Third OECD World Forum

"CHARTING PROGRESS, BUILDING VISIONS, IMPROVING LIVES"

BUSAN, KOREA 27-30 OCTOBER 2009

INFORMATION-TRANSPARENCY-ACCOUNTABILITY: ADDRESSING DATA GAPS, EFFECTIVENESS, AND ACCOUNTABILITY CHALLENGES

AFRICAN MONITOR PRESENTATION

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I. ABOUT THE AFRICAN MONITOR

- AFRICAN VOICES FOR AFRICA’S DEVELOPMENT
- GRASSROOTS FOCUS
- GRASSROOTS DEFINITION
- CONTINENTAL NON-STATE ENTITY
- ROLE: MONITORING DEVELOPMENT SUPPORT PROMISES, COMMITMENTS, DELIVERY AT THE GRASSROOTS
- SOME FLAGSHIP PRODUCTS/ACTIVITIES:
  - Development Support Monitor (DSM-YEARLY)
  - Poverty Hearings
  - Grassroots Capacity Building For Monitoring
- GRASSROOTS FOCUS INDEX (GFI)
II. BEYOND IMPROVING ACCOUNTABILITY LOOPS - TOWARDS A PARADIGMATIC CHANGE
(OF POLICIES, APPROACHES, ATTITUDE)

1. ACCOUNTABILITY FOR WHAT?

- FOR RESULTS

- TO FORESEE – FORETELL – FOREWARN – FORESTALL/FORWARD

- FOR SHARING LESSONS (GOOD OR BAD PRACTICES)

- FOR MAINTAINING, IMPROVING, OR CORRECTING ACTION (INCLUDING DAMAGE CONTROL)
2. ACCOUNTABILITY KEY ACTOR GROUPS

- DECISION MAKERS: services delivery actors
  - Decision makers
  - Decision activators
  - Decision processors
  - Level three responsibility sharing-actions/outcomes

- THE BENEFICIARIES
  - Building the “demand” (from the bottom) for accountability
  - Citizen transformation agenda required
    - informed citizens organise better to claim accountability and quality services
    - Citizens’ sense of ownership for development processes
    - self responsibility and self organisation for action
    - articulation of demand for services
    - claiming accountability from leaders, managers, administrators and other middle persons
1. CONTEXT/CHALLENGES

- The Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness and the subsequent Accra Agenda for Action have highlighted the need for “timely, transparent and comprehensive information (data) on aid flows” to improve aid transparency and accountability; and ultimately aid effectiveness.

- In spite of various efforts to promote transparency and accountability in development aid delivery systems, various stakeholders within the development agenda are facing significant data-gap challenges.

- Available data on development resources currently faces three main challenges:
• **It is generally not timely.**
The average time-lag in aid statistics is between 2 to 3 years for macro-level data. For more detailed data, this time-lag can stretch up to 5 years. In the context of African governments, the time lag on comprehensive data averages 4-5 years.

• **It is not readily accessible.**
Depending on what the data source is, the levels of accessibility vary significantly. In terms of ODA data for instance, there are a number of international instruments which make macro-level data on ODA commitments and disbursements available. What is missing from this data is depth, specificity and detail. In many instances, one would have to go directly to the donor offices to access this kind of information, and go through various levels of red-tape. In terms of data from African countries, there is no comprehensive data-base that records resource flows, disbursements and use. One not only needs to go to each individual country in order to access data, in most cases even within the country this data is not coordinated – meaning that various central ministries and departments (treasury, planning, etc) would have to be approached and a comprehensive picture drawn from information received.

• **It is not comprehensive.**
Even those databases that attempt to provide information about commitments and disbursements such as the OECD DAC database, they are not able to provide comprehensive information about geographic location, sector specifications, and conditions attached. While the DAC CRS database does provide information on geographic location, some details are missing, e.g. implementing agency, target beneficiaries, expected outcomes, etc. Both databases do not account for development assistance from emerging donors.
Perhaps the greatest indictment for current aid data management systems is that they do not enable or facilitate proper measurement of effective use of resources and delivery. As a result, to a large extent we have not been able to answer the question, “is aid delivering results?”

I believe many of us here agree that there is an undeniable relationship between availability of information » transparency » accountability » effective delivery » and good governance.

However, I think as the international community we have not fully appreciated the relationship between availability of information/transparency » citizen activism » effective delivery » and accountable governance. Let me elaborate:-
2. HOW TRANSFORMATIVE INFORMATION CAN ENCOURAGE CITIZENS TO HOLD THEIR GOVERNMENTS ACCOUNTABLE

- Informed citizens are active citizens.
- Active citizens promote accountability from their governments.
- Accountable governments respond to pressure to deliver on commitments.
- The relationship between transformative information, active citizens and accountable governments manifests itself in two ways:
  - First, we have seen that when citizens have access to information which increases their knowledge of what they should expect from their governments and other partners in terms of development delivery, citizens tend to use this information more proactively to seek answers when delivery is slow or not happening. Civil society organizations have achieved incredible results by simply using available information to hold their governments and development partners accountable. This “top-down and up” system has one important prerequisite - the **right** kind of information should be available to citizens in a **timely** manner so that citizens can in turn feedback on outcomes.
Secondly, once citizens know what the intended outcomes of a development intervention are, they are able to evaluate and pronounce on the success of the intervention. Therefore, those who have made the investment, e.g. development partners, can measure outcomes and impact through citizen participation. This “bottom-up and down” system with one key prerequisite - there should be systems and channels for citizens to feedback to investors (either own governments or donors) about delivery outcomes and progress and this information should be used to improve development delivery.

