

**Civil Society Perspectives**  
**Strengthening the Poverty Impact of the Paris Declaration: through**  
**Gender Equality, Human Rights and Social Exclusion:**  
**INTRAC Oxford UK March 2007**  
**Phase one Literature review**

*“Effective states depend on empowered citizens and donor policy should strengthen the role of active citizens.” (DRC, IDS 2006)*

**Summary**

The Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness<sup>1</sup> signed in March 2005 is a comprehensive approach to reforming and streamlining overseas development assistance (ODA). Although the Paris Declaration (PD) is essentially an agreement between donors and recipient governments, its core principles such as support for country ownership and managing for results provide possibilities for including a wider range of development actors – the civil society (CS) groups and NGOs, many of whom have been at the forefront of development practice for decades. Among CS groups who have been active in the debates about the PD, there is agreement that the principles it contains for the reform of the aid system had already been part of the CS agenda (DRC 2005, CCIC, UK Aid Network 2006, and UK NGO consortium 2006, GADN 2006). They therefore welcome its formalisation.

Such a view about CS inclusion is in no way uniform. Many CSOs and NGOs, especially Southern-based, remain sceptical about both the process and content of the way that the PD proposes management of aid (Menocal and Rogerson 06; Commonwealth Forum 2006; SIDA 2006; INTRAC 2006). They question its likely impacts, scope for inclusion of non-state actors, and, above all else, its ability to have a real impact on the lives of poor people, world-wide. Northern NGOs may be generally supportive of the principles of the PD, but express specific concerns about ownership and accountability. They fear these might be too easily ‘managed’ in the absence of genuine CS voice and given the lack recognition of the crucial role played by non state-actors, in the development process.

CS response to the PD has taken the form of discussion, comment and appraisal intended to feed into the monitoring and assessment processes initiated in 2006. Some reactions to the PD have been constructive and others remarkably sceptical. In examining its potential impact it is important to note the recent nature of the PD process, the complexity of the proposed changes, the plethora of monitoring mechanisms and instruments and the time required for analysis. Many CS-led discussions are ongoing and their results are not yet in the public domain. This review summarises some of the key concerns raised by both Northern and Southern CS organisations currently available, but may not be totally inclusive.

In general CS concerns over the PD focused on three main areas:

1. First and foremost, there is concern about the structure of the aid disbursement process (e.g. tied aid and aid conditionality). Many CS groups and NGOs are concerned that old structures of aid provision will not have altered and will continue to perpetuate unequal and discriminatory policies towards the poor.
2. Second, there is major concern as to the absence of CS voice and role in making governments accountable and transparent given the legacy of closed door discussions and the struggles to be heard under previous regimes of aid policy.

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<sup>1</sup> [www1.worldbank.org/harmonization/Paris/FINALPARISDECLARATION.pdf](http://www1.worldbank.org/harmonization/Paris/FINALPARISDECLARATION.pdf)

3. Third, there is concern over the vagueness of some of the existing indicators to measure the effectiveness of the PD and the lack of steady progress towards mainstreaming gender equality and human rights. These are at risk due to the technical and often abstract language of the existing Agenda and its focus on mechanism rather than actual impact and outcome.

To many CSOs, the PD is also not sufficiently transformative. They fear progress may be hindered because past conditionality continues to remain alongside the call for greater national ownership. Examples include conditions that enforce disbursement of funds in accordance with donor priorities, such as the liberalisation of trade and the privatisation of essential services. This together with the persistence of tied aid (ensuring that a large share of aid is spent on imported goods and services from the donors) are viewed as a major hindrance to any progress towards aid effectiveness (Oxfam International/Action Aid 06). Many CS groups and their representatives have argued that the rhetoric of ownership is belied by the way CS is excluded from participation in the way budgets are allocated or managed (Pratt INTRAC 33 06, Gadnet06). There is a much greater focus on reducing transaction costs than on ensuring aid benefits marginalized communities. Exclusive emphasis on donor country negotiations on implementation wrongly assumes that governments are always democratic and representative or that they can guarantee political stability (Pratt, Ontrac 33). This approach is particularly ominous for many Southern CS organisations at risk of closure or censorship at a time when considerations of security are ascendant, overshadowing policies to address poverty and improve livelihoods (Ontrac 35: 06; Menocal and Rogerson 05). Strengthening of the powers of the executive under the current security agenda is a major concern for CS organisations. There is growing fear that current proposals under the PD are likely to encourage even democratically-elected governments to act punitively and without accountability (VANI 06). There is evidence that countries as far apart as India, Uzbekistan and Russia may already have done so (VANI/INTRAC 06, unpublished, Asian Human Rights Commission 2006). This is a particular concern among many Southern CSOs at the front line of development practice.

