

Rome Declaration on Harmonisation

Ministers, Heads of Aid Agencies and other Senior Officials representing 28 aid recipient countries and more than 40 multilateral and bilateral development institutions endorsed the Rome Declaration on Harmonisation in February 2003.

We, the heads of multilateral and bilateral development institutions and representatives of the IMF, other multilateral financial institutions, and partner countries gathered in Rome, Italy, on February 24-25, 2003, reaffirm our commitment to eradicating poverty, achieving sustained economic growth, and promoting sustainable development as we advance to an inclusive and equitable global economic system. Our deliberations are an important international effort to harmonise the operational policies, procedures, and practices of our institutions with those of partner country systems to improve the effectiveness of development assistance, and thereby contribute to meeting the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). They directly support the broad agreement of the international development community on this issue as reflected in the Monterrey Consensus (*Report of the International Conference on Financing for Development*, March 2002, para. 43). We express our appreciation to the governments of Jamaica, Vietnam, and Ethiopia, and to the bilateral donors and international institutions that sponsored and coordinated regional workshops in Kingston, Hanoi, and Addis Ababa in January 2003, in preparation for the Rome Forum. The key principles, lessons, and messages synthesised in the reports of these workshops have provided valuable input to the Forum.

Improvements in development effectiveness

We in the donor community have been concerned with the growing evidence that, over time, the totality and wide variety of donor requirements and processes for preparing, delivering, and monitoring development assistance are generating unproductive transaction costs for, and drawing down the limited capacity of, partner countries. We are also aware of partner country concerns that donors' practices do not always fit well with national development priorities and systems, including their budget, programme, and project planning cycles and public expenditure and financial management systems. We recognise that these issues require urgent, coordinated, and sustained action to improve our effectiveness on the ground.

We attach high importance to partner countries' assuming a stronger leadership role in the coordination of development assistance, and to assisting in building their capacity to do so. Partner countries on their part will undertake necessary reforms to enable progressive reliance by donors on their systems as they adopt international principles or standards and apply good practices. The key element that will guide this work is a country-based approach that emphasizes country ownership and government leadership, includes capacity building, recognises diverse aid modalities (projects, sector approaches, and budget or balance of payments support), and engages civil society including the private sector.

Good practice standards or principles

We acknowledge that while our historical origins, institutional mandates, governance structures, and authorising environments vary, in many instances we can simplify and harmonise our requirements and reduce their associated costs, while improving fiduciary oversight and public accountability and enhancing the focus on concrete development results. We endorse the good practice work by the technical groups of the DAC-OECD Task Force and the multilateral development banks (MDBs), and look forward to the expected completion next year of the UN harmonisation work that is being coordinated by UNDG. We are ready to follow existing good practices while continuing to identify and disseminate new ones.

Going forward

We agree that, for both donors and partner countries, the progress we make on the ground in programmes and projects will be a concrete and important measure of the success of our efforts. We recognise that such progress can be facilitated and enhanced by harmonisation efforts at the international and regional levels. Building on the work of the DAC-OECD and MDB working groups and on country experience, including the recent country initiatives, we commit to the following activities to enhance harmonisation:

- ❖ Ensuring that development assistance is delivered in accordance with partner country priorities, including poverty reduction strategies and similar approaches, and that harmonisation efforts are adapted to the country context.
- ❖ Reviewing and identifying ways to amend, as appropriate, our individual institutions' and countries' policies, procedures, and practices to facilitate harmonisation. In addition, we will work to reduce donor missions, reviews, and reporting, streamline conditionalities, and simplify and harmonise documentation.
- ❖ Implementing progressively – building on experiences so far and the messages from the regional workshops – the good practice standards or principles in development assistance delivery and management, taking into account specific country circumstances. We will disseminate the good practices to our managers and staff at headquarters and in country offices and to other in-country development partners.
- ❖ Intensifying donor efforts to work through delegated cooperation at the country level and increasing the flexibility of country-based staff to manage country programmes and projects more effectively and efficiently.
- ❖ Developing, at all levels within our organisations, incentives that foster management and staff recognition of the benefits of harmonisation in the interest of increased aid effectiveness.
- ❖ Providing support for country analytic work in ways that will strengthen governments' ability to assume a greater leadership role and take ownership of development results. In particular, we will work with partner governments to forge stronger partnerships and will collaborate to improve the policy relevance, quality, delivery, and efficiency of country analytic work.
- ❖ Expanding or mainstreaming country-led efforts (whether begun in particular sectors, thematic areas, or individual projects) to streamline donor procedures and practices, including enhancing demand-driven technical cooperation. The list of countries presently involved includes Ethiopia, Jamaica, Vietnam, Bangladesh, Bolivia, Cambodia, Honduras, Kenya, Kyrgyz Republic, Morocco, Niger, Nicaragua, Pacific Islands, Philippines, Senegal, and Zambia.
- ❖ Providing budget, sector, or balance of payments support where it is consistent with the mandate of the donor, and when appropriate policy and fiduciary arrangements are in place. Good practice principles or standards – including alignment with national budget cycles and national poverty reduction strategy reviews – should be used in delivering such assistance.
- ❖ Promoting harmonised approaches in global and regional programs.

We wish to record that a positive by-product of our collaboration on harmonisation has been increased information sharing and improved understanding of commonalities and differences during the preparation or revision of our respective operational policies, procedures, and practices. We will deepen this collaboration in the future, and will explore how such collaboration could help to ensure that new or revised policies are appropriately harmonised or “harmonisable” with those of the partner countries and donor institutions.

We recognise the global work on monitoring and assessing the contribution of donor support to the achievement of the MDGs. We will track and, as necessary, refine lead indicators of progress on harmonisation such as those described in the DAC-OECD Good Practice Papers.

We acknowledge the potential contribution of modern information and communication technologies to promoting and facilitating harmonisation – already demonstrated by the use of audio and videoconferencing facilities in the staff work on harmonisation, the Development Gateway, the Country Analytic Work Website, and the early work on e-government, e-procurement, and e-financial management. We commit to further efforts to exploit these technologies.

Next steps

Partner countries are encouraged to design country-based action plans for harmonisation, agreed with the donor community that will set out clear and monitorable proposals to harmonise development assistance using the proposals of the DAC-OECD Task Force and the MDB technical working groups as reference points. In turn, the bilateral and multilateral agencies will take actions to support harmonisation at the country level. As part of their self-evaluation processes, bilateral and multilateral agencies and partner countries will assess and report on progress in applying good practices, and on the impact of such practices. Whenever possible, we will use existing mechanisms to develop such plans and to assess and report on progress, and we will make these plans available to the public.

We will utilise and strengthen, including through partner country participation, existing mechanisms to maintain peer pressure for implementing our agreements on harmonisation. In this regard and in the context of the New Partnership for Africa's Development, we welcome regional initiatives, such as the work by the Economic Commission for Africa, for a joint annual aid effectiveness review in a framework of mutual accountability that would also address harmonisation issues.

Reflecting our experience over these last two days, we plan stocktaking meetings in early 2005 following the review already scheduled in DAC-OECD in 2004. This follow-up would assess progress in and sustain the momentum for fundamental changes that enhance aid delivery, and would contribute to the review of the implementation of the Monterrey Consensus, the timing and modalities for which are expected to be determined by 2005.