

Future of the Forum

Discussion paper submitted by the Chair

I. Introduction

Since its inception in 2006/2007, the Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD) has established itself as a unique facilitator for a global policy dialogue on migration and development policies, as a platform for exchanging practices and experiences on these issues and as a space for networking and building new partnerships. It has also helped framing the international agenda on the migration and development nexus. The Forum, however, remains a recent process; its further development and strengthening, therefore, necessitates regular exchanges of views among policy-makers and should remain on the agenda of future GFMD meetings.

Operating Modalities for the GFMD were endorsed at Brussels in 2007; they were “*of a preliminary nature..., to be assessed and revised, as appropriate, in 2008*”. They have served the purpose and nature of the Forum well to date, notably by striking a balance between maintaining the Forum’s informal character and allowing it to operate efficiently. A fairly substantial discussion on some aspects of these Operating Modalities took place at Manila in 2008, mainly the modalities for the establishment of the Support Unit and the link of the GFMD with the UN. In September 2009, the Chair submitted a Reflection Paper to the Steering Group, intended, among others, to determine if there was a need for a limited update of the Operating Modalities. It contained suggestions and ideas of the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General, of some member-states and of the Chair itself, the latter ones evolving from the challenges faced during the GFMD preparatory process. The Reflection Paper led to an interesting discussion in the Steering Group, which yielded additional new ideas included in this paper.

First of all, the Steering Group concluded that there was no need to revise the Operating Modalities, but agreed on suggestions for consolidating the process or bringing new impetus to it, without these having to be institutionalised. They relate to:

- the medium and longer term perspectives;
- the agenda setting and preparatory process;
- the involvement of Civil Society;
- the Support Unit.

Other issues, needing a clearer understanding or strengthening, are:

- the respective roles of the Steering Group and Friends of the Forum within the GFMD process;
- the cross-sectoral character of the Forum;
- the nature and follow-up of the outcomes;
- the role of the Focal Points.

This discussion paper also sets out some of the issues which will require further discussion among the Heads of Delegation in Athens and possibly even beyond Athens, such as the composition and renewal of the Steering Group, the frequency and sequence of the meetings, the funding of the GFMD, a multi-year agenda setting and some organisational aspects.

This paper aims at providing a basis for the discussion, at the level of Heads of Delegation in Athens with the objective of reaching some non-binding recommendations which could guide future Chairs.

II. Medium and longer term perspectives of the process

The Presidency of the Forum is assured till 2012, with Mexico, Spain and Morocco having offered to host the GFMD in the three coming years. The Chair would like to recommend a reconfirmation of this calendar and an endorsement of it during the Athens meeting. By the end of this cycle of meetings, all major regions will have been covered.

The experiences gained by governments with the GFMD and its impact on policies and policy-thinking will require a proper assessment by participating countries, as well as within the framework of the GFMD process, at the end of the current cycle. This exercise, the parameters of which should be carefully elaborated, could also determine the longer-term modalities and prospects of the GFMD beyond 2012.

III. Agenda setting and preparatory process

A number of issues discussed in the Forum require by their nature some continuity. There is, however, also a need for the Forum agenda to remain fresh, innovative and forward-looking. Policy-makers should be closely involved in priorities and agenda setting, as well as in the preparatory process.

It was considered important that the approach adopted for the agenda setting be flexible enough to accommodate a bottom-up approach, to tackle newly emerging priorities and to take account of the thematic priorities of successive Chairs.

As far as methodology is concerned, several ideas were put forward in the Steering Group: the carrying out of a survey among all participating countries as was done by Belgium in 2006, identifying priority themes for one (or more) year(s); identification of future agenda points during the GFMD meeting itself, allowing "organic" growth of the process; an overarching theme could be identified, as Greece has done, with a survey among Steering Group members.

The proposal for a multi-year program of work focusing each year on one major migration and development theme was considered by the Steering Group as an idea to be further explored in the future.

The Chair, as the guardian of the integrity of the Forum, has flexibility in the organisation of the Forum, but consults on important issues along the way with the Steering Group. Transparency and information of the Friends of the Forum on progress made in the preparations, including on the elaboration of the background papers, should be ensured, while providing also for their input into the process.

