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Accountability in development cooperation – a gender issue or not?

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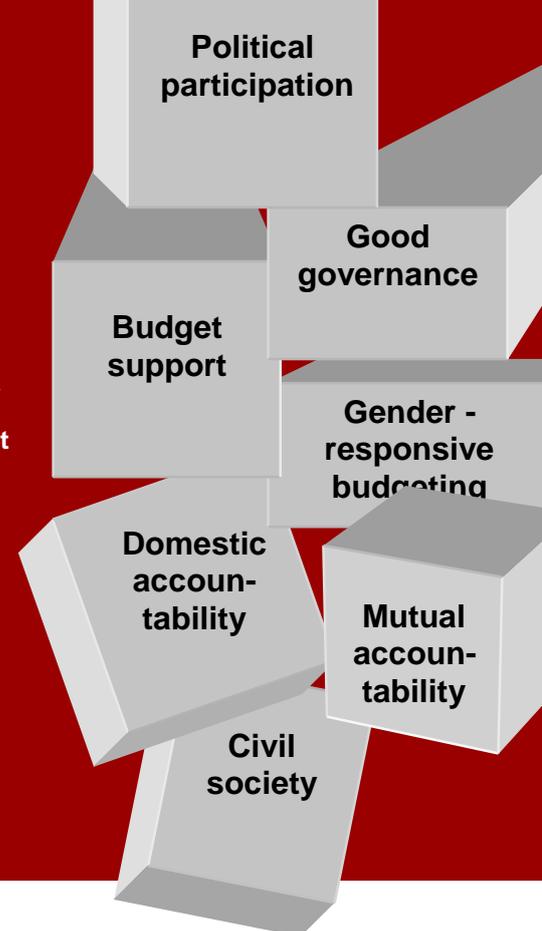
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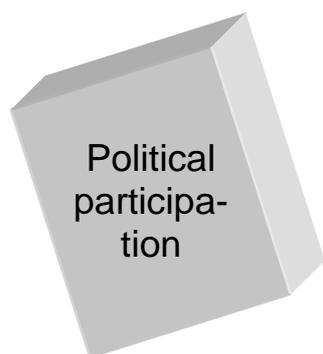
This paper explains how the principle of accountability is linked to the issue of gender equality, and to this end analyses the ongoing processes to realign development cooperation and the international agreements concluded in this regard. The purportedly gender-neutral instruments and principles of international development cooperation in fact have the potential to make a major impact in the field of gender, as we will demonstrate. If development is to be gender equitable and if it aims to give a democratic impetus, it is imperative that this be taken into account.



1. The problem in brief: Accountability in the context of good governance and gender

In the theory of democracy, the principle of accountability defines the relationship that exists between the government and the citizens of a democratic state. The principle can be broken down into four elements:

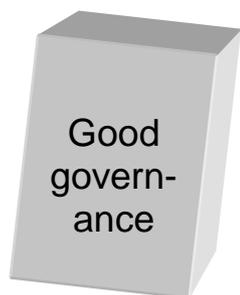
- **Transparency** – The citizens of a state must be able to understand the decisions and the actions taken by those in power.
- **Answerability** – Those in power are obliged to justify their decisions and actions.
- **Responsiveness** – Those in power must act in line with the needs and interests of citizens, i.e. they must represent them well. This presupposes that they are aware of the interests and needs of the people.
- **Enforceability** – Mechanisms must be in place that make it possible to punish those in power for any misuse of that power.



The quality and scope of a democracy depend in no small way on how the principle of accountability is translated into practice. The fundamental promise of a democracy can only be kept if the above four elements are operationalised with the help of specific instruments and measures. A sovereign people not only chooses its own government or returns it to power. It observes, monitors and influences the actions of those in power to ensure that these correspond to its own interests and convictions.

Accountability is an instrument that influences, negotiates and monitors power relations. Whether or not it works depends on both sides. Citizens are called on to become involved in the political process. The 'right' to make the government accountable must be defined and *demanded* 'from below'. Equally, the government must display at least a minimum will and ability to respond to demands of this sort. The right to accountability must be *granted* 'from above'.

