

Civil society voices for **Better Aid**

Civil society statement in Accra warns urgency for action on aid

1st September 2008

Introduction

2008 is an important year for development financing and an opportunity to move the international community to a more equitable, people-centred and democratic governance system. Today 1.4 billion people live under the new poverty line of US\$1.25, and the majority of them are women. The current financial, food, energy, and climate change crises make evident the urgency for action.

Accra is an opportunity to advance towards a broader agenda of development effectiveness. The High Level Forum in Accra will be followed by major United Nations meetings in New York and Doha that will confirm the huge gap between what has been promised and the lack of progress in the achievement of the internationally agreed development goals.

Development aid is only one part of the equation, and has to be analysed in the broader context of its interactions with trade, debt, domestic and international resource mobilisation and the international governance system. When donors and governments met in Paris three years ago, technical debates masked deeper political differences around the broader vision for aid. Some donors wanted to hand a lot more power, a lot more quickly to developing country governments. Other donors didn't. What was achieved was a compromise and has been criticised for its narrow technical approach.

It is urgent that human rights, gender equality, decent work and environmental sustainability are made explicit objectives of aid.

We call on officials present in Accra to respond with urgency. What we need in Accra are clear time-bound commitments to deliver real results for people on the ground, towards the eradication of poverty, inequality and social exclusion. This is a political not a technical challenge, and should be treated as such.

What is our 'bottom line' for Accra?

So far, the Paris process looks like a failure. The 2008 Paris Survey shows that donors in particular have a long way to go in delivering what they pledged. Accra must deliver a major change in implementation and change how "effectiveness" is measured by setting new targets and indicators. All donors must set out detailed plans and individual targets showing how they will meet their commitments.

But the Accra High Level Forum must also deliver real measurable and time-bound commitments to address some of the problems which are not adequately dealt with in the Paris Declaration. Donors must take responsibility for improvements which only they can deliver (e.g. untying aid and improving medium-term predictability of aid) and all governments must increase the democratic accountability and transparency of their use of aid resources, policies and activities. If the Accra High Level Forum is to be seen as a credible response to the serious challenges of making aid more effective, the Accra Agenda for Action must **at a minimum:**

- Commit to broadening the definition of ownership so that citizens, civil society organisations and elected officials are central to the aid process at all levels.
- Set time-bound and monitorable targets to:
 - Stop short-term aid and commit to ensuring that 80% of aid is committed for at least 3-5 years by 2010.
 - Reduce the burden of conditionality by 2010 so that aid agreements are based on mutually agreed objectives.
- Set a more ambitious target to make all technical assistance demand-led by 2010.
- Commit to end tied aid, including food aid and technical assistance, by 2010.
- Commit donors and recipients to make the aid system more accountable by developing and implementing new standards for transparency by 2009 which ensure that accurate, timely, accessible and comparable information about aid is proactively communicated to the public.
- Commit to improve the monitoring of aid effectiveness by adapting existing Paris indicators and by integrating new indicators from the Accra Agenda for Action by 2009; by supporting independent and citizen-led monitoring and evaluation systems and by agreeing an inclusive evaluation process to assess the impact of Paris on poverty reduction, gender equality, human rights and environmental sustainability.

Who are we?

Over 600 representatives from 325 civil society organisations and 88 countries have met here in Accra to debate what actions must be taken to reform aid. 80 civil society representatives have participated for the last two days in roundtables at this Forum to communicate those messages and ensure that our voices are heard. Civil society organisations (CSOs) have engaged energetically with the preparatory processes for Accra – organising consultations in every region, attending meetings of the Working Party on Aid Effectiveness and commenting on drafts of the Accra Agenda for Action. Although we have welcomed these opportunities, we are very disappointed that our views on previous drafts have not been taken into account, and that the Accra Agenda for Action as it stands promises little change.

