



## **Italian Pact for the Fight against Poverty**

**Key elements for an Italian national strategy in the fight against poverty based on sustainable and integrated development and focusing on human rights.**

### **Introduction**

In view of the political elections on 9 April, the CINI-organizations have decided to send some strong and clear messages to the political parties on the theme of the fight against poverty to actively follow-up the Millenium Declaration undersigned by all the world's countries.

At a European level, popular interest in the fight against poverty and consequent commitments by national governments is obvious. In Italy, which is also one of the founders of the European Community, the fight against poverty tends to be considered by the political parties as of little electoral importance and is therefore marginalised. But the February 2005 Eurobarometer *Attitudes towards development aid* contains data which should force the political parties into a rethink. This data is confirmed, and possibly even strengthened, by a research carried out by Millward Brown on behalf of the organizations belonging to CINI this year. According to these findings, **the issue of the fight against poverty in the world must become a distinguishing element of the political parties and may influence the electoral choice of voters.**

With the direct support of **over one million citizens** and having verified the wide-ranging interest of themes concerning the fight against the poverty among the Italian voters, we intend to aim this Pact at anyone with government responsibilities, along three distinct lines:

- the **institutional set up** required
- **resources** allocated by the State
- strategy and **coordination** between the various **themes** and **actors**

We are calling upon the political parties to clarify their willingness to action, underlining that:

- the **fight against poverty**, as regards the sustainability of social and economic development, not intended merely as the management of resources for ODA, must be at the centre of our initiatives;
- the fight against poverty is a question of **international justice**, of policies to **re-balance access to resources and opportunities** and cannot be dealt with on the basis of the logic of "concessions" from the richer States or countries to poorer countries;
- a fight for justice can only begin with the **recognition of rights and duties**, favouring the legitimate claim by poor communities and the recognition by richer countries;



- action based on the recognition of rights and duties must depend on an **agreement between generations** based on the protection of human rights, especially the rights of children, adolescents and handicapped people. Therefore, action is also axed on considerations of **environmental sustainability**, promoting **positive policies for peace and integration between peoples and their cultures**. **Biodiversity**, the extraordinary richness of life on Earth, must be protected, by maintaining the vitality of natural surroundings, and declaring “water a common good”. In other words, one must act looking well beyond the protection of current trade interests;
- in any case, the **international agreements signed by Italy must be respected** to the letter and in the right spirit.

Certain political parties have shown interest in seriously dealing with the question of Italy’s role in contributing towards the achievement of the Millenium Objectives, according to what agreed by this country at an international level. However, the willingness to **invest resources and the best possible efforts of the country in credible action** towards both poor countries and peoples and Italian citizens must be assessed yet.

The Italian Coordination of International Networks (CINI) group is decidedly intent on achieving a **radical renewal of the “cooperation system”**.

Therefore, CINI has decided, in this pre-election phase, not to make specific reference to possible amendments to the legislation currently in force as regards cooperation (Law 49/87) or other draft reforms currently being discussed. Neither does CINI intend to limit its action to regulatory discussion, as proposing laws is the primary duty of the political parties and Parliament.

We would like to launch a constructive and substantial partnership with the political parties and institutions, a “pact” involving the new Parliament, and consequently the Government, local bodies, the business world and even individual citizens. The Pact must lead to a real **refounding of the Italian system to fight poverty** and not simply to legislative reform (which is in any case hoped for by many parties, but as yet undefined).

We would also like to make it clear that, while we appreciate the serious and productive discussions which will be opened in the next few months, we do not want to comment upon any appointment of officials who will be called upon to fill positions of responsibility. The people called upon to **fill positions of responsibility for Development Cooperation must be the result of clear innovation proposals** and not the result of political belonging. The “system” with its current components (in government, public administration and also in positions affecting associations) has basically failed. A real step forward will be difficult unless the tenor of the politics we know changes.