Amidst such wide-ranging concerns, some NGOs and CSOs are arguing that the visible exclusion of CS voice and participation necessitates creation of a parallel CS-led system to monitor the progress of the Paris Agenda (PA) and that there should be a CS-only forum at the next high level meeting to assess PD progress in Ghana in 2008 (EuroDad, March 07). The parallel forum will be focused on holding donors and recipient government to account on the principles of the PA, as well as scrutinizing the current monitoring process being undertaken through country level surveys. These activities would be undertaken in conjunction with the ongoing, active and critical engagement among many CSOs and NGOs with the development process (CCIC 06; PRIA 06; Pratt 2006). There are also suggestions from some Northern CS groups that urgent dialogue with donors and recipient governments may be the best way forward (Gender net, GADnet 07, Bond 07). In a comment on the PD, Action Aid and Oxfam International lean towards the former view, that without consideration of the progress achieved in Government –CS partnerships in development - the Paris process rather than being a milestone could easily dissolve into a ‘millstone’ that fails the poor (Action Aid/Oxfam International 2006).

There is also concern among southern CSOs that there is a divergence of opinion between Northern and Southern NGO - CSO perspectives on the context of the PD. Northern NGOs are concerned about issues pertaining to governance, such as that of ownership and accountability. Southern agencies at the frontline of development practice, are faced with issues of values and principles such as unchanging conditionality, promotion of market-oriented policies that damage the lives of poor people, entrenched inequalities in the distribution of income and resources and trends towards authoritarianism (CCIC 06, Sen, Ontrac 35).

### ***Gender Issues- Calling for reassessment and Entry Points***

Gender networks have voiced concern about the potential loss of dialogue with governments when gender issues are incorporated into PRSP's. Lack of clarity and marginalisation of CS voice could undo progress on incorporating a gender dimension in the AE, an unfortunate development in view of

the fact that the majority of the world's poor – in terms of income and asset ownership – are women. Most gender analysts, in both CSOs and state development agencies note that there is limited inclusion of gender in the wider aid effectiveness agenda. PRSPs and measures to implement the MDGs reveal poor understanding of gender issues.

Those who work on cross-cutting PRSP-related policy issues are concerned that gender equality risks being sidelined, unless there is visible commitment in budgets and plans for action. There are areas where opportunities for influence remain: the **Working Party for Aid Effectiveness (WP-EFF)** and four **Joint Ventures (JV)** could offer entry points for influencing gender and social policy when there is reporting back to donors at the scheduled meeting in Accra, Ghana in 2008. Progress reports being prepared could nudge policies to be more **gender-sensitive**, especially at country level. Gender net members are encouraged by the Irish Aid critique (Gaynor 2006) to **forge partnership at Working Party and at Country level** in order to access all potential entry points to influence the Paris Declaration and to contribute to the Third High Level Forum, planned for the Accra meeting.

Some but not all gender alliances (Gender-net GADN) appear focused on dialogue with governments and donors. At the International Dialogue Conference on the Paris Declaration organised by the civil society centre of the Swedish International Development Agency (Sida) in August 2006<sup>2</sup>, there was debate about whether it was appropriate to engage with a pre-determined process that largely excluded civil society. Some participants argued a select group of technocratic administrators had taken ownership of the Paris Agenda and were focused on mechanistic aid delivery. The meeting – which consisted mainly of northern NGOs and representatives of official Swedish official agencies – agreed on the need to ensure inclusion of civil society **as equal partners** in the development process.

### *Challenging the Current Premise*

The Sida conference concluded with the election of a CS Ambassador to voice and monitor the concerns of civil society and highlight the ambivalence felt by most participants, especially a handful representing Southern CSOs and NGOs on the PD. There was criticism of the lack of learning from past approaches and the tendency of the World Bank and IMF in defiance of PRSP rhetoric, to exclude the needs and concerns of the poor and the marginalized. It was also suggested, particularly by the Swedish CSOs, that whilst the PA might strengthen national ownership, its approach was not new, for Swedish CSOs and official aid mechanisms have always striven towards goals of ownership, harmonisation, alignment and accountability in their developing country partnerships. Swedish CSOs wanted the Paris Agenda to be part of the already established and agreed MDGs, rather than creating new aid mechanisms.

