

## Chapter 2

# Civil Society and the Paris Declaration

*Recognition of CSOs as agents of development and change in their own right calls for a deeper understanding and application of the international aid effectiveness agenda to facilitate CSOs' engagement in that agenda. This chapter offers recommendations for enriching each of the five Paris Declaration principles from a perspective inclusive of CSOs.*

The importance of CSOs in development is widely recognised, and was acknowledged to a degree in the Paris Declaration. However, the Paris Declaration provided only limited guidance on how the roles of CSOs can be enhanced as part of international aid and development efforts. The Paris Declaration focused on the way that donors and central government agencies relate to each other and the need for a new approach to development co-operation that helps to reinforce the state rather than undermine it, as was so often the case in the past.

The Paris Declaration was an important achievement in this respect, and this was widely recognised in the AG-CS consultative process. However, the Paris Declaration needs to be seen as a particular step in the international strengthening of aid effectiveness that needs to be further pursued and enriched. Focusing as it does on the relationship between donors and partner governments, the Paris Declaration provides only a limited picture of development co-operation, of the various players involved, and how those players need to relate to each other in order to secure sustainable development results. CSOs consider that the Paris Declaration failed to recognise them as agents of development and change in their own right, whose priorities might not always mesh with those of governments.

By virtue of their position as independent development actors and of the commitment to aid and development effectiveness that they share with other stakeholders, CSOs have expressed views on the Paris Declaration that deserve to be heard and considered. Some of these views were reflected in the position paper produced by the International Civil Society Steering Group for the Accra High Level Forum, titled *Better Aid: A Civil Society Position Paper for the 2008 Accra High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness*.\*

This position paper echoed the calls of developing country governments for greater efforts to untie aid and enhance predictability and reflected widespread calls for greater attention to crosscutting issues such as human rights, social exclusion and gender equality. It also included a critique of policy conditionality as a barrier to country ownership, a call for greater transparency as a basis for policy dialogue and mutual accountability, a rebalancing of power relationships between donors and developing countries, and an appeal for independent assessments of adherence to the commitments made under the Paris Declaration.

### Enriching and implementing the Paris principles

Two perspectives are possible when considering how CSOs relate to the Paris Declaration.

- One perspective asks whether and how CSOs can contribute to the better implementation of the Paris Declaration itself, understood as an agreement between donors and governments on the better management of Official Development Assistance.

\* Available at [www.betteraid.org](http://www.betteraid.org).

- The other asks whether the Paris principles of aid effectiveness can be applied to the work of CSOs and whether these are well adapted and sufficient for that purpose.

There are thus two agendas here:

- implementation of the Paris Declaration as a specific agreement on aid effectiveness between donors and developing-country governments; and
- enriching the international aid effectiveness agenda to facilitate CSO engagement in that agenda.

These agendas are both legitimate, and both important.

The AG-CS recommendations with regard to the Paris agenda and the international aid effectiveness agenda more generally are based on a broad understanding of aid effectiveness, which is taken to mean “the extent to which aid resources succeed in producing sustainable development results for poor people” (AG-CS 2008b: 7). From this perspective, the Paris Declaration should be seen as a particular agreement at a point in time, whose interpretation may be enriched, and that can be supplemented or replaced over time with new understandings and commitments. What follows are some general and specific recommendations regarding the Paris Declaration principles of aid effectiveness.

#### **Overarching recommendation on enriching and implementing the Paris principles**

4. At a general level, all development actors, including donors, governments and CSOs, should work together to implement and enrich the international aid effectiveness agenda by:
  - a) recognising the character of the Paris Declaration as a historic agreement between donors and developing countries at a particular point in time, to address a particular set of issues and mutual obligations; and
  - b) deepening their understanding and application of the Paris Declaration principles in ways that emphasise local and democratic ownership, social diversity, gender equality, and accountability for achieving results of benefit to poor and marginalised populations as essential conditions of effectiveness.

The following deals more specifically with each of the Paris Declaration principles, beginning with the ownership principle.

#### **Local and democratic ownership**

Although the ownership principle is key to understanding the Paris Declaration, the Declaration itself did not explore this principle in any depth. The reference was in fact to “countries” and to government leadership of a country’s poverty reduction strategy.

The fundamental importance of ownership, including government leadership of national development strategies and policies, is unquestionable, because aid will not lead to sustainable development if developing country actors are not committed to aid-supported endeavours. This is, indeed, why imposing policy conditionalities on developing countries has proven unsatisfactory and why so many development projects collapse once donors leave.