Successive Chairs have organised the Roundtable sessions on the basis of the participative approach initiated in Brussels by setting up government teams with balanced representation of developed and developing countries and of countries with different migration experiences, jointly preparing the background papers. This approach plays an important role in the process by creating collective ownership; it is also characteristic of the state-led nature of the Forum and should, therefore, continue to inspire future chairs.

IV. Relations with Civil Society

According to the current Operating Modalities, "*appropriate arrangements shall be made for the participation of civil society, including relevant NGOs*". Participants in the Civil Society Days include representatives of NGOs (migration as well as

development), migrant and diaspora organisations, the academic world and social partners (trade unions and private sector representatives). The agenda of the Civil Society Days mirrors the agenda of the Government Meeting to foster effective and pertinent input of the Civil Society in the process.

Over the past three years, incremental progress has been made to involve more closely representatives of Civil Society in the Forum process, e.g. through the creation of different links and interfaces between the Government Meeting and the Civil Society Days and consultation between the Friends of the Forum and the Civil Society Days organizers.

Governments are encouraged to associate Civil Society representatives closely at the national level in the different stages of their preparations for the GFMD.

Future Chairs should continue to consult with the Friends of the Forum on how to optimize the participation of Civil Society to the benefit of the governments concerned, while preserving the state-led nature of the process.

V. Support Unit

The current Operating Modalities state that the Support Unit should assist the Chair administratively in the preparations of the Forum. It shall be responsible for maintaining the archives, the website and for other related matters. It is attached to and supervised by the Chair.

The creation of the Support Unit was endorsed at the Manila Meeting. The Unit became operational in Geneva in February 2009 on the basis of a MOU with the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) for hosting the Support Unit. Its staff presently consists of two persons.

The present Chair-in-Office, not knowing when the Support Unit would become operational, had already started its preparations for the GFMD in early 2008 and had established its own relevant arrangements. It consequently made limited use of the full array of functions initially foreseen under the terms of reference of the Support Unit, although progress has gradually been made in this respect. In these circumstances, it is deemed more appropriate that the future Chair should make an evaluation of the contribution of the Support Unit to the GFMD.

Current funds suffice to fund the Support Unit until the end of 2009. The estimated 2010 budget for it amounts to US dollars 424,515, which will need to be covered by voluntary contributions.

VI. Steering Group and Friends of the Forum: strengthening their roles and related issues

The Operating Modalities stipulate that the Steering Group *“meets at regular intervals to consider and advise on all relevant policy issues pertaining to the smooth running of the Forum process”*. It consists of countries which should be *“firmly committed to offer sustained political and conceptual support”* and *“its membership shall be sufficient in number to provide efficiency, flexibility and transparency”*.

The Friends of the Forum *“acts as a sounding board, ensures that all States Members and Observers of the United Nations are kept abreast of Forum related developments and advises on the agenda, structure and format of each Forum meeting”*. It is open to all States Members of the UN and to the GFMD Observers.

These roles are not contested, but need to be understood more clearly and strengthened. The strategic and operational role of the Steering Group should be better articulated. Active participation of its members is considered a necessity. Issues considered to be of strategic importance are those that relate to the nature of the Forum as well as its future, its place in the global arena as trendsetter on migration and development issues, its relations with the GMG and with Civil Society at large. It may create thematic follow-up working groups, evaluate and advise on the Forum process and progress, and should be consulted on all other issues deemed to be important by the Chair.

Meetings of the Friends of the Forum are important in order to allow input into the process, to create ownership and to prepare the ground for implementation of the outcomes. The Friends of the Forum should continue to be the meeting of the whole, where all participating countries and observers can be informed about Forum-related developments, such as agenda, preparations, structure and format and where countries could also report about their implementation of GFMD recommendations.

Strengthening these roles should be reflected in the respective agendas and in the frequency and sequence of their meetings, while assuring the flow of information between Steering Group members and the Friends of the Forum.

Finally, the composition and renewal of the Steering Group should be organised in such a way as to allow it to play its role efficiently. Both these matters should be discussed further under future Chairs.

VII. Cross-sectoral nature of the Forum

It is important to keep in mind that the Forum is about migration **and** development and the interaction between both policy fields. There is a need, therefore, for policy-makers and practitioners responsible for these areas (and possibly other related policy areas such as employment, social affairs...) to be closely associated with the preparation process and to attend the meeting itself.

