

Round Table 5: Mutual Accountability

Donors and partners are accountable for development results:

“A major priority for partner countries and donors is to enhance mutual accountability and transparency in the use of development resources. This also helps strengthen public support for national policies and development assistance.”

The Paris Declaration

Key Points from the Evaluation

1. On the surface, mutual accountability is the area where the least progress is reported in the evaluations. Some of the evaluations argue that this commitment is less understandable than others, but the sensitivity surrounding it is also a factor in many cases. Deeper analysis of the evaluations shows that, although they all view mutual accountability as a complex puzzle, more pieces of the solution are actually at hand than is generally assumed. In fact, they are already being used to varying degrees, and could be better harnessed to fulfil this commitment, which is so fundamental to the credibility of the Declaration.

2. The evaluations suggest that the joint processes for tracking progress and resolving problems fall short of the goals of mutual accountability. This is where the essentially political character of the Paris Declaration and its commitments between parties comes most sharply into focus – it is about the relationship itself – and brings into play the political interests, values and priorities of the endorsing governments and institutions, and of their respective constituents. Direct political re-engagement is needed to re-orient and revitalize this pivotal commitment to mutual accountability, and should also help clarify the intended role and limits of the Monitoring Survey in the overall assessment of implementation.

3. In order to capture what the evaluations actually had to say about the implementation of the mutual accountability commitment, it proved necessary to go beyond consideration of the single indicator selected for the Monitoring Survey, and go back to the carefully framed and reciprocal package of mutual commitments in the Declaration itself. Some of the questions about mutual accountability that had seemed more opaque or potentially divisive – particularly expectations around who is accountable to whom and for what – were in fact found to have been anticipated and opened up for genuine mutual review by the Declaration. In some cases, mechanisms for accountability to countries’ own legislatures and publics, being fully transparent and in the public domain, were seen as providing the appropriate basis for countries’ accountability to donors as well. If a wider range of countries could justify the same claim, the partner countries’ side of mutual accountability would be greatly advanced. Donors’ commitments and performance would also be illuminated by full reporting to partners’ and their own legislatures and publics, but more measures will be needed to assure

more balance in their actual accountability to partners, including better use of the available forums.

4. There is a basic question as to whether accountability can be fully mutual between countries and those providing them with development assistance. Two country evaluations highlighted the unequal means available to the two parties for assuring compliance, based on the imbalances of bargaining power between donors and most partner countries. Getting this balance right is essential for ensuring compliance with the Declaration’s commitment of mutual accountability.¹

5. Without strong systems of managing for results and performance information, primarily serving stronger domestic accountability and consultation, discussions of either partners’ performance against their respective commitments can only take place at the most general or anecdotal levels, and risk becoming ritualistic and frustrating. At the same time, “overkill” or bureaucratization in mutual accountability arrangements must also be avoided. The donors are falling short in their first obligation for accountability – to provide full and timely information on their aid flows. Given the fundamental importance of this requirement to informed accountability for the whole Paris Declaration package, the continuing failure of donors to find satisfactory solutions to this problem has been seen by some as a lack of good faith and will to comply.

6. Internationally, the bi-annual Monitoring Survey is the purpose-built part of the information and accountability base for monitoring the implementation of the Declaration. The evaluations show that the survey and its selected indicators have a powerful influence on thinking and action on implementation of the Declaration – including possible unintended consequences in narrowing the focus to a few aspects. Each country’s own performance management system will have its own monitoring requirements, and donors are pledged under the Declaration to refrain from “piling on” their own monitoring demands. Evaluations can be an important accountability mechanism. There are emerging demands for evaluations to

¹ One report cited a preliminary ODI 2006 study for this evaluation which stressed that there are three main requirements for mutual accountability: the availability and use of information, mechanisms for monitoring performance and the existence of adequate incentives for compliance, ranging all the way to contractual or quasi-contractual arrangements. South Africa report, p.46.

be conducted outside government and donor structures, with an overarching accountability to civil society, and for multi-stakeholder evaluations involving a number of donors and national partners. Mutual accountability between donors and partner countries is reflected in an increasing number of joint evaluations, including the present evaluation, and its planned second phase.