However, the sort of ownership and commitment that is required goes far beyond central government leadership of a country’s national development strategy. What is

required is ownership that is both widespread and deep-rooted, including ownership by all who are involved in, and affected by, the planning, design, implementation and monitoring of aid-supported development programmes.

The lack of clarity of the Paris Declaration on this point has led to considerable confusion about the meaning and importance of this all-important principle. This has been exacerbated by the use of the expression “country ownership”, which suggests a consensus-based or centralised interpretation of ownership by the “country” as a whole. What is required is an understanding of ownership that is broad-based and derives its legitimacy from democratic participation.

### **Recommendations on ownership**

5. A return to basics is in order regarding the ownership principle, including a change of vocabulary away from the commonly used expression “country ownership,” which is misleading. More accurate would be an expression such “local and democratic ownership,” which emphasise ownership not just by central government agencies, but also by parliaments, local governments, citizens, communities and CSOs.
6. Complementary measures and approaches should include the following:
  - a) significantly broadening the range of “stakeholders” engaged in the design, implementation and assessment of development strategies, programmes, and initiatives, including parliaments, political parties, local governments and CSOs;
  - b) recognising that ownership of specific initiatives and programmes may involve leadership by different actors, including national governments, decentralised government bodies, or CSOs;
  - c) reinforcing different stakeholders’ capacity to exercise ownership through capacity development initiatives and support for democratic processes; and
  - d) related to this, a new approach to policy conditionality in which donors emphasise their role in facilitating policy options that are democratically developed and discussed, and invest in strengthening the capacity of governments, parliament and CSOs to develop locally-owned policy solutions.

### **Alignment**

On the issue of alignment, the emphasis of the Paris Declaration was on donor alignment with the priorities identified in national development strategies such as Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers and alignment to country systems of public financial management, procurement and results management.

However, CSOs prefer to emphasise a plurality of views, and Northern CSOs often work directly with developing country CSOs. As a result, they are likely to understand alignment in terms of the priorities and strategies identified by their Southern CSO partners and constituencies, and the use of country systems involving those partners’ own systems of priority setting and programme implementation.

CSOs thus contribute to alignment in their own ways through solidarity with the priorities and needs of partners and constituencies that may contribute to development goals in ways that differ from government priorities. This requires a broader interpretation of the concept of alignment in line with that of local and democratic ownership.

### **Recommendation on alignment**

7. Alignment should be understood broadly to mean alignment with the priorities of developing country counterparts and emphasis on the use and strengthening of country systems broadly understood. This means that efforts to develop and use country systems should extend beyond the current emphasis on centralised government mechanisms, such as public financial management and procurement, and also include other parts of government, decentralised authorities and CSOs.

### **Co-ordination and harmonisation**

Both the Rome and Paris Declarations emphasised donor co-ordination and harmonisation. Increased co-ordination and harmonisation can be defended on various grounds, including the need to reduce dispersion and duplication of effort, the desire to reduce unnecessary transactions costs, and the need to take a more comprehensive view of development programming.

However, co-ordination and harmonisation come with costs of their own that are not as widely recognised. For CSOs, in particular, the concern is that the inappropriate application of these principles could stifle initiative, hamper innovation, or divert energies from other pursuits. There is a need for a conceptual framework that recognises the need for balance. Increasingly, the emphasis in aid effectiveness discussions seems to be shifting away from co-ordination and harmonisation as such towards a more flexible principle that assumes the need for a comprehensive perspective, while recognising the advantages of diversity and the value of focused and specialised efforts by different actors.

### **Recommendations on co-ordination and harmonisation**

8. A balanced approach should be taken to co-ordination and harmonisation that emphasises the value of more comprehensive approaches to development programming, while also acknowledging the value of diversity and innovation.
9. The following measures are recommended to improve co-ordination and harmonisation where CSOs are concerned:
- a) recognition by all actors of the complementary roles played by governments and CSOs and the implications of this for enhanced co-ordination and harmonisation of government and CSO efforts;
  - b) greater efforts by governments and donors to support the participation of CSOs in government-led sector programmes (independently or under contract), and greater efforts by CSOs themselves to engage actively in these programmes;
  - c) greater efforts by CSOs to co-ordinate and harmonise their activities with those of other CSOs;
  - d) recognition of civil society strengthening as an objective that is itself worth pursuing in a more comprehensive way by all development stakeholders; and
  - e) recognition that responsive funding formulas continue to have an important role to play for tapping into the energy and innovative ideas of citizens and CSOs as agents of change and development.

