

Articles from the civil society commenting Accra High Level Forum August 2008

1. What should CSOs expect from the Accra High Level Forum?

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In the first week of September, more than 800 representatives of donors, developing country governments and civil society organisations will gather in Accra, Ghana, for the Third High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness (September 2nd to 4th). A civil society parallel Aid Effectiveness Forum will bring together more than 400 CSOs from August 30th to September 1st to discuss and finalise CSO recommendations for the High Level Forum (HLF).

Since January 2007, CSO networks, including Reality of Aid Network, Social Watch, CIVICUS, Alliance 2015 and the Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID), among others, have worked in an International CSO Steering Group (ISG) to coordinate CSO analysis, proposals and plans for the HLF. The ISG maintains a web site, www.betteraid.org, as a portal for CSO initiatives on aid effectiveness, including a Policy Paper signed onto by more than 350 CSOs on aid and development effectiveness reform. The ISG have been meeting with the Working Party on Aid Effectiveness, based at the OECD DAC, setting out CSO concerns and proposals for the Accra HLF.

At the last High Level Forum, held in Paris in March 2005, donors and governments signed onto a five-year plan for reform of aid practices. The Paris Declaration is organised around five principles for aid effectiveness – country ownership, alignment to country priorities, harmonisation of the terms for aid, management of aid for result, and mutual accountability for these results – with related goals for action.

The Accra High Level Forum will be reviewing progress on these commitments, but equally important, the Forum may also establish an agenda for deepening these reforms over the next two years, leading to a successor Declaration to be agreed in 2011.

CSOs welcomed the Paris Declaration and its principles, but many question its narrow and limited focus on reform of aid delivery – the efficiency of moving dollars from donor accounts to those of governments in developing countries. CSO experience of aid on the ground raises questions whether much has actually changed in aid practices, pointing to weak commitments to untie aid, continued high numbers of policy conditions attached to aid, and limited use of developing country systems. They have called for deeper and more far-reaching aid reform and its measurement. The only real test of the effectiveness of aid is its development impact – real changes in the lives and rights of millions of people affected by poverty and inequality. Whether donors and governments will deliver on these critical areas remains an open question.

The signs are not good. When donors and governments come together in Accra to measure their progress, for example, there is not one single indicator that explicitly relates aid reform measures to improvements in human development, in gender equality and women's rights, or in the ability of people to claim their rights.

CSOs have expressed deep concern about the ambition for reform demonstrated in the draft outcomes for the Accra HLF, the Accra Agenda for Action (AAA), that have been circulating for comment. CSOs will be promoting in Accra specific proposals for aid reform that will result in real changes in the effectiveness of aid for developing countries and people living in poverty:

- Adopt democratic and local ownership in which people's participation enriches donor/government practices of aid alignment, harmonisation, managing for results and mutual accountability,
- Eliminate the use of imposed policy conditionality,
- Reform the practice of technical assistance as a demand-driven resource for developing country counterparts,
- Make growing aid budgets more predictable and aligned to priorities determined by people who are the intended beneficiaries and affected by aid,
- Creating robust mechanisms for accountability served by increased aid transparency,
- Establish development indicators for aid effectiveness based on impacts for poverty reduction, gender equality, human rights and social justice, and
- Set a visionary agenda for the 2011 HLF that addresses the need for an equitable multilateral aid architecture, one that includes CSOs as equal development partners and enshrines human rights, social justice, gender equality and environment at the heart of aid effectiveness.

CSOs have engaged effectively in the processes leading to Accra, facilitated by the Advisory Group on Civil Society and Aid Effectiveness, which has made a number of helpful proposals recognising the distinct contributions of CSOs as development actors in their own right (see its Synthesis of Findings and Recommendations at http://www.ccic.ca/e/docs/002_aid_2008-04-16_ag_synthesis_and_recs.pdf).

CSOs have been challenged that they also have a responsibility to address their own effectiveness as donors and development practitioners. What principles and practices affect and improve their legitimacy and credibility as development actors? Northern and southern based CSOs will be meeting in Paris prior to the Accra HLF to launch a global CSO process to clarify and agree on principles and guidelines for CSO effectiveness over the next two years, which will include dialogue with donors and governments on enabling conditions for CSO effectiveness.

CSOs have high expectations of the 800 donors and government officials who will gather in Accra in early September. The High Level Forum provides a unique opportunity to set in motion ambitious actions for meaningful aid reforms. It may also be the place where donors and governments fail to seize the momentum with proposals that deepen the Paris Declaration. The CSOs gathered in the parallel CSO Forum and the 80 accredited CSO delegates to the HLF, while very critical of progress to date, will be pushing for real aid reform, measures for aid effectiveness that give opportunity to citizens of developing countries to reclaim their democratic mandate to control their future development.