“Systems for recording and reporting aid need to be strengthened both within government and among the Development Partners, in order to achieve quality and timeliness.

Uganda report”

“Mutual accountability should be built around public accountability. In this regard the submission of Fiscal Management Reports to Parliament in terms of the Fiscal Management (Responsibility) Act, No. 3 of 2003 constitutes a significant step in government’s fiscal accountability.

Sri Lanka report”

“DFID is entering into [ten-year] Development Partnership Arrangements (DPAs) with bilateral partners, setting out the UK’s long-term commitments, including for the delivery of more predictable and better aid. DPAs also specify the conditions on which UK aid may be suspended (e.g., human rights violations), and are intended to support transparency, predictability and mutual accountability.

UK report”

“There is no single model for an effective Partnership Group. The report usefully describe a “partnership journey, in which Vietnamese agencies and their donor partners proceed from a shared diagnosis of the challenges prevailing in the sector, through the development of shared action plans and the mobilisation of resources, to developing common implementation and monitoring arrangements... The Independent Monitoring Team (IMT) found that commitment to the Hanoi Core Statement is still solid on both sides, but a certain fatigue is apparent. When the structures and processes become too elaborate, aid effectiveness fatigue becomes a genuine risk...”

IMT Report on Vietnam”

Key Recommendations

The following steps, derived from the evaluation, are recommended for the remainder of the Paris Declaration review period up to 2010, establishing a clear basis for the five-year assessment of progress and further course corrections at that time.

It is recommended that **partner country authorities:**

Announce, before the end of 2008, a manageable number of prioritized steps they will take to strengthen their leadership of

aid relationships up to 2010, in the light of lessons from monitoring, evaluations and other stocktaking to date.

Build on the interim reviews of implementation in 2008 to ensure that they have in place a continuing transparent mechanism, ideally anchored in the legislature, for political monitoring and public participation around aid management and reform.

Give clear guidance to donors who are supporting capacity-strengthening on their priorities for assistance to manage aid more effectively, consistent with their main development concerns.

Work out, by 2010 at the latest, adapted systems of managing for results that will best serve their domestic planning, management and accountability needs, and provide a sufficient basis for harnessing donors’ contributions.

The evaluations show that all are making progress with the difficult tasks of building systems of managing for results. The experience of Uganda in particular demonstrates both the feasibility and benefits of this work. Such systems will provide the necessary base for ensuring the alignment and harmonisation of development assistance, and will strengthen the information underpinnings for mutual accountability, mainly as a by-product of transparent domestic accountability.

It is recommended that **development partner or donor authorities:**

Update their legislatures and publics in 2008 on progress to date with aid effectiveness reforms, underlining the need and plans for further concrete changes to be implemented before 2010 to accept and support country leadership in aid implementation and greater donor harmonisation.

Before the end of 2008, announce their further detailed plans to delegate by 2010 to their field offices sufficient decision-making authority, appropriately skilled staff and other resources to support and participate fully in better-aligned and harmonized country-led cooperation.

Specify their concrete planned steps to improve, by 2010 at the latest, the timeliness, completeness and accuracy of their reporting and projections for aid flows to feed into the planning, budgeting and reporting cycles of partner countries, together with other donors. Make the needed provisions for multi-year allocations, commitments, or firm projections.

Provide supplementary budgets, staffing and training up to 2010 to help their own programs adjust for the transitional and new demands and transaction costs and learning needs that are being reported as major concerns in implementing the Paris agenda.

Allocate special resources (budgets and coordinated technical assistance) to support and reinforce countries’ prioritized efforts to strengthen their own capacities to implement more effective cooperation. Work with partners to design and manage other interim means of implementation (such as project implementation units) so that they steadily enhance capacity and country ownership.