

OWNERSHIP AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Summary of Recommendations and Terrain for Debate

The present document is the abridged version of the “*Synthesis of Key Findings and Cluster A Messages for the Working Party on Aid Effectiveness and High Level Forum 4*” built upon research and contributions from different workstreams and organizations collaborating under the Cluster A “chapeau”. The main document is available at www.wpeff.net, in the Cluster A section..

FROM COUNTRY EXECUTIVE OWNERSHIP TO INCLUSIVE OWNERSHIP

Although the Paris Declaration had specific recommendations on strengthening the role of parliaments and civil society organisations (CSOs), there was an underlying assumption that partner government executives would and should take sole leadership and control in the design and implementation of national development strategies, which would enable development partners to align and support these strategies. There was insufficient room left for other actors outside a segment of the partner country executive, generally the Ministry of Finance, to enhancing donors’ and partner countries’ respective accountability to their citizens and parliaments for their development policies, strategies and performance. Stakeholders such as line ministries, local government bodies, parliaments, and CSOs, felt left out or coerced into consultation systems that gave them little voice. This has reduced the enhanced effectiveness of aid that was anticipated.

The wording of the Accra Agenda for Action (AAA) placed more emphasis on the importance of voice for other stakeholders. Since it was endorsed in 2008, there has been a growing consensus on the importance of including all stakeholders in national processes related to a country’s development. This may be articulated in the design of strategies, choices made, or the assessment of achievements, with the understanding that actors respond in different but complementary ways. Competing views also continue on an appropriate distribution of roles and prerogatives, as well as powers, between these same stakeholders. Aid influences the power equation, particularly in aid-dependent partner countries, which is an issue that must be addressed at the Fourth High-level Forum on Aid Effectiveness and beyond. How can aid contribute to inclusive, conducive, equitable and effective domestic modes of decision making, arbitration and peaceful conflict resolution in the running of public affairs? How can domestic stakeholders play an effective role in decision making so as to achieve development results? The question should also and specifically address countries and regions in fragile situations.

FROM MUTUAL ACCOUNTABILITY TO THE PROMOTION OF A CULTURE OF ACCOUNTABILITY

In Paris, the issue was very much about how donor and recipient governments could be made to behave in a more accountable manner towards each other. Respective concerns and negative experiences related to the unpredictability of aid and erratic inconsistent donor behaviour on the one hand, corruption, fiduciary risks and low management capacity on the other, were dominating the debate.

By the time of Accra, it became clear that domestic accountability was vital to aid effectiveness and that mutual and domestic accountability were closely linked. Aid – especially in aid dependent countries – can skew accountability away from citizens – and the actors who represent them - towards donors. Development cooperation ought therefore to address not simply the

question of how to ensure mutual accountability, but the whole complex system of domestic “accountabilities” (local, private-public, national amongst constitutional institutions, regional), or the lack thereof. Donor behaviour that aims to ‘do no harm’ and support capacity for domestic accountability is critical. Donor efforts to support domestic accountability should involve acting as facilitators in supporting citizens in holding states to account, going with the grain of reforms and avoiding blueprints and applying a political economy lens in order to better tailor support to context. All stakeholders – partner countries, CSOs, local governments, parliamentarians, political parties, the independent media and development partners - thus must work together to build robust accountability systems that are mutually supportive.

Moreover, evidence is growing that lack of transparency is a major obstacle to mutual and domestic accountability. This deficit is in part due to not having in place effective mechanisms and platforms (of the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI) type), but also to reluctance on all sides to disclose information that may provide leverage to other actors and lead to negative exposure.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Inclusive Ownership

A number of summary approaches that have been recognized as essential for inclusive ownership:

- **Respect the diversity of policy perspectives from various development actors**, such as CSOs or local governments, whose contributions to development will inform national strategies, but as actors in their own right, their development activities may not always directly align with these strategies.
- **Strengthen parliamentary processes**, as a representative voice of people and their capacities to engage in the determination of development priorities and strategies, as an essential feature of democratic governance.
- **Provide, promote and monitor an enabling environment for CSOs** that allow them to contribute to national and local strategies and maximises their contribution to development. Encourage CSOs’ efforts to enhance their own effectiveness and accountability as development actors.
- **Coordinate local, intermediate and national levels to support effective decentralization and de-concentration policies**. Better multi-level governance allows linking local processes to national and international development strategies, with the local level influencing and, in turn, national strategies and global knowledge relating to local processes.
- **Focus on people and relationships within international co-operation**, with emphasis on strengthening needed capacities for cross-cultural, cross-political networking relationships on all sides.
- **Ensure access to nuanced and broad-based knowledge, an important effort in strengthening capacities for ownership**. Donors should recognize the existing knowledge of partner country governments and other social actors, strengthen knowledge areas identified by them, and understand the political economy in which development efforts take place.
- **Increase emphasis on monitoring and evaluation**. The complex web of organizations trying to inform policy processes, of which some with support from donors, as well as the complex causal link between their contributions and actual increases in inclusive ownership, underlines the importance of moving beyond the presently inadequate investments in monitoring and evaluation.
- **Avoid rapid rotation of donor officials at the country level, seek out diverse perspectives from relevant development actors**, including outside capitals, and work collectively with other development actors through appropriate modalities, while avoiding excessive fragmentation.
- **Work from a capacity development perspective**, as donors and external actors, taking on board learning in international cooperation, accepting complexity and diversity, while avoiding hands-on approaches.

Capacity Development

As was underlined in Accra, capacity development is the flipside of the ownership and accountability coin. Only people and institutions able to access, understand and use available information, with an in-depth understanding of the issues and options that are at stake, can really “own” the development process and ensure a culture of accountabilities.