The Steering Group deemed it important that, during the preparatory process, expertise is drawn from different backgrounds, geographically as well as thematically. A number of reputed academics, international expert agencies, think-tanks and other Civil Society representatives have already been associated with the Forum, at the behest of Chairs, Roundtable co-chairs and the government teams. In view of the need for evidence-based discussions and the lack of “in-house analytical” capacity, the Forum may wish to draw upon the knowledge and expertise of the widest range of academics and experts. The suggestion was made to set up a database (or list) of experts to this effect which each Chair could use as it sees fit. The objective of such a tool would be to draw on the best in the different fields pertinent for the Forum, so that it is kept informed of the latest trends and has access to a wide range of qualitative and quantitative analyses.

VIII. GFMD Outcomes and Impact

The impact of GFMD outcomes is not easy to measure. However, the acknowledgement of the need for international policy dialogue and cooperation on issues considered sensitive, the advancing degree of coherence at national, regional and international levels on how to deal with migration and development, the changes in political thinking about the relationship between both policy fields, the creation of

new partnerships, new studies of good practices, increased networking among participants, as well as the impressive number of countries involved in the GFMD, all bear witness to the impact that the Forum is having on policy-making.

There are several types of outcomes: policy changes on the ground at national, regional and international levels; recommendations taken up by countries or other stakeholders; projects and initiatives at national, bilateral or multilateral level emerging from the GFMD discussions; new partnerships between governments and between governments and other stakeholders. Information about these outcomes is of strategic importance, since it will determine the degree to which the Forum usefully contributes to the creation of more effective policies at different levels. It is also important for the viability of the Forum itself.

Countries and observers are encouraged to inform the GFMD Support Unit about their follow-up to the Forum discussions, for it to be posted on the GFMD website. At each of its meetings, the GFMD could also devote an information session on progress made. In between GFMD meetings, the Friends of the Forum could also provide space for information sharing on implementation of outcomes.

Finally, international organisations have an important role to play in the follow-up of recommendations and outcomes of the GFMD. It was also suggested that, after the Athens meeting, a discussion takes place with the GMG on its involvement in the implementation of GFMD outcomes.

IX. Role of Focal points

In addition to their role of ensuring the liaison with the GFMD and coordinating the national preparation process for the GFMD, focal points are also important to ensure the continuity of the GFMD process and for enhancing national and international coherence in the areas of migration and development policies. Participants should make an effort to keep Chairs updated on their focal points, so that communication between the Chair and participants is not hampered.

X. Funding and budget

Looking at the Future of the Forum compels the Chair to raise the recurrent issue of funding.

To date, the chairing countries, with the generous support of other governments, international organisations and private foundations, have provided the bulk of GFMD financing. To ensure its continuity, considering especially the north/south chairmanship rotation system, it is important that the Forum budget reflects its informal character and that the organisation of the process is as cost-effective as possible.

It should further be envisaged to find predictable financial resources. The Chair believes that, to achieve this objective, the Forum would need (1) to develop a simple but transparent budget system and (2) to widen its donor base.

Concerning the establishment of a budget system, it was agreed that, as early as possible after being endorsed as the next Chair, the host country draws up a preliminary budget, indicating the part to be covered by the Chair and the part for which external funding is required. This budget should be circulated to all potential donors invited to pledge contributions.

To increase predictability, it was proposed that contributions should be announced one year ahead of the Forum meeting. These contributions could be channelled directly to the host government or to the GFMD special account managed by the Support Unit under the authority of the Chair-in-Office.

All of these issues should be kept under further consideration.

XI. Format

The legitimate expectations for better focused discussions and concrete outcomes have to be reconciled with the understandable desire of countries and regions to use the Forum as a platform to express their views and submit their contributions to the global migration and development debate. This last objective should, however, not be pursued at the expense of the first one, and creative ways should be explored to reconcile both.

Several suggestions have been made to organise the general debate in a way that is in keeping with the informality of the Forum, which operates under Chatham rules, such as for general statements to be posted in writing, the general debate to be abolished, the general debate to be replaced with a free discussion among all Heads of Delegation on policy-related issues, and finally for the general debate to be held UN-style with the reading out of statements.

Future Chairs may wish to experiment to find the best formula.