other governmental and non-governmental institutions and overseeing research related to foreign aid.
Finland	Development Policy Committee	The DPC promotes coherence of development policy in Finland (and ensures that the UN millennium development goals are supported by Finland's development policy), and reports independently annually to the Government on the implementation of Finland's development policy and the factors affecting it.
Germany	BMZ Dialogue forum	The BMZ Dialogue Forum that has been functional since 2002. This is a forum of civil society, media and private-sector representatives that aims to raise public awareness of the Programme of Action 2015 (which includes several PCD commitments) and to craft broad alliances for the programme's implementation.
Ireland	Technical and Specialist Section within Irish Aid	In 2003 a unit within Irish Aid was created which was responsible for assessing Policy Coherence for Development issues and disseminating the results of analyses conducted. ³⁰
Netherlands	Advisory Council on International Affairs	The AIV is an independent body which advises government and parliament on foreign policy, particularly on issues relating to human rights, peace and security, development cooperation and European integration.
Spain	Development Cooperation Council (Annual Reports)	The DCC is made up of representatives of the different departments of the Administration and of the various participants from civil society that are involved in the cooperation for development (NGOs, Universities, human rights associations, trade unions, company organisations and independent experts). New regulations from 2004 requires this body to carry out the tasks involved in monitoring the extent to which the development policy is coherent.
UK	1) House of Commons Int. Development Committee 2) DFID-studies on PCD	1) See for example The Commission for Africa and Policy Coherence for Development: First do no harm. First Report of Session 2004–05 2) For example: 2005 CEPS study on PCD in the EU Council
European Parliament	EP Development Committee	This committee does not have a specific PCD mandate, but is actively following this issue, and 'coherence' is often mentioned in the reports addressing development issues in relation to other policies.
European Commission	Impact Assessment	An impact assessment process was set up in 2002 to simplify the regulatory environment and improve the way the Commission designs policy. As designed, the impact assessment process functions as an ex-ante analysis tool for improving the coherence of measures under preparation.

³⁰ More recently, the Institute of International Integration Studies at Trinity College Dublin, Ireland was awarded a research grant by the Advisory Body for Development Cooperation Ireland in February 2004 for a project "Coherence between Ireland's Official Development Cooperation Activities and other Policy Areas in particular Agricultural Trade and Support Policies".

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