### **Managing for results and accountability**

The issues of managing for results and accountability are closely related, since the most important type of accountability from an aid effectiveness perspective should be accountability for results. As principles of aid effectiveness, managing for results and accountability have implications for CSOs both in their own accountability for results, and in their watchdog role in promoting accountability by governments and donors for the use of public funds. CSOs have for many years pressed donors and governments to be accountable and to demonstrate development results, and have taken distinct actions to promote their own accountability through the establishment specific accountability mechanisms and collective codes of conduct.

A number of issues emerged from the AG-CS' consultative processes. Donors and government partners often mentioned accountability of CSOs themselves as a preoccupation. CSOs are usually accountable to donors for any funding that they receive, and to their own boards for their overall performance, but the general issue of accountability by CSOs is one that requires more attention. Of particular concern to developing country governments is the lack of information on donor funding that flows to and through CSOs and the lack of any mechanism for assessing the overall impact of CSO activity on development results in particular countries.

For their part, CSOs often criticised current tools of "managing for results" because these tend to be used more as instruments of control by donors than as instruments for measuring meaningful change in development outcomes or promoting learning and adaptation and accountability to those whose welfare is at stake. They raised questions also about what to measure, about the division of responsibilities, access to data and transparency, and the roles that CSOs can play. CSOs advocate an approach to results-based management that is based on iterative learning and adaptation, and results-monitoring mechanisms that empower the ultimate beneficiaries of aid.

There are questions also about the types of results that are most relevant to CSOs as agents of change and accountability. For instance, the emphasis of performance management frameworks under programme-based approaches tends to focus either on the reform of government processes or policies or on indicators of service delivery such as access to education or primary health care. The adoption of a more meaningful approach to results for CSOs operating as agents of change is likely to require greater attention to indicators of institutional and social change, such as improvements in gender equality and women's empowerment, the reduction of social inequalities, the improvement of human rights and democratic practice and other qualitative indicators of social progress.

The need to measure progress in the promotion of women's rights and gender equality is particularly evident. This will require the inclusion of gender equality targets and indicators in the design and implementation of development strategies and programmes, and systematic use of sex-disaggregated data for monitoring purposes.

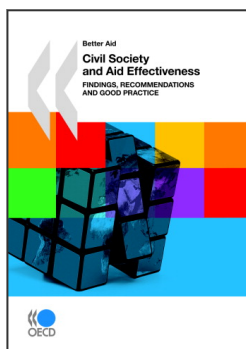
The *direction* of accountability is a major issue, as well. The Paris Declaration establishes a shared donor/government responsibility for development results, but in practice, accountability in development co-operation tends to be upwards from recipients to donors. This undermines downward accountability towards citizens and beneficiaries, and the systems of accountability that would normally encourage such downward accountability. This suggests the need for a broad understanding of accountability that emphasises the ultimate accountability of all development partners for results benefiting

poor and marginalised populations and raises the challenge of how to fully engage the intended beneficiaries of aid in the assessment of results and holding governments, donors and CSOs to account.

There are issues, finally, about mutual accountability for aid effectiveness as envisaged in the Paris Declaration. Participants in the AG-CS consultations considered that to be effective, these processes will require greater institutional commitments to transparency and more inclusive processes. CSOs should play, and are already playing, a role to enrich processes of mutual accountability at national and global levels (*e.g.* in research and in monitoring the implementation the Paris Declaration at the country level). However, they find themselves hampered by lack of access to information. The AG-CS joins other work streams involved in the preparations for HLF-3 in calling for higher standards of access to information and transparency regarding aid flows and policies.

### **Recommendations on managing for results and accountability**

10. The following recommendations are proposed with respect to results management and accountability for development:
  - a) the adoption of results-based approaches and results-monitoring mechanisms intended first and foremost as management tools to promote iterative learning and adaptation, while empowering the ultimate beneficiaries of development programmes;
  - b) the adoption of a more meaningful approach to results that includes greater attention to indicators of institutional and social changes and to sex-disaggregated data of importance to CSOs operating as agents of change;
  - c) an approach to accountability that emphasises a rebalancing of accountability for results in favour of beneficiaries;
  - d) the reinforcement of accountability systems in country for all development actors (donors, government and CSOs); and
  - e) a multi-stakeholder approach to monitoring and evaluation that includes the effective and timely engagement of CSOs and beneficiary populations, including representation from women's rights organisations and other socially marginalised groups.
11. All development partners are encouraged to adopt the highest possible standards of openness, transparency and access to information.
  - a) Donors and international financial institutions should commit to delivering timely and meaningful information to other stakeholders on their aid flows and policies, including official aid flows to CSOs.
  - b) Developing country governments should work with elected representatives and CSOs on how to achieve increased transparency of both official and non-official aid flows and improved accountability for development results.



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