In this process of 'hands-on democracy', the mass media, civil society organisations and the political parties all play a crucially important part. The *political parties* act as the link between the government, the opposition and the people. On the one hand they represent the 'will of voters' vis à vis those in power, and on the other they inform the people about the decisions and actions of the latter. *Civil society organisations*, which represent specific interest groups and ensure that the concerns and needs of these groups are heard at political level act as a balance to these comparatively cumbersome, and generally vast structures. The *mass media* act firstly as a forum in which various actors seek to justify their actions before a large audience, and secondly as independent investigators, who 'keep an eye on' those in power, monitoring them critically.



2. Accountability and good governance

Accountability is firmly anchored in German development cooperation in the strategy of the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) on the Promotion of Good Governance¹. In this context, accountability, in conjunction with empowerment, participation, gender equality, non-discrimination and transparency, is seen as one of the key human-rights-based elements of good governance and as a direct contribution to poverty reduction.

¹ Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development: Promotion of Good Governance in German Development Policy (BMZ Strategies 178).
<http://www.bmz.de/en/service/infothek/fach/konzepte/konzept178.pdf>

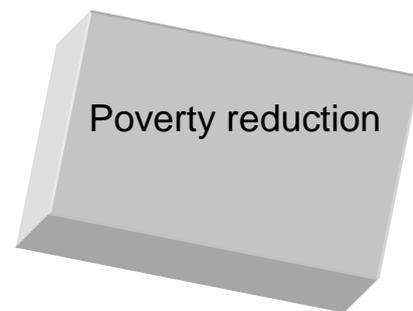
This view is based on the realisation that although the practical implementation of the obligation of a state to respect, protect and guarantee human rights ought to ensure that human rights standards are translated into binding national law, it is by no means self-evident that every government will meet these commitments. Thus individuals, in their capacity as citizens, are entitled and indeed called on to demand their sovereignty at regular intervals, and to help voice and realise their own rights and interests.

Good governance and accountability will however remain empty promises unless the conditions exist or are put in place to enable all citizens, male and female, to participate in political and societal processes not only formally (for instance where these rights are laid out in the constitution of a state) but de facto. In international development cooperation there is a long tradition of seeing poor individuals in particular as passive recipients of development aid. This only serves to prolong their dependence, and not only in material terms. They are not encouraged to identify their own needs, to voice these needs, and to demand that their political representatives take action to meet them. The precondition for participation, and this is indeed the foundation of all democratic processes, is the awareness of one's own situation and the conviction that it is possible to change things. In order to foster this awareness, all citizens must be seen and addressed as political beings, as active stakeholders.

Strengthening accountability instruments and promoting political participation for all sections of the population not only strengthens democracy in a country. It also makes an indirect contribution to reducing poverty.

If poor sections of the population want those in power to take into account their interests, they must participate to a greater extent in the political process. The interests of these groups, however, often relate to the provision of welfare services that are essential to reduce poverty (for instance a properly functioning health and education system, or an effective social safety net). Equally, they might relate to access to major resources (such as land). Where these basic services are not available a vicious circle emerges, which affects women in particular.

It is generally women who are responsible for caring for their immediate family. The less the state does in the fields of health care, childcare, water resources management, etc., the more women must do. This leaves them less time and energy to pursue other activities, such as undertaking gainful employment or becoming politically active and demanding improved social services.





The latter is absolutely indispensable if civil society is to function properly, and this in turn is a key element of the process of extending the reach of democratic principles.

3. Accountability, civil society and gender

What do the above insights mean though from a gender perspective?

1. Accountability is a key element in the fight against poverty. 2. Civil society is an essential actor in this context.

'Civil society' is generally understood to mean organised interest groups which are highly qualified in their field and undertake advocacy work on behalf of certain groups. They play a regulatory role between individuals and the state and are thus enormously important for accountability structures. Comparatively few people, however, become involved in civil society organisations and feel that these organisations represent their own interests. The structure of civil society organisations is also often such that they do not take into account the concerns of women, or do so only to a limited extent. This is a reflection of the obstacles to the political participation of women.