2. Reviewing Paris: Notes on CSOs and Aid Effectiveness¹

Rakesh Rajani, East Africa Citizen Agency & Public Accountability Initiative, 6 June 2008

The interest in aid effectiveness is timely. We know from our own personal experiences, from the facts of chronic impoverishment, millions still not reading, women still dying from childbirth, and increasing inequalities that the aid business is not working. Responsibility applies to all of us – governments, donors and civil society alike – and often I sense that we CSOs are the least effective of them all. So I celebrate attention to aid effectiveness, because implicit in it is recognition that things are not well, and that we must get them right.

But with all the attention the Paris Declaration has received, it is easy to lose sight of a simple point – that *the purpose of aid effectiveness is not aid effectiveness*, but households escaping impoverishment, and people realising concrete changes in their lives. Paris is only the *plumbing*, the purpose is water and to have *thirsts quenched*. The problem with donors and governments is that they seem to have lost sight of the purpose of aid – so that countless months are spent drawing up assistance strategies and performance matrices which measure the extent to which aid is harmonised or the percentage which is provided in budget support, *as if these in themselves were the goals of development*

A useful way to approach the Paris Declaration may be to put it aside for a moment, start with the core purposes of development, and then work backwards to what kind of plumbing we need. For many of us this would be ordinary people having the ways and means, the options, to live a good life, to get the basic services they need, to secure livelihoods, to have voice and to have their rights respected. To make things happen, rather than just have things happen to them. In short, 'citizen agency'.

Citizen agency is not only the purpose – or the *ends* – of development and democracy, it is also its most effective *means*. People who are in good health and well educated, confident and secure, able to access opportunities within a level playing field, enjoy access information and express themselves – are the people who can make things happen, fight injustice and unfairness, thrive. Historically we find that all the important changes – women's equality, stopping slavery, ending apartheid, respect for gays and lesbians, concern for the environment – have been *driven* not by declarations in Paris or New York or Accra, or government schemes or NGO projects, but by socio-political movements of capable, committed and courageous people. The focus of our efforts, and for the Paris review for that matter, should be how do we enable capable, committed and courageous people to do their thing, to unleash their potential.

When I think in these terms an immediate observation is how the business of development is so out-of-touch from the reality of people's lives – it is as if there are two separate worlds – lived reality on this side, and the aid industry on that side. The connection between the two is hardly organic. In Tanzania, when I have asked ordinary people to define development, often I am told that 'it is to be sensitised and get an allowance'. I cannot imagine a more effective way to erase citizen agency. Demands for an allowance makes sense where people see no intrinsic value in development – *you see it is a game that brings money, and you see that people running the game are making money from it, so you try to get your piece of it too* We offer sitting allowances as a bribe for people to show-up to our events, because otherwise they wouldn't, and we wouldn't be able to fill our boxes to show success. I am increasingly convinced that development, whether done by governments, donors or NGOs, however well-meaning, is too often all too corrupting.

My pessimism about the aid industry is surpassed by my enthusiasm for what happens on the 'lived realities' side of the column. When people are not 'doing development' sitting in workshops being sensitised and drawing up recommendations that go nowhere, there is suffering but there is also wonderful stuff happening. Recently in Uganda I learned of powerful debates on FM radio stations – where people discuss what matters to them, use meager resources to send in an SMS, rally against the corrupt politicians and say what should be done. This has enabled people's voice to be heard and fostered public debate in a manner that is historically unprecedented. Or in Tanzania we see an equally unprecedented public stir about the use of natural resources, that is driven by and that drives the media and Parliament to uncover more of the truth. The events have led to the Governor of Central Bank being fired, the Prime Minister resigning, the cabinet dissolved and in the reshuffle seven big ministers losing their posts. Mining contracts with most powerful companies are being reviewed. Stolen billions

¹ These remarks were presented virtually at a CSO consultation in the Netherlands organised by Hivos on 5 June 2008

from the Central Bank are being recovered. A powerful ex-minister is under investigation for corruption. Donors have been forced to amend how they play their game. And most importantly, among the people, there is a clamoring for transparency and accountability, and an understanding that government must work for them, which can no longer be suppressed. These powerful currents have little to do with the aid business; they have been driven by other forces. We need to connect with those forces.

So what does all this mean for the Paris Declaration? First, we need to recognise the high level of our irrelevance, of development as we know it and do it. Second, we need to understand that the aid architecture and our work will become relevant to the extent to which it can enable citizens to connect with the public domain, to find ways to make government and public sphere their own, to have aspirations and pursue their dreams, practically.

