

viewpoint

Rhetoric and Reality in Aid Effectiveness

The High-Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness in Paris in 2005 set in motion a number of processes focusing on good aid delivery, both among official aid agencies and civil society organisations. Since we dealt with the Paris Declaration in ONTRAC 33 in 2006 (available at www.intrac.org/pages/previous_ontracs.html) a lot has changed, and with the next High-Level Forum coming up in Accra in September, there is much to discuss about civil society's role in aid effectiveness.

At the present time, the more that is written about the Paris Declaration (PD), the more we are in danger of confusing and not clarifying what the real issues and agendas are. There is a clear tendency for people to bring into the PD and aid effectiveness debates questions which are at best secondary and at worst misleading. We should keep in mind these key points:

1) It is still possible to take the **PD at face value as an agreement between donors** to see if they can improve the efficiency of the administration of aid. If harmonising procedures reduces transaction costs for both donors and recipient governments then this is something most people can sign up to.

2) Who is deciding **whether a government's aid policy is a genuine reflection of a democratically generated and supported set of policies**, or merely the reflection of an autocratic group of politicians or state employees?

3) There appears to be some **'hidden agendas'** around issues such as international procurement, an excessive role for the World Bank to be arbiter of whether a recipient country has struck by

the PD or not, and so on. Given the highly technical nature of many of the indicators, which read like a World Bank manual, this is perhaps not a surprise. It can imply major changes for a recipient country – **changes which are not made explicit.**

4) The PD is still regarded as a **theory and policy for development instead of a set of relatively modest improvements in public administration.** We have debates framed as though the PD is the new development solution. This is misleading. It is clear that we could achieve all of the objectives of the PD which could improve the efficiency of aid, but that this would not necessarily improve the impact of international cooperation at all.

5) Civil society organisations have to reaffirm the positive contribution they make in their own right. Civil society including NGOs is **neither merely an adjunct of the state nor of the development industry.** Given the key element of pluralism and independence in civil society **we should neither expect nor promote alignment of policies either between civil society and NGO groups or automatically with state authorities.** This means that we need to reaffirm and celebrate what we do and what we have achieved, and not just be defensively on the back foot. We need to highlight positive solutions to the myriad of social, political, and economic constraints on poor people.

This is a summary of a thinkpiece available at: www.intrac.org/pages/thinkpieces.html

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In this issue:

Aid effectiveness and the Paris Declaration is one of the fastest-moving policy processes in development circles – but what should civil society organisations know about it? What is going on at the moment and how can we influence the proceedings for the third High-Level Forum in Accra in September? In ONTRAC 38, Brian Pratt and Katie Wright-Revolledo remind us of the most contentious aid effectiveness issues for civil society; Joanne McGarry and Sarah Mulley describe the key aid effectiveness groups, events and processes; AFRODAD summarise their recent research on the effects of the Paris Declaration on CSOs in nine African countries; François Lenfant finds that underlying power issues are still unresolved in civil society development effectiveness forums; and Toomas Mast and Tomas Brundin provide an official donor agency perspective on safeguarding civil society diversity within aid effectiveness.