- **Socioeconomic factors** such as positioning on the job market, their occupation, education acquired and marital and family status have a major impact on the ability of women to participate. Financial resources free up time and are thus a precondition for participation. The type of occupation also determines the opportunities for networking and thus the access to influential individuals. The level of education of an individual limits or opens up opportunities on the job market and increases subjective political competence. Resources such as time, education, contacts and cash are thus preconditions for political participation. And women generally have fewer of these resources than do men.
- **Institutional factors** influence the opportunities open to individuals and groups to become politically involved, as a result of their structure. Career patterns, nomination practices, systems of government and political parties, electoral systems and the constitutional and legal foundations of a state are often tailored to suit male lifestyles and interests. Female interests, needs, scope for action and lifestyles are 'alien' to

politics, which is why women too are 'alien' to the world of politics.

- The **political culture** of a country shapes the scope for action open to an individual as a result of specific role allocations, stereotypes, clichés and traditions, and thus encourages or blocks the political participation of that individual. Accountability processes are often androcentric in their structure, like many other highly formalised political processes. Men and male behaviour patterns, ways of articulating interests, life histories and interests are taken as the norm and as a yardstick, which makes it significantly more difficult, if not impossible, for women to participate.

These findings clearly indicate that it is not enough to point out that on paper women enjoy equal rights. The subtle obstacles that effectively hinder women are many and varied – and women must be aware of them. Greater efforts must then be made if women wish to become integrated into the process of political consensus building. This is all the more true when the aim is to reach the 'uncoordinated' parts of society and motivate them to become active within civil society. By focusing on the needs of these individuals though, we can effectively kill three birds with one stone.

1. Accountability mechanisms that benefit the poorer sections of society are put in place, strengthening democracy.
2. A contribution is made to fighting poverty, since it would appear safe to assume that the interests of those affected by poverty generally relate to poverty-reducing measures.
3. Gender equality is enhanced if the factors that prevent women participating are tackled.



4. Accountability and new aid modalities

Within the framework of the ongoing restructuring of aid and financing modalities, greater attention is being paid to the principle of accountability. A distinction must be made between two forms of accountability:

1. Mutual accountability and
2. Domestic accountability

Mutual accountability requires donors and partner countries to make transparent and comprehensible use of development funds and thus targets in particular the accountability mechanisms between these actors. Not only are partner countries accountable for what they do with development funds. Donors too are subject to peer review². The principle of peer review is one of the main commitments undertaken by the international community within the framework of the 2005 Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness.

Another form of accountability is laid out in the Accra Agenda for Action (AAA), in which the international community re-affirmed and extended the provisions of the Paris Declaration in 2008. AAA focuses on **domestic accountability**, which addresses the level of accountability between the institutions of a nation state and its citizens. In concrete terms this means that national dialogue on development issues is extended and NGOs are involved to a greater extent in political processes. In the Paris Declaration and the AAA the principle of accountability is closely linked to the call for partner-country ownership. Partner countries are to decide on development measures more independently and the existing systems and structures of these countries are to be used more effectively to handle development aid. To make it possible to measure the results of development measures, partner countries are called on to manage their databases on a gender-differentiated basis.

Within the framework of the realignment of development cooperation in line with the principles laid out in the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness and AAA, the financing modalities too have been revamped. Budget support³ is a cornerstone of this new aid architecture. Budget support

² Within the framework of peer review, other actors assess (in this case) the development services provided by a country or organisation. The OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC), for instance, reviews the development policy of member states at roughly four-yearly intervals.

³ Budget support is granted on a selective basis. The target group of countries addressed by German development cooperation are primarily pro-reform low-income countries. The fundamental precondition for budget support is that the partner country has achieved an adequate level of good governance and that cooperation with the government of the partner country is based on mutual trust (BMZ Strategies, Budget Support in the Framework of Programme-Oriented Joint Financing (PJF), pages 9-10).