Organisations such as PRIA and INTRAC supported the call for an alternative CSO dialogue to create parallel CS partnerships in development and ensure a CS watchdog role. They argued that the language of the PD, especially that of governance and accountability, could not be achieved without including civil society's experience of results-based and poverty-focused approaches to development. INTRAC has argued that efficiency does not necessarily lead to effectiveness and that the **value of indicators** needed to be based on **results**, rather than simply on the management of development. INTRAC has also suggested that the terminology of the PD risked CSOs becoming **subcontractors** rather than development partners. Concern was voiced over missing elements in the PD and confusion in the AE between administrative efficiency and programme effectiveness. PRIA (India) argued that the current agenda marginalizes CS and that the broader **governance agenda** should not be reduced simply to calls for improved **public administration** of aid. INTRAC has argued that governments are not always capable of deciding what is best for their citizens and need to work closely with CS to understand the priorities and concerns of isolated communities far from the capitals where budget priorities are set. Christian Aid, has criticised the failure to change existing aid structures and

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.sida.se/sida/jsp/sida?d>

challenges bias towards donor interests.<sup>3</sup> Oxfam and Action Aid are critical of the continuing tied nature of aid and call for greater accountability and less conditionality. They urge use of countries' own systems to build capacity and an end to policy conditions that reinforce economic dependence. World Vision, as signatory to a petition sent to the OECD/DAC has argued that the PD is unclear about instruments for CS voice and that the twelve indicators intended for effective monitoring would work largely in favour of donors, rather than countries in receipt of aid. In similar vein, Southern CS partners have raised a host of concerns, some of which coincide with views held by Northern NGOs about conditionality, donor 'interest' blocks that pressure recipient governments, lack of transparency over monitoring and evaluation of country progress and failure to monitor donor performance). The main call arising from the Sida conference was for donors not to simply endorse the IMF and World Bank's hegemonic poverty alleviation agenda, but instead to work on specific sectors to ensure focus and quality.

### *Reassess Indicators and Performance Assessment Frameworks*

**Numerous CS groups have voiced concerns about the way the Paris process is monitored. The UK Aid Network (UKAN), a collection of UK based NGOs,**<sup>4</sup> has noted lack of CS representation and suggested the value of the PD can be judged mainly by its ability to comprehensively translate its principles into action. This can be assured only if CS is acknowledged on all national development plans in order to ensure ownership, participation and accountability. In a letter to the chair of the DAC in April 2006, UKAN makes a number of recommendations on the use of indicators, and for example calls for a **qualitative assessment of performance** based on results achieved by donors and partner countries. They suggest that overemphasis on the operational dimensions of the AE agenda may distract from social policy and accountability. There is a risk the PD could end up being akin to the Country Development Frameworks (CDFs) prepared by the World Bank, during the earlier phase of PRSP. UKAN suggests adding to existing indicators and argues the need for **greater flexibility** in monitoring relationships and results so as to include the voices of a broader spectrum of society and not simply the contractual parties. This would allow a focus on **results**, rather than on processes alone and would encourage a multi dimensional approach.

### *Overhaul of the current Aid System for Impact on Poverty and Inequality?*

There is a clear danger that unless several Paris Agenda objectives are clarified apparently consultative and participatory processes could end up being fragmentary, mechanistic and futile. This fear was endorsed by CCIC, a coalition of Canadian NGOs,<sup>5</sup> who in May 2006, concerned that the PD is state-centric and ignores CS concerns. Drawing on consultations with CSOs in the North and the South the CCIC urges focus on five key points; CS participation; ownership; alignment and harmonisation and mutual accountability). The CCIC argues that it is essential for the PA not to align itself uncritically with country PRSs since these have been problematic from the outset. CCIC calls for profound reform of the aid regime and conditions of trade and aid. Aid conditionality, they argue, is an ongoing reality, leading CSOs to question whether donors are really 'external actors' or have simply become adherents of state-led policies. The CCIC wants to ensure participation and empowerment of poor people (and not simply of their representatives) but argues this can only take place through democratic negotiation and the parliamentary process. Since the roots of poverty are closely related to inequalities these must be addressed by the PA. The Canadian coalition argues that one of the main problems of the AE agenda is that the underlying power relations and the **politics of development** are ignored. Agreements hatched behind closed doors between donors and states cannot be classified as consensus and representative of citizen interests. CCIC calls for democratic participation, transparency and accountability, not just in relation to poverty-eradication but also with regard to governments' human rights obligations that risk being ignored.