### **The reasons for a discussion**

The promotion of an **Italian Pact for the Fight against Poverty** is a requirement driven not only by the “age” of Law 49 and the lowest ever level of ODA, but also by:

- *recent events that have modified the regulatory framework* (the role of the Prime Minister and the Civil Protection Department, the dominant role of the Ministry of the Economy, choices on the allocation of funds and emergencies such as those in Iraq);
- *changes to the international political scenario* (European opposition to Italy’s policies concerning tied aid, the prevalence of security imposed by the use or threatening the use of force and strong resistance to the defence of trade interests in important sectors such as farming).

This, and other aspects, imply the re-thinking of the whole idea of cooperation. There is an urgent need for overall reflection (and also, finally, action) in order to change the role of international cooperation. This line of thought cannot simply be focused on the regulations concerning official development assistance (ODA). One must think in overall terms, leading to a “country system” that is capable of acting in order to achieve the Millenium Development Goals (MDGs) and involves each actors in its own sphere of competence, all the actors involved and other international commitments concerning worldwide development policies.

NGOs, such as ours, regularly communicate with the hundreds of thousands of citizens which support them, being focal actors to promote dialogue with those interested in international cooperation. Our organizations have the duty to inform the public on the real situation as regards institutional commitments in this country.

Commitments concerning political dialogue naturally stem from our duty towards our supporters and our responsibilities towards the Southern partners with which we cooperate.

As they are active at an international level, the organizations belonging to CINI intend to illustrate to Italian political interlocutors – in a serene and constructive manner – the significant choices they make at a worldwide level, affecting 100 countries throughout the world.

We imagine that Italian political parties really do intend to discuss, absorb and also actively operate with the major NGOs, which in turn work with the Government in policy making in many international scenarios. We believe that there must be a significant connection in this sense, which must feed off the reciprocal trust that derives, in addition to the proven reliability of our bodies, from continuous work in making specific suggestions on the themes, approaches and practices in which we are involved. In this sense, our common cooperation must not be taken to mean a loss of specificity, but as an inestimable richness that each individual makes available to this network, Italian civil society and institutions.



As Italian citizens, we must take as our starting point the embarrassment to which we, within our own networks, are subjected to every day when having to explain the current lack of political willingness on the themes we are actively involved in, which, in truth, was also true of the previous two governments. This embarrassment is greater when we are called upon to explain the absence of coordination between central public administrations, the absence of real parliamentary debate and the absence of a single strategy for the country which could bring coherence to trade, environmental, peace and public aid for development policies.

A situation such as this is no longer sustainable either for this country or for the community in which we attempt to work each year. Therefore, we are addressing Italian politics as both electors and citizens who are exposed to various systems of discussion with the international “public”, which is incredulous of the scarcity of resources, and even more so of the lack of active contribution by Italy in the definition of adequate policies (in many cases, but obviously with exceptions).

We are people who, in addition to promoting an intrinsically internationalist policy, are fully aware of our responsibilities as Italian citizens and recongise the need for this country to recover its guiding role in certain well defined and manageable areas. Due to this, correct, focus on Italy’s prestige, or at least reliability, at an international level, and for reasons concerning our mission, we would like to contribute towards rectifying the current state of affairs concerning Italian contributions towards achieving the Millenium Development Goals.



## POINT 1: INSTITUTIONAL SET-UP

We have followed with interest (albeit with a certain difficulty, given the uncertainty of the processes of policy making) the positions taken and public statements by the leadership, as regards both the Union and the Casa delle Libertà. We are in favour of what appears to be a well-founded fact: the **willingness expressed by both parties to give cooperation real political representation at a Ministerial level.**

We believe that, although there is a lack of formulas being defined, which are still little inclined towards fully outlining intentions, this is a significant step forward. In fact, without **representation in Parliament**, it has been proven to be impossible for the theme of the fight against poverty to achieve the status it deserves and find a place on Government agendas.