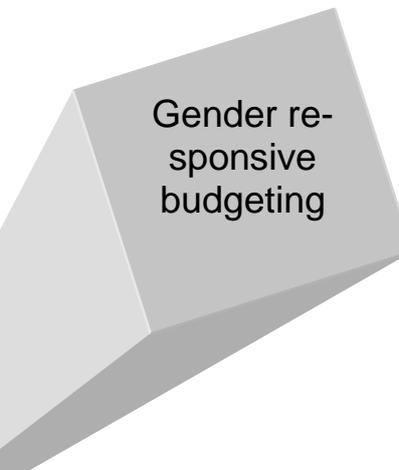


means that sectoral, suprasectoral and macroeconomic reform processes developed at national level by a partner country under the responsibility of that country are jointly financed by several donors. Budget support thus strengthens ownership on the part of the partner country, since it is part of national policy (e.g. poverty strategies) and of the national budget process. Budget support is paid by donors into the overall national budget of the partner country, which means that, theoretically at least, it is subject to the control of the national parliament and can be more readily observed by civil society and the media. The actual core element of budget support is the development of domestic accountability mechanisms.

Pursuant to the BMZ's strategy for budget support within the scope of programme-based approaches, the promotion and realisation of gender quality is pursued within the political dialogue between donor and partner countries (governance objective)⁴. Budget support is also intended to help achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and to reduce poverty (financing objective). This also embraces MDG 3 (gender equality and empowerment of women). The strategic political directives are quite clear and specifically geared to promoting gender equality within the framework of the new aid modalities.

This puts the promotion of gender equality in a new context, which embraces firstly the establishment and further development of state gender-oriented institutions, decision-making processes and checks and balances serving the interests of good governance, and secondly calls for the involvement and participation of citizens of both sexes. The concrete form taken by the relationship **between** the two sides – government and civil society – via existing accountability mechanisms is illustrated below, taking the example of budget support in Ghana. This example makes it quite clear what action is still required in order to ensure effective accountability mechanisms.

⁴ Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development: Budget Support in the Framework of Programme-Oriented Joint Financing (PJF), BMZ Strategies 181. <http://www.bmz.de/en/service/infothek/fach/konzepte/konzept181.pdf>



Gender responsive budgeting

Budget financing, gender and accountability – the case of Ghana

Gender-specific policy approaches

In Ghana, budget support provided by donors from 2004 to 2006 accounted for 25.3% of the entire national budget, at about USD 1 billion per annum. Budget support for Ghana goes directly into the national budget of the Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning (MOFEP) and is intricately interwoven with the public budget of the country. From the point of view of accountability, the processes of producing and adopting the budget are relevant. At various levels, instruments are in place that involve civil society organisations and take into account the interests of women in particular. The public and individuals, for instance, have an opportunity to comment on the draft budget in front of a parliamentary committee. To date little scope has been made available for this offer to the public, for reasons which are not clear. At parliamentary level too it is difficult to effectively lobby for the interests of women. Female members of parliament accounted for only 7.9% of the total in 2009 (as compared to 10.9% over the period 2005 - 2008)⁵. Neither is there any guarantee that female members of parliament are in fact committed to promoting women's interests.

Since 1999 Ghana has had a Medium Term Expenditure Framework (MTEF), which is drawn up for a three-year period and monitors the activities, efficiency and effectiveness of the spending of the various ministries and sectors. This should normally facilitate gender responsive budgeting⁶, but to date spending has only been analysed after the event rather than examining current spending in terms of its impact on gender equality. This thus remains a major challenge that we will look at in more detail below.