- Interestingly, we have found that governments and donor partners who are confronted with feedback from beneficiaries are both overwhelmed by and appreciative of this information, since they can quickly identify what is not working and fix it in order to improve delivery.

- We have also found that African governments often complain about lack of access to future aid flows, which in turn hampers their ability to plan effectively for development delivery.
3. WHAT TYPES OF DATA IS NEEDED TO PROMOTE EFFECTIVE DELIVERY AND IMPROVE ACCOUNTABILITY?

- Transparent, comprehensive and timely data is necessary to tell a comprehensive story regarding the full scope of development resources, particularly ODA. It seems to me that aid is most probably underrated because its full story is never told in a timely manner and is never obvious beyond the small circle of data generators and users.

- African Monitor’s own experience has been that data availability diminishes and eventually disappears the closer one gets to the ultimate destination of the resources, by which time one is dependent on proxies and anecdotal evidence about where the resources were used and who the intended beneficiaries were.

- The essential information required for proper monitoring of aid delivery and evaluation of its development effectiveness at grassroots level include:-
  - Detailed information on commitments and disbursement of aid.
  - Intended program outputs and outcomes.
  - Information on multi-year commitments and disbursements.
• Current flow of overall assistance by individual donors at micro level.
• Details of programs and projects, according to development partner, sector, modality, implementers, period, region and other stakeholders.
• Level of alignment with country systems, institutions, and procedures.
• Details of financial and non-financial incentives of aid.
• More information on the objectives and targets of aid.
• More information on the procedures, conditions, and costs of aid delivery.

- The challenges are to devise ways to fill the gap between data required to undertake a proper assessment of resource delivery to target groups and evaluation of its development effectiveness.
- The International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI) is a perfect example of how these needs can be met by simply agreeing on reporting standards and augmenting existing donor databases to meet these standards. In the African contexts, such solutions still need to be found.
4. WHAT OTHER CREATIVE SOLUTIONS CAN BE APPLIED TO ADDRESS THE EXISTING DATA GAP CHALLENGES?

- African Monitor has explored various monitoring instruments, such as the Development Support Monitor, and modified public expenditure tracking surveys.

- These monitoring projects are naturally heavily dependent on secondary data sources from the databases. In the face of incomplete datasets, attempts are made to supplement this information with primary research using key informant interviews to verify data.

- Results from a modified Public Expenditure Tracking Survey in Uganda which looked specifically at the agricultural sector, indicated that donors contributed an average of 20.2% of total spending to this sector for the 2006/7 season. However, the formula for allocation of funds between districts, and programs was not clear to both officials at the district level and grassroots communities. In addition, the absence of clearly articulated desired outcomes by both donors and the government made it difficult to evaluate whether the objectives were met.
In order to undertake similar studies in Mozambique, Ghana, Rwanda and Chad, African Monitor had to conduct extensive, time-consuming and costly research exercises using project documents, donor and partner country records, and key informant interviews in the absence of readily accessible micro level data (project level). This means that monitoring efforts in this context continue to be labour and resource intensive.

Currently, we are in the process of developing a tool to assess the extent to which national governments and donors prioritise grassroots needs and align resources to identified needs.
Through the **Grassroots Focus Index (GFI)**, African Monitor will comprehensively collect and collate information from African governments and partners about internal and external resource flows; resource allocation and disbursement to specific sectors; and measurable outputs and outcomes.

- The **GFI** will be the first product of its kind that will comprehensively measure development focus on the poor and results in Africa, defined from a grassroots perspective. All this information will be available in an easy to use data base that can be accessible to all, in addition to the GF INDEX that will provide a yearly ranking of Government and donor performance regarding attention to the Grassroots.
Through the **GFI** we are identifying indicators that can be used to:-

- Measure grassroots focus at national and donor level;
- Provide evidence of good practice and performance in order to capitalize on what works;
- Share learning with different stakeholders;
- Provide evidence of ineffective performance in order to encourage change and better prioritization of the grassroots;
- Enhance alignment of resource, poverty reduction strategies and economic empowerment programmes to development needs of the poor;
- Provide consistent, reliable data on an annual basis, which can be used for information and advocacy by multiple stakeholders; and
- Provide end-user feedback to governments, especially at the local level.

This is an exciting development for us, as it presents the possibility of a comprehensive database that can complement efforts to record aid information which are more advanced among developed nations.
In this presentation I have highlighted the importance of data availability and transparency for governments, donors and civil society stakeholders who have a responsibility to hold their governments accountable.

If we are all collectively want to see improved delivery on the ground, we must endeavour to support all efforts that improve transparency between governments and citizens. Efforts such as IATI, the GFI and others offer creative solutions that will contribute positively to our development imperatives.

In the African context in particular, we know that democracy is maturing. However, it needs to be supported by numerous other systems which will continue to strengthen good governance. Data availability has a direct contribution to this.

As we chart progress and build a collective vision in this 3rd OECD Forum, we must make sure that data availability and access to information is central to future progress, especially if we want to meet the MDG’s, and fast-track our progress towards poverty eradication.

THANK YOU !!