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.eurodad.orh/articles/default.aspx?id=749>

<sup>4</sup> [www.bond.org.uk/policy/ukan.htm](http://www.bond.org.uk/policy/ukan.htm)

<sup>5</sup> www.ccic.ca

Adding to this call, the Commonwealth Foundation hosted a meeting of representatives of Commonwealth CSOs in Colombo, Sri Lanka, in 2006, which reiterated support for the MDGs and CS role in their achievement. They argued that AE should focus on improving the lives of poor people and realising their rights to employment, quality essential services and protection against poverty-induced vulnerabilities.<sup>6</sup>

### ***Dangers of Repeating Past Mistakes in Aid Disbursement***

The arguments sustained by the CCIC are reiterated in a recent statement by 26 NGOs belonging to the Reality of Aid Global Network (ROA/GN).<sup>7</sup> They call on donors to be bold in their vision and commitment to aid effectiveness. They argue that the PD as currently constituted is likely to lead to aid yet again failing to reach those most in need, precisely because it does not clarify how donor aid will be untied, nor how developing country capacity and good governance will be built. A number of indicators remain vague. Governments need a results-based approach to AE through committing to a set of meaningful time-bound targets and rigorous country-level monitoring and reporting.<sup>8</sup> They note with concern the absence of reforms within IFIs and the overall aid system, failure to untie aid and the low volumes of ‘real aid’ – conditionality-free, and non-tied. They cite figures that a mere 40-45% of bilateral aid remains untied and urge the need to learn from successes in the PRSP process in order to make it work better, rather than creating new initiatives through the PD Declaration. The Group argues that PRSPs had the advantage of enabling some countries, particularly in Africa, to set up effective participatory forums. These should continue under the PA with support from multilateral and bilateral donors, civil society, governments and parliamentarians.

### ***Monitoring Quality of PRSPs under DBS***

In a recent report another NGO consortium, Direct Budget Support (DBS), examined the implications of the AE agenda for NGOs in three countries in sub-Saharan and East Africans. Many of the concerns they highlight reflect wider CS anxieties about the AE agenda, especially the quality of consultations undertaken on PRS with CS. The report argues that while the consultation process in all three countries led to some positive changes in the quality of participation, there were serious concerns about the mechanisms used. Gains identified were overshadowed by the failure of governments to take CS voice seriously and their exclusion from the decisions on budget allocations. This reinforced mutual existing suspicions between state and civil society. Hence many of the gains of participation were undermined by the nature of implementation of agreed parameters for cross sector policies and poverty targets. DBS argued there was far too much upward accountability, (to donors) and too little downward accountability towards CS, thus reinforcing already existing powerful donor blocks in each country assessed. The focus on **executive negotiations** in DBS has tended also to marginalize parliaments. Focus on administrative efficiency and current performance tends to **de-contextualise** the process from its immediate past and in particular, the legacy of already existing mechanisms. This highlights the urgent need for public scrutiny, not only of NGOs but just as importantly of donors and recipient governments.

Critics contend that the current focus of donors is disproportionately on **NGO accountability**. **This may provide** a pretext for not providing accountability for all sides in the development process – that is both recipient governments and donors. There is a strong perception that it is not only states but also donors who are sidelining NGOs in the consultation process over national strategies and country plans. Offices of development agencies, including DFID country offices, are treating NGOs as an

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<sup>6</sup>[www.commonwealthfoundation.com/uploads/documents/CIVIL\\_SOCIETY\\_STATEMENR2006\\_24\\_JULY\\_-Final.doc](http://www.commonwealthfoundation.com/uploads/documents/CIVIL_SOCIETY_STATEMENR2006_24_JULY_-Final.doc)

<sup>7</sup> [www.realityofaid.org/](http://www.realityofaid.org/)

<sup>8</sup> See: <http://realityofaid.org/themeshow.php?id=37>

'add-on' rather than as equal partners. Among the many recommendations made by the EuroDad report, the key ones deal with the need for **meaningful participation** with CS over the AE agenda, the urgent need for public scrutiny through parliament and through NGOs of the **accounting and budgeting processes** and the need for donors to consult NGOs when developing country plans and reviewing CS funding instruments. The report urges donors to maintain flexibility in their funding options, rather than approach the AE agenda with absolute uniformity.