Another level at which accountability mechanisms could be effective is ministerial level. The distribution of funds poses a problem in this context. The Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs (MOWAC), whose mandate is to push forward with gender equality and the empowerment of women, receives only 0.4% of the national budget, which severely limits the action it can take. Nevertheless, a gender budgeting initiative, within the scope of which capacity development measures have been conducted in three pilot ministries⁷ since 2008 has managed to have gender budgeting accepted

⁵ United Nations Statistics Division: Millennium Development Goals Indicators. <http://mdgs.un.org/unsd/mdg/seriesDetail.aspx?srId=557&crId=288>

⁶ Gender responsive budgeting is a process which analyses a budget from a gender perspective and allocates funds on a gender equitable basis. For more information see, for instance Katrin Schneider/GTZ (2006): Manual for Training on Gender Responsive Budgeting. Eschborn. <http://www.gtz.de/de/dokumente/en-manual-gender-budgeting-2006.pdf>

⁷ The Ministry of Food and Agriculture, the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development.

as part of the national budget process. A gender briefing for the chair of the budget commission was held for the first time in 2009.

In projects and programmes **without budget support** the contribution made by donors to promoting gender equality is also tiny. Although it is relatively difficult to identify the precise percentage of funding made available to gender projects and programmes, the Ghana Partnership Resource Overview estimates that in 2007 approximately USD 390,000 was spent on specific gender projects. Since at least ten donors state that they implement projects of this sort (not including the three donors that are strongest in Ghana in terms of volume of funding provided – DFID, the World Bank and the EU), every donor would, on average, spend some USD 39,000 on specific gender projects. This is a tiny percentage of the total funding made available: 0.1% of all financial support received from donors is spent on social security, gender and vulnerability. A major problem is the discrepancy between the pledges made with respect to realising gender equality and the actual implementation of projects and programmes to achieve this (and the resources made available to this end). Although most donors have made undertakings with respect to promoting gender equality, and have appropriate strategies, this is not in itself enough to achieve gender equality. The undertakings are not reflected at financial level (some donors do not even disclose their spending on gender-related measures) and thus at implementation level. Evaluations indicate that the issue of gender is being 'outstreamed' rather than mainstreamed by donors, in spite of all claims to the contrary.

An assessment

In the overall budget process, a number of mechanisms are already in place for demanding and providing accountability in terms of promoting gender equality. These are, however, rarely used. As a result, the hands of those actors who contribute to achieving gender equality or demand that gender aspects be taken into account must be strengthened. In general, all those involved in the process must be made aware of the relevance of calls for gender equality. In addition to this, new accountability mechanisms must be introduced⁸, firstly at institutional level in the form of

⁸ Although this issue brief focuses on the major importance of the non-institutional level for accountability processes in a nation state and in development cooperation, this should not be taken to mean that the institutional level is not relevant. Quite the reverse is the case. The structures *within* the state administration are extremely important and have a great influence on whether or not the principle of accountability can be effectively applied at other levels. One positive example of this are budget divisions within individual ministries, which have the capacity and expertise they need and, acting as an interface between the sector ministry and the ministry of finance, can influence the form of the budget process. The existence of a division of this sort, say within the Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs, would significantly facilitate and strengthen gender-responsive budgeting processes. Cf. the GTZ factsheet: Institutionelle Voraussetzungen einer geschlechtergerechten Haushaltsführung. Eschborn, 2009.
<http://www.gtz.de/de/dokumente/gtz-de-institutionelle-voraussetzungen-einer-geschlechtergerechten-haushaltsfuehrung-2009.pdf>



Ownership

'horizontal' accountability, and secondly in the relations between institutions and citizens in the form of 'vertical' accountability.

Then and only then are the foundations laid for **inclusive ownership** that embraces not only the government, but also citizens of both sexes, civil society organisations, the academic community and the media.

Time to act!

Gender as a topic can illustrate the need to promote gender-differentiated and gender-effective accountability at national and international level. Although generally national and international legal frameworks to promote gender equality are in place, the commitments made are frequently not honoured.

The analysis of the example of Ghana has shown that gender equality approaches that address the institutional level alone are often condemned to failure or to have a limited impact. Accordingly, gender-related accountability mechanisms too have minimal chances of success if they are only mainstreamed institutionally. The state and its institutions are comparatively cumbersome giants. Attempts to achieve change that take this level as the entry point are then slow to bear fruit. The most promising and most sustainable moves for change are those supported by pro-reform groups within society, i.e. that are launched and demanded 'from below'.