In Italy, our activities interact with those of other subjects, such as trade unions, campaigns, movements and networks of local bodies, and, for the very reason that our range of action covers all fields, we cannot limit our relations with institutions simply to financial relations, as is the case with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (which is even less significant in its function as a donor). Other Ministries are frequently our direct interlocutors, especially those responsible for the Economy, Production Activities, Agriculture, Health, Environment, Internal Affairs, Welfare and Equal Opportunities. We thus believe that they should be included in producing a reform which must necessarily provide more wide-ranging links than those simply concerning cooperation. Therefore, we believe it is essential to be able to interact, as regards the subjects of reform, not only with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs but with all the Ministries and other state and local institutions involved in the themes which are part of. This will be insisted upon during political dialogue.

Therefore, we believe that representation in Parliament is the minimum prerequisite, but this must, however, be substantial; the following will be necessary:

- aiming, before the elections, for the creation of a *Minister for Sustainable Development and the Fight against Poverty worldwide*;
- identifying the person most suitable to fill this role as an *authoritative person with strong political influence and representation*;
- recognising to the Minister *real control on all the resources destined by the State for international cooperation* (currently dispersed among Foreign Affairs, Environment, Treasury, Prime Minister's Office, Equal Opportunities...);
- the immediate setting up of a *path for complete legislative redefinition to be completed within 12 months*, leading to not only a reform of cooperation, but the definition of the efforts to be made by the country, promoting the integration between subjects (parliament, government, local bodies, NGOs, social



parties, existing or new specialised bodies...) and recognising that Italy is an integral part in its turn of global efforts, and that therefore it cannot act solely on the basis of the logic of national interest.

It must be highlighted that the complete redefinition of the system we are asking for **must not involve a logic of defending the interests of the sector** and therefore the questions we will outline are presented in the interest of the system and not of the NGOs (much less of the NGOs belonging to CINI).

Once the pre-conditions for real political discussion outlined above, the organizations belonging to CINI must also produce certain elements for operational work we foresee for the next few months. This work can only begin with the understanding of the **subjects recognised by non-government cooperation**.

The CINI NGOs conform to Law 49/87, and have requested such recognition not only to obtain direct access to official funds, but rather so that their network is recognised as an important interlocutor, and in order to interact with Institutions from the policy making viewpoint. This is for reasons that are more than formal.

As occurs at a European level, NGOs must not become service agencies which on one hand end up being financially controlled by the Government (as regards the remainder of its foreign policy), but on the other are often incapable of making a significant contribution to the basic strategic choices of the Government itself. This would lead to the renouncement of the **primary function of the NGOs, which is not merely an operational service**, but must be of stimulus to Europe and third party countries.

The NGOs belonging to CINI, stimulating and complementing other Italian NGOs involved in the country system, are therefore interested in thinking about how to valorise the quality elements of non-government cooperation, and especially in the definition of the terms and conditions for political dialogue between civil society and other institutions. They would also like to think about the forms aimed at **favouring the operations of NGOs in civil society, also through forms of supporting self-financing**.

We also believe that the “new subjects” which may be involved in development cooperation in the future should also be involved in the debate, including equal trade networks, movements for the defence of human rights, environmentalist groups, those involved in micro-finance and any others that have in recent years proved capable of proposing and managing innovative proposals in the field of cooperation, which has changed radically since the implementation of Law 49/87.

In this sense, although underlining their diversity, we also believe that the role of **local bodies** should also be recognised, not so much as subjects active in providing complementary funds to those from national



public cooperation, but rather as **subjects capable of facilitating the transmission of international justice values in the territory in question and implementing territorial policies included in national plans.**

## POINT 2: RESOURCES ALLOCATED BY THE STATE

What we take for granted (greater political representation in institutions, acknowledgement of the existence and social and political importance of actors other than traditional ones...) must be substantiated through the **total effective increase of the public resources** made available through the budget law. It must be reiterated that, in addition to statements in this regard by the political exponents of both parties, this country is officially committed to making ODA 0.51% of the GDP by 2010 and 0.7% by 2015.