How? Here are three suggestions:

- *Practical information for everyone:* Information is indeed power – not the abstract supply-driven kind, but information that is concrete, practical, user-friendly. By definition this has to be demand driven and responsive. This is not national enrolment rates, but about who is going to my school and who isn't, and how that compares with the neighboring schools and schools in the capital city. It is not pre-packaged notes on local government policy, but practical stuff on how my council can be a vehicle to improve my community and how I can get rid of a corrupt leader. It is about ordinary people having the ability to search whatever they want and getting the information in a quick, reliable and affordable manner. Imagine Googling using SMS from your cell phone.
- *Quality and independent media:* Mass media done well – newspapers, TV and in particular radio – can get information to people, create space for citizen views to be heard and debated, and hold governments publicly to account. Despite many constraints, media is doing an amazing job in many countries. Amartya Sen has famously declared that no country with a free press has had a famine. So what's really important is to keep media free and independent (from undue state or commercial interests), to help it have real quality and reach, and to have it reflect diverse voices. Investing in a pluriform and free media is probably the single most important thing one can do to facilitate change.
- *Citizens monitoring government:* Governments are meant to do things for and on behalf of the people, but most people have little means to know or track what the government is actually doing. Access to information and independent media will help; but in addition we need to develop a fabric and tools for citizen monitoring of public bodies and public resources. In recent years, through the International Budget Project (IBP) and others, we have seen some terrific work on analyzing budgets and tracking revenues and expenditures – so that people know how public monies are allocated, distributed in practice, and used. This work needs to be expanded and extended to see whether people get services, who benefits and who is excluded, and how it changes lives. This is not a technocratic exercise, but one where people really can know what they are interested in, discuss among themselves, and find practical recourse to addressing concerns. A basic indicator of human progress has to be the extent to which people can monitor what their governments are doing, follow-up, and have the power to do something about it.

This conception defines development in the contestation and cooperation between citizens and public institutions. Information is the lubricant that helps fuel and massage this political dynamic, and one that, because it *puts matters in the public domain*, exposes matters and allows citizens to exercise influence over the state. When private, individuals are only as powerful as their wealth or personal connection, but when public the equation can dramatically change. The true work of civil society is not technical or capacity building (that awful phrase) or handouts or lobbying or advocacy, but to lubricate the ways and means in which citizens can exercise power.

The problem with the Paris Declaration offers a managerial set of technocratic solutions when the core reason development isn't effective is not poor management or lack of harmonisation or high transaction costs or lack of mutual accountability, but because the political dynamic between states and the citizenry is warped, and public institutions are either captured or dysfunctional or too weak to be a corrective. As a set of management tools, I have little problem with Paris. *But what it seeks to take on and solve has its roots in something far more fundamental and ambitious.*

For CSOs it would be a mistake to just complain about the Paris Declaration as ignoring civil society or taking away money from it or giving too much or too little control to donors, or worse moan that we were not involved in the process. These constraints aside, several aspects of Paris make sense to me in the plumbing of supporting governments. Moreover, it has been argued (and the donors in Tanzania have agreed) to apply the Paris principles for support to strategic CSOs – it certainly makes the job of an NGO head easier to have only one proposal, one budget, one set of reports and one set of processes, all designed by itself, to use with its donors. But the core point is that all this getting the plumbing right does not solve the challenge of whether any of us are doing the right thing.

The Paris review offers us at least two opportunities: One of them is to situate the Paris plumbing in terms of its larger context of accountability to citizens. The other is to take a hard look in the mirror. Many of us would be far more relevant and effective if we got our houses in order than rally against the powers that be that can brush us aside anyway. If we had the ability to inform and be informed by citizens, at scale, and transform ourselves into resources for individual and collective citizen action, those capable, committed and courageous people – the organic stuff not more workshops and allowances – then the powers would have to pay attention to citizens. This is the stuff of enabling citizens to claim and reclaim their democratic mandate and *constitute the powers that be in themselves*. In the elegant slogan of the Kenyan-American US Democratic Party presidential candidate, we will know we have arrived when the citizens know and feel that “we are the ones we have been waiting for”.

3. Implementing the Paris Declaration: Implications for the promotion of women's rights and gender equality

Excerpts from the paper "Implementing the Paris Declaration: implications for the promotion of women's rights and gender equality", from Cecilia Alemany, Nerea Craviotto, Fernanda Hopenhaym, with Ana Lidia Fernández-Layos, Cindy Clark and Sarah Rosenhek, January 2008. More at <http://www.awid.org/>

The Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness (PD) aims to reform the delivery and management of aid. The main goal of aid effectiveness is framed as poverty reduction and the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The PD is said to be unique in that it establishes overarching principles to redefine the relationship between donor and recipient countries. The practical implication of these commitments is a shift in the mechanisms or 'modalities' that channel aid.