Below we will sum up the findings to emerge from the debate so far. We will discuss hypotheses as to how gender-sensitive accountability can be incorporated into development activities and identify fields of action for concrete measures. This is done a) against the backdrop of the theoretical insights into the principle of accountability, b) given practical experience with the participation of women and value changes imposed 'from above' and c) in view of the political modalities of the new development aid and financing structure.

Hypothesis 1: Invitations and exhortations to participate that are offered by representative democracy are not enough to get women involved in politics to an appropriate extent.

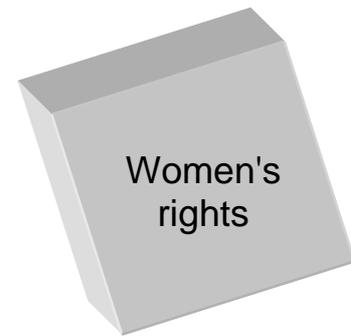
Representative democratic procedures are not particularly motivating and tend to ignore power gaps between various sections of the population. While lobby groups and special interest groups are comparatively influential, they represent only the specific concerns of women and/or the poor.

Women must then be addressed explicitly and with others within the framework of classic representative democratic procedures if their political interest and level of political participation are to be increased. One key precondition here is the principle of subsidiarity, according to which decisions are made at the most devolved level possible. This is particularly important given that women tend to express their needs at local level and are more likely to become engaged at this level to demand that these needs be met than at a higher political level, although this is where the more relevant decisions are made.

→ For political participation it is crucially important that the people are familiar with their own rights. Information about national pledges with respect to women's rights and international agreements ratified and their significance for women's rights must be made available at places where women can be found. The information must be couched in a language that is accessible to women with very different levels of education and must relate to topics that are relevant for women's day-to-day lives. This is best done at 'everyday' locations such as markets, schools, wells, hospitals, community centres or other public meeting places.

→ At the same time, the work of those sections of the population that have already been 'activated', i.e. civil society (women's) organisations and women members of parliament should be supported.

→ Opportunities must be created for 'practising' politics. Women in particular are often put off by the behaviour patterns, vocabulary etc. expected of them in a political arena. If they can 'practise' politics and participation at the lowest level possible in a comparatively protected framework, the foundations are laid for their entering formal politics. In this way more people, and in particular more women if they are specifically encouraged, will become involved in conventional, formal politics in the long run. One possibility is to initiate political planning games in neighbourhoods, districts, schools and universities. These could deal with the allocation of funds from the municipal budget, municipal planning, etc. This helps citizens, male and female, to become aware of their own needs and interests, to communicate these to those in power, and to demand that their needs are met. In the field of gender-responsive development and budget planning, GTZ has gained a wealth of experience in Banda Aceh in Indonesia. The initiation of the planning procedure MUSRENA⁹ in 2007 was intended to counter the very low level of female involvement in participatory planning processes at local level. Individual women and women's groups were involved in the planning procedures. The women could exchange views



⁹ The conventional planning procedure MUSREBANG was an almost entirely male-dominated instrument, which was in principle open to women, but was too unattractive for them to voice their own interests. The reason for this was probably the different gender roles accorded to men and women and the tendency to separate women and men in public dealings.



Practising budget planning

undisturbed and could elaborate project proposals. These proposals were then discussed with representatives of the district and sub-district authorities, who passed the proposals on to the superordinate municipal authorities. The result of this form of 'women action planning' was that 90 project proposals were submitted, of which 80% were classed as suitable by the planning authorities. Women were thus able to have their interests taken into account (e.g. the construction of a communications centre), while the city government played a leading role in financing gender projects and the city authorities were sensitised to the concerns of women. MUSRENA is thus an instrument for gender-oriented municipal policies that can be transferred to other countries and other contexts, and modified as required.

→ The local level must be strengthened. This is especially important in countries aiming to decentralise. Women participate more readily at local level (neighbourhoods, districts, villages, municipalities) than at national level. It would be possible to support and promote dialogue forums between the government and the people, as proposed by BMZ, not only at national level but also at local level. Citizens' budgets and 'fictitious' citizens' budgets too could play a part. The latter should be seen as a sort of planning game.