The main dilemmas about the AE agenda raised by CS are summarised by Laverne and Wood (2006) and focus on three main principles. The first relates to the need for **commitment** to continuing the fight against poverty and under-development in low- income countries. The second focuses on the need for the AE agenda to acknowledge the need to **learn** from shared lessons of what is known to work in the struggles against poverty and inequality. Thirdly, it is vital that the AE agenda should go beyond statements of principles to include **targeted commitments** to addressing the causes of poverty and inequality). An understanding of these causes and subsequent targets should be based on a broad consensus and not simply on the basis of donor-government relationships. A focus on state building alone is likely to be counterproductive and to detract from building strong partnerships between state and civil society based on mutual respect and democratic accountability (DRC 2006). The ability to promote a needs and rights-based approach to the voice of the poor and the excluded needs not only monitoring but also dialogue and consensus building.

If the process of implementation is dominated by a rigid and mechanistic approach focused on planning, programming, public financial management and procurement it will lead to the removal from the Agenda of local political realities and complexities and preclude discussion of issues such as human rights and entitlement. This would risk further alienating AE from meaningful local ownership and relegating CS to the sidelines. It is thus essential to ensure a coherent approach at an early stage, in order ensure that the **different Agents of Development** each have a strategic role to play in implementing a truly meaningful and effective aid agenda. An acknowledgment of this important principle requires foresight as well as insight into interests, power relations, values, knowledge and access to information of each (of the development partners). The AE agenda must serve the interest of all groups in society and include social policy.

CS critiques of the current AE agenda suggest that donors have adopted a very technocratic approach to implement effectiveness. They focus it is alleged, on efficiency rather than effectiveness. The emphasis on 'efficiency' has the danger of excluding development that includes justice for poor people, social inclusion (including the rights of migrants and refugees who are a growing element of the population of many countries), the rights of women, the elderly and people with disabilities, all of whom are left off the agenda. There is evidence that dis-empowered groups rarely benefit from either targeted or vertical policies (Sigamany Ontrac 33). A strong emphasis on quantifiable outputs, most argue, is therefore likely to lead to failed policies. The Gender net groups have most cogently argued that focus therefore needs to be on cross sector policies e.g. not simply on education, water and sanitation or MCH, but rather on justice, employment, access to credit – needs of poor people that cannot be met through singular quantifiable mechanisms. The PA in its current form is geared to moving in a linear manner, whether the state in a particular context is weak in capacity or in a position of strength. Therefore, it is only through dialogue with a variety of groups that states can become more capable and accountable. The current planned mode of delivery is likely to lead to greater exclusion and the suppression of voices that are critical of target-led approach to development.

In sum, the range of concerns of civil society groups over both the PD and AE is focused on ownership and accountability and need to ensure democratic participation. The absence of CS inclusion and engagement indicates lack of political will and commitment to social participation from donors. It has been repeatedly argued that this is likely to lead to an exclusion of already marginalized groups in many countries of the developing world – women (who comprise 70 percent of the world's poor), the elderly, people with disabilities and the chronically ill. Existing structures of aid disbursement are also viewed as being unjust and dysfunctional and likely to reinforce growing disparities between the rich and poor. They may also contribute further to jobless growth, and further

de prioritisation of pro-poor budget allocations. Strong concerns have also been voiced from a range of CS actors about the lack of continuity in policy from earlier and major initiatives such as the PRSPS and the MDGs. Agencies such as the Commonwealth Foundation are calling for a reinstatement of commitment to both of these to ensure that the success stories of these policies in terms of CS-government participation and dialogue are not lost. CS actors highlight issues relating to gender poverty and human rights. They are fundamentally concerned about the instrumental nature of the AE agenda, which, they argue, is over-focused on administrative and bureaucratic processes, rather than real transformations to the lives of the poor.

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## **Annex 1: Glossary**

PD – Paris Declaration

PA – Paris Agenda

AE – Aid Effectiveness

CS – Civil society

CSO – Civil society organisation

CF – Commonwealth Foundation

NGO – Non-governmental organisation

ROA – Reality of Aid

GADN – Gender and Development Network

WPAAE – Working Party on Aid Effectiveness

JV – Joint venture

SIDA – Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency

APRODEV – Association of World Council of Churches-related Development organisations in Europe

PRIA – Society for Participatory Research in Asia

INTRAC – International NGO Training and Research Centre

STUDC – Swedish Trade Unions Development Corporation

ACT – Action by Churches Together International

CDFs – Country development frameworks

PRS – Poverty reduction strategy

PRSPs - Poverty reduction strategy papers

CCIC – Canadian Council for International Co-operation

IFIs – International Financial Institutions

DBS – Direct budget support

CGD – Centre for Global Development

DRC – Development Research Centre

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