As development actors we are committed to making all aid activities more effective in addressing poverty and inequality. We recognise the need for continual improvement in our performance and our own responsibility for this. To this end, we have initiated the Open Forum for CSO Development Effectiveness, which is an inclusive, CSO-led, multi-stakeholder process. The Open Forum will create a space for agreement on principles to guide the effectiveness of CSOs, on guidelines for applying such principles and for documenting and sharing good-practices. We appreciate the acknowledgement of this process in the Accra Agenda for Action and we expect its outcomes to be based on a vision of development effectiveness that is relevant to all actors.

However, our effectiveness is also shaped by the environment in which we work, which is often determined by donors and developing country governments. Appropriate financing, democratic and effective states and enabling environments, including legal frameworks based on human rights, are crucial to our work being more effective with the most marginalised communities.

Our vision for change

Our vision is of a world where aid is no longer needed; where poverty is no longer a daily reality for billions of women and men; where decent work is a reality for all; where global resources are fairly distributed; where social and gender inequalities are ended; where indigenous populations are respected; where strengthened democratic states fulfil economic,

social, and cultural rights; and where global public goods including environmental sustainability are secured by multilateral international institutions with equal participation of all countries.

We believe that aid can play an important role in moving us towards this vision, and that more and better aid is urgently needed to respond to the scale of the challenges of poverty, inequality and exclusion. Aid will be effective when it can be clearly demonstrated that it is indeed addressing those challenges. The effectiveness of aid should be assessed under a universal, more democratic and representative platform than the OECD/DAC, such as within the Development Cooperation Forum at the United Nations.

Effective aid must be based on the principle of democratic ownership and have poverty reduction, the fulfilment of human rights, gender equality, environmental sustainability and decent work as its objectives. When donors impose their own policies, systems and priorities, they drown out citizens' and recipient communities' voices, and they undermine the principle of alignment with developing countries' priorities and systems.

Effective aid should support democratic accountability between citizens and their governments. Democratic institutions are the result of national processes for social and political dialogue and donors should not undermine these efforts or the need for policy space. Rural development, regional integration and decentralisation processes in developing countries should be supported by donors when defined as national priorities.

Effective aid supports the development of transparent and accountable systems. It needs to be predictable to allow recipient countries to make medium and long-term plans, and then be aligned to those plans. It needs to be untied. Yet many donors continue to deliver aid in order to promote their own interests – tying aid to the purchase of goods from their own national firms, or setting conditions which promote their own economic interests.

At the heart of many of these problems is a lack of accountability and transparency. There is not enough reliable and timely public information about aid flows, or the policies and conditions associated with them. There is not enough independent evaluation of donor performance or the impact of aid on the ground. There are not enough opportunities for citizen, and civil society organisations to make their voices heard in decision making processes. This constitutes a systemic obstacle for citizens to hold governments in donor and recipient countries to account.

The Paris Declaration recognises many of these problems in principle, but donors have proved unwilling to resolve them in practice. Even where developing country governments have improved their performance, donors have not met their side of the bargain. The slow progress in implementing the Paris principles should be a source of acute embarrassment and concern for the governments represented here in Accra.

Both donors and developing countries have responsibilities to make aid work. However, the process of improving aid effectiveness needs to move away from conditionality, and not introduce new ways of imposing conditions, which undermine the right to development and democratic ownership.

Accra is an opportunity for you, ministers of donor and recipient countries and high-level representatives of donor agencies, to demonstrate your commitment to poverty and inequality reduction through effective aid, and a test of your credibility in living up to your commitments.

Your decisions tomorrow are important to set the stage for a more ambitious agenda for change towards real development effectiveness. As civil society organisations we will continue to work energetically to improve our own development effectiveness. We will continue to work

– hopefully closely with you – to improve the impact that official aid has on poverty and inequality. Aid will ultimately be judged on the extent to which it contributes to positive change in people's lives. Only then will we really be able to talk about aid being effective.

See also the following statements:

- *Putting Decent Work at the Heart of Sustainable Development Effectiveness, ITUC.*
- *Women's Forum Statement: Recommendations for Action on Development Effectiveness in Accra and Beyond, 30th August 2008.*
- *Joint Ecumenical message and policy briefs for the Accra High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness.*
- *Civil Society Statement on Aid Effectiveness and the Debt Crisis.*