This commitment will only be effective and credible if:

- the *intermediate deadlines for increasing the ODA/GDP ratio* are respected from the outset without delay (allocating 2.8 billion in new resources in 2006 for 2007, with an annual increase of 1.5 billion in real terms, to reach 0.51% ODA/GDP in allocations alone by 2010).
- *in achieving the 0.51% target, one does not consider the remission of debt, although positive, (which responds to a different logic) or technical assistance provided by Ministries other than that for Foreign Affairs (such as technical innovation) which favours the positive development of commercial inter-relation capabilities, but does not aim primarily at reducing extreme poverty.*
- it is *genuinely public and not founded on either special additional taxes or campaigns for gathering funds incorrectly aimed by institutions at citizens, which leave the initiative of goodwill to the latter, renouncing the State's choices for the allocation of its own resources.*

This commitment will not in any way have been kept if Italian resources are allocated by the State claiming the merit for the choice to allocate them to the fight against poverty before country and international diplomacy when this is also due (as in the last two legislatures) to the public gathering of funds.

It is inevitable that the autonomous resources which the organizations belonging to CINI mobilise and commit to "Italian" activities in international cooperation are currently greater than those invested annually by Italian Cooperation for development activities through NGOs.

Therefore, these resources represent a volume of aid that is complementary to public aid. In our view, this must be coherent from the political and methodological viewpoint and, although completely safeguarding non-government autonomy, must be intended as created a



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“system for the promotion of sustainable development” which is currently lacking in this country.

In recent time, as in the case of the tsunami, many citizens made donations which were then managed by bodies and institutions other than the State, with methods which created obvious superimpositions of competences and competition with the sectors traditionally involved. The public management of private funds was basically implemented, which must be clarified and requires at least the definition of specific and transparent procedures as regards both the gathering of funds and their allocation.

We believe it is not only opportune but dutiful to avoid superimposition and are looking with interest at mechanisms aimed at bringing the deductibility of donations to the level of other European countries to provide incentives for private and corporate donations and (still taking Europe as a model) increase fiscal facilitations/exemptions for NGOs, thus recognising the important social role of our sector.

This should not be difficult, in the light of practices in other countries in which the State allocates unconditional funds to NGOs equivalent to the amount of aid that each of them gathers from the public. In particular, we believe that the data available indicates how the mandate the Italians are willing to give to the new parliament will quicken the finalisation of efforts such as those made for the 5/° on income taxes. These efforts must be made by valorising the potential that the organizations involved in the fight against poverty have to mobilise interest and economic resources.

To do this, the basic requirements for operating in the third sector must be more clearly and transparently defined, and must include criteria of transparency, autonomy, quality of services provided, respect for the beneficiaries of projects and their donors and the assessment of the initiatives implemented.

We look with caution to the creation of “quality certification” promoted by second level groups because they often tend to produce mechanisms of “belonging” rather than being based on objective data, such as quality standards and the work of external certifiers. However, we believe it is vital that the State really involve the most significant actors in any regulatory efforts, also in the context of self-regulation being promoted by the State.

Unfortunately, as regards the name NGO in the broad sense, there are currently no shared identification criteria or at least the criteria are nearly always based on a logic of analysing obligations or fiscal facilitations or relations with institutions, rather than objective criteria concerning the real nature of the subjects involved



### POINT 3: COORDINATION BETWEEN THE VARIOUS THEMES AND ACTORS

As regards the coherence of Italian policies concerning the fight against poverty with commitments undertaken during international summits and the European framework, we believe that a significant return to **multilateralism** is necessary, firstly in respect of the European framework and secondly to ensure that national policies and those of countries interested in our efforts are complementary.

Once the debate on the structure(s) which will deal with defining and carrying out a public strategy concerning the pursuit of the Millenium Objectives (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Agencies, Prime Minister's Office, Ministry for Cooperation, Civil Protection...) is over, we believe it would be useful to set up a **permanent round table** where the non-government organizations can hold discussions with the relevant structures concerning not only projects but also coherence and integration between policies.

