

OECD engagement with civil society By Meggan Dissly, Civil Society Liaison Manger, OECD

Public interest in globalisation has increased OECD engagement with civil society and OECD analysis benefits from greater input from civil society organisations (CSOs). Member countries believe that ongoing dialogue builds trust in public institutions and improves understanding of ongoing global economic and social changes.

The OECD has been engaged with civil society since its creation, notably through the Business and Industry Advisory Committee to the OECD (BIAC) and the Trade Union Advisory Committee to the OECD (TUAC). Both of these advisory bodies contribute to OECD work in a number of areas, including sustainable development, biotechnology, corporate governance, employment and development co-operation.

OECD cooperation with BIAC and TUAC has been complemented in recent years by co-operative activities with other representatives of civil society and parliamentarians through regular consultations on specific issues. Online consultations make it possible to broaden public participation in OECD work and the OECD website hosts a vast array of statistics and reports. Forums and workshops around the world offer opportunities for discussion with civil society on global or regional issues.

The OECD uses Forums as part of its outreach to civil society and to governments in both the OECD area and beyond. They focus on the global aspects of a particular issue or can deal with a topic such as public governance or employment policy in a particular country or region.

The OECD Forum is a «multi-stakeholder summit» which brings together business and labour leaders, civil society personalities, government ministers and leaders of international organisations to discuss the key issues on the agenda of the annual OECD ministerial meeting. The first OECD Forum took place in 2000.

The agenda of the OECD ministerial meeting and the OECD Forum reflects the work of the more than 150 specialised OECD committees and subgroups which are at the heart of OECD activity. It is here that the analytical work and consensus building that develops into government policies takes place, and where input from civil society can have a real impact.

The committees are composed of government experts who meet several times a year to discuss policy issues using analyses, statistics and pooled experiences of member countries. They cover the same areas as government ministries, such as environment, employment, finance, or education. Their conclusions can become official policy recommendations to governments or «OECD instruments».

OECD Committees have developed their own processes for interacting with civil society. Some of them hold informal, periodic consultations with civil society on specific issues, while others meet more regularly with civil society in a structured way. There are CSOs who have observer status in some committees and others who participate fully in the meetings. CSOs have been invited to participate in meetings at ministerial level as well.

CSOs are active at every stage in developing, implementing and monitoring products of OECD work such as the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises, the Principles of Corporate Governance, the OECD Guidelines on the Security of Information Systems and Networks or the OECD Convention on Combating Bribery of Foreign Public Officials in International Business Transactions.

Public interest in globalisation has focused in recent years on the increase in trade and investment. CSOs representing business, labour, environmental, development and consumer points of view meet annually with members of the OECD Trade Committee. Environmental and developmental CSOs, business federations and banks follow very closely the work of the working party on Export Credits and Credit Guarantees

Member countries of the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC), who provide more than 90% of world ODA, consult together on aid policies and are in contact with CSOs from both developed and developing countries. CSOs participated in drafting the DAC guidelines on poverty reduction and they help devise strategies for sustainable development, conflict prevention and trade capacity building.