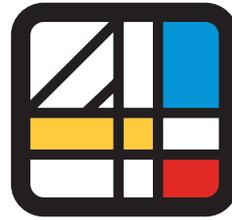
- **Start from the country context.** This requires government efforts to create a good environment for the national stakeholders to participate effectively. In this regard, parliaments, local government, CSOs and the private sector engages itself to improve their own responsibility and effectiveness as prescribed in the Accra Agenda for Action (AAA) and donors continue to respect country ownership and leadership.
- **Strengthen collaboration among all development actors based on the explicit recognition that each is a distinct actor in its own right,** with unique roles appropriate to their mandates and commitments to development effectiveness.
- **Support countries priorities and needs,** notably to develop national aid policies and locally-driven aid quality and results monitoring frameworks with annual performance targets for individual providers to increase accountability and promote peer pressure.
- **Establish the procedures and tools needed to ensure an increasing level of transparency** across the aid system.

Accountability

- **Get on with it:** No new principles of mutual accountability are required. What is needed is implementation. Implementation depends in part on a strong focus on a culture of accountability in which relationships, built on trust, complement mechanisms of accountability, and lead to implementation, change and results. All development actors have a responsibility to be accountable for their aid and development efforts, and share responsibility to promote each others’ accountability”.
- **Make strengthening mutual and domestic accountability a default:** This applies to all aspects of aid relationships, from strategy to choice of aid instruments and to their implementation. While respecting the “do no harm” principle, efforts should have a positive impact on mutual as well as domestic accountability. There is a need to ‘walk the talk’ on AAA commitments on strengthening the role of parliaments, local governments, civil society and the private sector. This also means recognising that accountability is a political as well as a technocratic process. Findings from various studies highlight the importance of political economy analysis - in recipient and donor countries – to understand how accountability relationships play out in practice and to find pragmatic country-level solutions.
- **Regularly and mutually take stock,** monitoring and evaluating implementation and progress, while ensuring inclusive participation of all stakeholders and an element of independent assessment, as well as peer review. Update action plans based on these reviews.
- **Strengthen accountability systems (domestic and mutual), with a focus on results, transparency, and capacity. Build on the capacity of sub-national governments** to interact with the citizenry and other local stakeholders, facilitating participatory decision-making. As a priority, donors should improve their behaviour and avoid risks of fragmentation which can be created by supporting a single actor of accountability. With a stronger understanding of each context, donors should work with partners to develop holistic approaches for programming to underpin dynamic accountability systems, such as budget processes and service delivery, and take account of interactions among institutions of accountability.

POSSIBLE ISSUES FOR DEBATE AT HLF4

- **Inclusive ownership through democratic governance:** How can country ownership of development emerge, and be effectively facilitated? What is emerging good practice on a) multi-stakeholder processes of dialogue at the country and global level for understanding and b) learning about how all stakeholders can strengthen national and local institutions and processes for democratic governance?
- **Institutional conditions for government leadership in development:** How all partners forge a better understanding of the necessary institutional conditions for structuring developing country governments' leadership? These may vary considerably, relating to issues such as: i) a coordinated public service with specific policy objectives derived from national development plans; ii) allocation of national revenue and only accept donor aid for these priorities; iii) structuring well-coordinated aid management systems with donors; iv) decentralisation of resources to local governments on an equitable basis for local development activities; and v) enabling domestic accountability through real parliamentary oversight of systems such as budget processes, and the influence of other actors, CSOs, the media, parties, audit institutions, etc.
- **Incentives for effective capacity development:** How can donors make better progress in addressing internal incentives to give priority to capacity development and putting proven approaches into practice, while reducing rigid institutional barriers (quick results and rigid disbursement schedules etc.)? How can country stakeholders best determine their capacity development needs and apply their own resources to improve capacity in critical areas?
- **Inclusive accountability and providing support:** How can accountability systems develop as up-front processes that involve citizens and a range of development stakeholders, including local government and in particular excluded communities, in development decisions that affect their lives? Accountability is not just about processes to identify "what has gone wrong or off-track", usually after the fact. How can donors and partners think differently about accountability as development relationships, when it comes to the efforts of donors as external partners, supporting systems of accountability rather than one actor at a time? What is emerging good practice in bringing parliament, political parties, audit institutions, local government and civil society into aid decision-making at important early stages? How can peer processes involving counterparts in both North and South (or South/South) and multi-stakeholder dialogue support capacities for accountability in aid relationships become mutually reinforcing in both donor and partner countries?
- **Drawing lessons and good practice from the experience of social dialogue:** What lessons and good practice can be drawn from the rich experience of social dialogue at country and global levels, including that of trade unions and the private sector employers on issues affecting the public welfare? What are appropriate mechanisms for institutionalizing broad-based policy dialogue and negotiation for development that respect the rights of affected populations, as well as the need for government leadership on strategic priorities for development? How can such policy dialogue be structured so as to bring to the table the interests and contributions of various stakeholders to development outcomes?
- **CSOs development effectiveness and the enabling environment.** How can partner governments, CSOs and donors work together to maximise CSOs' contributions to development? Significant gains were made in Accra by recognising the importance of CSOs as independent development actors, and in the agreement to work together to address CSO effectiveness as a responsibility shared among CSOs, donors and developing country governments. However, research shows that there is uneven progress in the fulfilment of these commitments. How can the range of partners in development promote a better understanding of how the principles and conditions of effectiveness vary across different development actors, based on the roles they play in development processes?
- **The local level and multilevel governance:** What is the role and strategic potential of the sub-national level, including local governance and decentralisation processes, to reinforce sustainable human development?



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