Despite changes in how aid is delivered to partner governments, civil society organisations contend that the Paris Declaration remains an unjust and unequal framework for understanding and implementing the aid effectiveness agenda. Among other concerns, the Paris Declaration is gender blind, and as a result, fundamentally flawed.

An analysis of the five principles of the PD raises the following concerns:

- **Ownership:** country ownership of development programmes should not be equated with "government" ownership. Citizens, including women's organisations, should be involved in the formulation and delivery of development policies and programmes.
- **Alignment:** as donors "align" aid with national budgets, and with aid mainly being channelled from government to government, if gender equality is not an explicit national priority (and in many cases it is not), will it be entirely excluded from donor agendas as well? There is also a risk that fewer aid resources will be available to support the work of CSOs, and particularly women organisations.
- **Harmonisation:** it is easy to see how "harmonising" donor policies could lead to a strengthening of conditionalities, such as the imposition of certain economic and trade policies. There is also a risk that harmonisation will result in too narrow a framework (based on the policies of the least progressive donor) and thus a reduction of the development agenda.
- **Managing for results:** human and women's rights principles and the legal obligations of donors and governments should be used to determine the effectiveness of policies and approaches – particularly their impact on vulnerable groups.
- **Mutual Accountability:** the principle of mutual accountability, where donor countries, recipient countries and citizens should be able to hold each other to account for their development commitments, can only be truly possible where strong, independent, and well resourced civil society and women's rights organisations exist.

The PD relies on a range of "new" aid modalities, including budget support, sector wide approaches, poverty reduction strategy papers, basket funding and joint assistance strategies. Across the board, these modalities raise concerns in terms of the possibilities for real civil society participation in influencing development plans and funding for development, limited capacities to play an informed role in shaping and monitoring budgets, persistent conditionalities imposed by donors that override national development interests, and fears that "country ownership" in contexts of lukewarm political commitment to gender equality will translate in far-reduced donor support for women's rights.

Civil society organisations have expressed serious concerns about PD monitoring plans, particularly the reliance on World Bank evaluation mechanisms and the absence of independent ways to measure the implementation of the PD Principles. Women's organisations are concerned with the fact that no gender equality indicators are included.

A more holistic approach is essential, that is, one that integrates parallel efforts (such as those by several donors to analyse in depth the relationship between aid effectiveness and gender equality) as part of the monitoring of the impact of the Paris Declaration.

The above analysis leads to several recommendations to strengthen a gender equality dimension in the aid effectiveness agenda:

- 1) Donors and governments should deliver on their commitments to gender equality by:

- Delivering on their commitments to the International Human Rights Frameworks and key agreements on women's rights and development.
 - Ensuring sufficient financial resources to accomplish their commitments towards gender equality, human rights and development.
 - Ensuring the effective participation of national machineries for gender equality in development planning and implementation.
- 2) Strengthening democratic ownership and women's participation in the aid effectiveness agenda:
- Strengthen national public awareness about the PD and the centrality of gender equality.
 - Promote mechanisms for effective civil society, including women's rights organisations, participation in designing, implementing and monitoring national development plans.
 - Promote better communication and engagement between CSOs, women's rights groups, and local governments and Parliaments.
 - Promote an autonomous and responsive aid support to civil society actors including women's organisations, with inclusive new aid mechanisms.
- 3) Include gender equality in the monitoring and evaluation of the PD:
- Use gender-sensitive instruments.
 - Develop statistics disaggregated by sex.
 - Support the development of qualitative indicators and analysis.
- 4) Develop guidelines and tools on the contribution of the new aid modalities to national obligations to gender equality:
- Support the development of guidelines, monitoring tools and indicators on the contributions of the new aid modalities to national obligations to gender equality.
 - Document the experiences of gender advocacy and promotion in the PRSP processes and provide an analysis of women's poverty in direct relationship to national macroeconomic policy.

The Third High Level Forum will take place in Accra in September 2008 to assess progress in implementation of the PD. It is vital that CSO delegations, including an important presence of women's rights organisations, participate in the Forum.

With regard to the resulting Accra Agenda for Action and beyond, key recommendations include:

- Promote the centrality of gender equality and women's rights as a development goal for aid effectiveness. A twin-track approach involving both gender mainstreaming and specific women's rights interventions is recommended.
- Carefully track funding that goes to support women's rights in order to "follow the money" and its impact.
- Develop adequate guidelines and tools to ensure that the new aid modalities are not marginalising gender equality and women's rights.
- Promote a review of the monitoring system for the Paris Declaration, and integrate a gender equality perspective into the monitoring and evaluation efforts.

B Betteraid.org is a campaign website that aims to provide information and Updates on aid effectiveness issues, especially related to the CSO parallel process towards the Third High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness in Accra September 2008 reviewing the Paris Declaration. CONCORD is part of the Better Aid campaign.