Hypothesis 2: Budget support has inherent risks of impacting negatively on national accountability processes.

The term 'post-conditionality' is used to describe the danger that the government of a partner country will feel more accountable to a donor or the donor community than to its own population (see experience gained in Mozambique¹⁰). This unintended constellation results from the fact that the population, in contrast to the financially powerful donor community, has little leverage to make the government accountable for its actions. Although in the best case scenario it is safe to assume that the donor regulations will benefit the population by consolidating democratic structures for instance, domestic accountability, which is a key element of democracy, at least risks being undermined. If we look to the future, the problem becomes clear. Development cooperation aims not only to strengthen and stabilise countries in the short term, but also and indeed primarily to achieve long-term independence from foreign aid. Democracy is a crucial

¹⁰ Golaszinski, Ulrich (2007): Interne Rechenschaftspflicht und Budgethilfe in Mosambik. Einige Gedanken zur Weiterentwicklung programmorientierter Ansätze in der Entwicklungszusammenarbeit. Friedrich Ebert Foundation, Africa Division.
http://www.fes.de/in_afrika/documents/SB_Mosambik_Budget03.07.pdf

precondition, but it is a process that must be learned and which takes time to develop (as the history of Europe demonstrates). The vitally important process of learning democracy can in fact be obstructed by budget support.

→ The issue of gender equity must not surface only once the financial part of the political process has been dealt with, and when we come to look at the substance. It must be part of the political dialogue from a very early stage. This presupposes that those in power are aware of the fact that they are accountable for their actions in the field of gender, and that they act accordingly. To this end it is of paramount importance that parliament, civil society, representatives of the private sector etc. are involved in the process of budget negotiations between donors and partner countries, and that they are able to voice their interests.



Hypothesis 3: Budget support risks neglecting cross-cutting issues.

In the course of budget support processes there is a risk that cross-cutting issues (gender, the environment, poverty, human rights, indigenous peoples, etc.) will be neglected, because no funds are made available for projects and programmes in these fields. Specific accountability mechanisms must be put in place to ensure that these topics continue to be taken into account at political level and that they are regarded as key issues at the heart of political processes.

→ To this end accountability instruments could be put in place, comparable to the shadow reports that are drawn up by NGOs in addition to the official government reports and which assess the progress made by governments in terms of achieving the aims of CEDAW¹¹. Those affected by cross-cutting issues and the (civil society) groups that represent their interests (women's movements, minority groups, environmentalists) would draw up reports which investigate whether or not the cross-cutting issue in question has been adequately taken into account in spending financed with the help of ODA funds¹². These reports would be published and in particular made available to the donors involved (perhaps online via IATI¹³). This mode of accountability does not entail sanctions but it does

¹¹ The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) is the single most important international convention on women's rights. The governments of signatory states undertake to report once every four years on gender equality policies to the CEDAW Committee, which reviews progress made in achieving the intentions of the convention. Parallel to this NGOs are able to present their views on the gender equality measures of their government and to put critical questions to their government in so-called shadow reports.

¹² Official Development Assistance (ODA) includes all financial, technical and human resources inputs within the scope of official development cooperation.

¹³ The International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI) was founded in Accra, Ghana, in 2008 and has made it its goal to democratise information about development financing such that it is more accessible, can be better used and is easier to understand. Members include donor countries, governments of developing countries, non-governmental organisations and experts.



foster political participation. Interests can be voiced and communicated and the donor community is given independent feedback about the use to which its funds have been put.

5. Conclusion

The ideas laid out in this issue brief, which are based on both a theoretical analysis of current political strategies and on political and practical considerations and experience, lead us to urge for the lowest political level to be strengthened. Only if democratic structures are so strong that accountability mechanisms are considered self-evident and are demanded can we speak of democratic consolidation. In the long run, this will not only get women, minorities and other marginalised groups involved in political processes. It is also a criterion that should be used to gauge the success of development cooperation.

See also the homepage of the Initiative: <http://aidtransparency.net/>

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