

National and Regional Authorizing Officers of the Caribbean Region meet in Suriname

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A delegation from the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) Group of States led by Henrique Banze, Assistant Secretary General of the Macroeconomics, Development finance and Intra-ACP Programming was in Paramaribo, Suriname from 28 to 30 May to carry out the last in the series of seminars with the National and Regional Authorising Officers across the six ACP regions.

The meeting aimed to provide a platform for the main stakeholders involved in the ACP-EU development cooperation in the Caribbean to provide an update of the programming and implementation of their National Indicative programmes (NIPs) and the Regional Indicative Programme (RIP), discuss critical issues and provide recommendations to improve the management of European Development Funds (EDF) resources.

Surinamese Minister of Finance, the Honourable Gillmore Hoeftraad, also the National Authorizing Officer (NAO) of Suriname, chaired the meeting of ACP EDF National and Regional Authorizing Officers of the Caribbean Region. Representatives from the government, parliament, the private sector and civil society organizations from ACP Caribbean member countries participated in the meeting as well as representatives from the Cariforum Secretariat, the European Union (EU) and the European Investment Bank (EIB).

During the meeting recommendations were made regarding the implementation of the projects financed through 11th EDF, which is jointly funded by the European Union (EU) and the ACP Group of States. There was also an exchange of views on the ongoing Post-Cotonou negotiations between the ACP Group of States and the European Union.

The meeting ended with the adoption of the Conclusion Report, which set out the points for attention and recommendations of the meeting. The main observations and conclusions arising from the Caribbean NAO/RAO meetings included:

- The implementation of projects uses complex rules and procedures that impede rapid implementation

- Long delays in decision-making processes on the part of the EU, with some decisions being made only in Brussels. The issue of long waiting times also applies to countries that do not have an EU office in their country;
- Capacity building is required for NAO officials and EU Delegations, as well as private sector and community organizations in EU rules and procedures;
- Despite the cooperation, participants were concerned by several unilateral decisions taken by the EU, specifically mentioning the "blacklisting" of the Caribbean countries on the EU tax lists with all the negative consequences for these countries. This requires continuous joint consultation between the member countries and the EU;
- The prejudicial nature of the differentiation policy for small-island middle income States, which are vulnerable to climate change and natural disasters which has resulted in a drastic reduction of their NIPs under EDF 11 compared to EDF 10.
- ACP Secretariat provided information on the implementation of Intra-ACP Cooperation under the 11th EDF and the best means to access the available fund € 600 million. The meeting proposed the establishment of a regional private sector association, in close consultation with other initiatives in the region including the CARICOM Secretariat
- The EIB presented the possibilities for both the government and the private sector and was open to creative solutions to serve the local private sector.

The findings and outcomes of the meeting are being documented. They will be combined with the findings from the other regions and contribute to the ongoing ACP-EU negotiations for the Post-Cotonou period in Brussels. According to ASG Banze, "This was a very useful meeting as it gives us an insight into how we can improve the assistance given to the NAO and RAOs in the Caribbean region. We appreciate the willingness of our colleagues to share their experiences and recommendations with us."

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