For example, bearing in mind that at a European level, that of coherence is one of the first four key objectives within the strategy, Italy should integrate this element in the process of re-thinking its policies on the fight against poverty, making the promotion of human rights and environmental protection transversal elements.

As another example, MDG 7 should be recalled: "Ensure environmental sustainability: integrate the principles of sustainable development in national policies and programmes and stop the destruction of environmental resources". This provides a clear indication of how only integration between themes can determine the success of policies for the fight against poverty in all countries.

The conservation of the environment and development are linked in a complex manner and aid for development, the cancellation of debt and adequate trade policies may have a profound impact in ensuring that the conditions required to avoid the social and economic dislocation linked to poverty are respected. Despite the ambitious political commitments undertaken at a European level and the recognition of the importance of a healthy environment and services for the ecosystem to alleviate poverty, environmental problems are still not given the necessary importance in national plans for the achievement of the Millenium Objectives and the lack of inter-connection with international agreements is embarrassing (and inevitably has an impact on the future of the world's populations, especially the poorer ones).

In terms of coherence between policies, or more often lack of commitment towards coherence, other examples are the positions to be taken on Global Fund to fight AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria, humanitarian emergencies, education and the digital divide (follow up to Dakar/Palermo and the G8), the relations between international agencies for the right to food and rural development based in Rome, preparation for participation in the WTO, relations with embassies,



Italian business in the countries in which we operate and the social responsibilities of the enterprises that implement this. By listening to views and valorising civil society experience, we can do a lot better than this country has managed to do under the last two governments.

Naturally, the CINI organizations do not intend suggesting any type of exclusive relations to be set up by law, but they believe that the campaigns, coordination and round tables already existing in the world of Italian associationism and cooperation should be valorised and included within a unifying and pluralist framework in which no-one is more important than anyone else, but everyone contributes.

We would like to point out the necessity for clarity, especially as regards the management of the widespread solidarity that has led to thousands of citizens making contributions in favour of the populations affected by the tsunami. We do not want to discuss the management by Civil Protection of emergency and reconstruction projects (although we will do shortly in a specific document), but it must be underlined how, in the absence of clear and univocal structures, the superimposition of subjects is inevitable, with consequent difficulties for the NGOs interested in discussion and therefore, in conclusion, a situation in which the populations affected risk paying the price. We would like to draw from this example the lesson that the multiplication of bodies, in the absence of strong coordination, does not appear to be the solution to the rationalisation of commitments in the field of international cooperation.

Therefore, we take it for granted, and are not prepared to hold back on this, that:

- a Minister should undertake and be recognised a role of inter-ministerial coordination that enables coherence between the actions of various State administrations to be achieved. This Minister must regularly report to parliament on the actions of the country (and not a single Ministry) as regards achieving the Millenium Objectives;
- this Ministry (or similar structure within an existing Ministry) should convene round tables for the coordination on a thematic basis of each of the Objectives (Italy as a whole, and not each separate Ministry, must approve specific actions and financing for the fight against famine, AIDS, disability, women's rights and so on);
- the credibility of national strategies should pass through a continuous and real consultative process, based on competences and not belonging;
- the Minister should make an immediate distinction between the competences and resources allocated to those who must deal with aid during emergencies and those who should ensure the conditions for the eradication of poverty (which cannot occur in the context of an emergency).



The CINI organizations, having identified a strong popular mandate in this sense originating in the countries in which they operate, but also from the Italian electorate, ask that political parties undertake commitments concerning the pact outlined in this document. Undertaking a connecting role between the interests of Italian society and the political choices outlining the work of the institutions, the CINI organizations are committed to informing their supporters and the general public on the progress (or lack of progress) promoted by the coalition which will take the responsibility of governing the country for the next five years

Marco De Ponte,  
Secretary-General ActionAid International

Ilaria Borletti  
President AMREF Italia

Mario Angi  
President CBM Italia ONLUS

Valerio Neri  
Director-General Save the Children Italia

Raffaele K. Salinari  
President Terre des Hommes Italia

Michele Candotti  
Secretary-General WWF Italia