

From Beijing to Paris: gender equality and aid effectiveness

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This article analyses the pertinence of gender equality and the rights of women as development objectives for the effectiveness of aid. It argues that the Paris Declaration, as a policy which guides new associations and modalities of aid, ought to serve women's rights and gender equality. In this sense, the text reviews the opportunities and challenges which the new instruments present, such as budgetary support and sectoral focuses. It points out that, in the same way, both donors and associated countries must assign and pledge aid based on their commitments in the international context of human rights, and key agreements on the rights of women and development, such as the BDPA, the CEDAW and the MDGs. Finally it presents a series of recommendations which may strengthen its impact in relation to the evaluation to be carried out at the Third High Level Forum in Accra (Ghana), at the beginning of September 2008.

How much is gender taken into account in development and aid effectiveness?

The Paris Declaration (PD) is a framework which incorporates a series of ongoing issues relevant to the effectiveness of development aid and the increase in its volume, centering on the flows of Official Development Assistance (ODA). However, the PD leaves out other policy decisions which determine aid effectiveness (such as commerce, debt, foreign investment, foreign currency transfers by emigrants, etc.) which are in turn a central aspect of the development agenda. The Paris statement of resolve, as well as its working mechanisms, are tied to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDG), and consequently to the framework of poverty reduction, in a context of harmonisation and alignment of aid from donors and also between donors and associated governments. From the perspective of gender equality, this is a narrow vision, in so much as the effectiveness of aid should be measured in terms of its contribution to the eradication of poverty, inequality, the application of human rights and development sustainability.

The new watchwords of aid effectiveness, harmonisation and alignment and the three central pillars - poverty reduction, ownership by countries and the participation of key actors in planning processes - present clear potentialities for democracy and participation. However these matters, as well the reduction of poverty and social and gender equality, cannot be assumed as the direct results of the instruments of the new modalities, which generate a

limitless number of opportunities and challenges in their implementation. When the ultimate objective is development, greater attention ought to be paid to the substantive policies and the quality or nature of the results desired, identifying new opportunities to advance, as much in the definition of a framework of rights as in the inclusion of gender equality as an objective, and not as a development means or instrument. It requires, in the same way, an alternative notion of policy coherence in line with the United Nations Conventions on Human Rights and the Rights of Women.

At the international level, states have ratified gender equality and human rights as a priority for development, peace, security and the fulfillment of the Millennium Development Goals. At the same time they have reaffirmed as essential the application of the Beijing Platform for Action¹ and Beijing+5, the CEDAW² and Resolution 1325 of the Security Council,³ and have recognised the relationship between the above mentioned implementation and development aid. In spite of these commitments, studies to date indicate that gender related results have not gone beyond mere words, and it is more than demonstrable that we are still moving in an unpredictable, highly volatile environment of inconsistent political will and little support in terms of the institutional capacity of the relevant actors and national structures, as well as the strategies and resources necessary to achieve the goals set in the Millennium Summit and in national development plans.⁴

In consequence, gender equality along with the rights of women is absolutely pertinent to this debate, given their importance as development goals. In the same way, the category of gender as a framework for analysis on the one hand, and development practices expressed in the planning of gender and the design of policy on the other, can contribute to the widening of the PD guidelines. In this way, there is great potential to deepen understanding of the articulation of the principles and the desired results, and to contribute to situating the efficiency of aid in the framework of development effectiveness. In this sense, we can look at two of the matter's most relevant aspects:

- The international laws and agreements accepted by the international community on matters relating to gender equality, as well as the results and strategies agreed upon in international conferences and the tools supplied by them to evaluate progress. In this way, the necessity of coherence between the objectives of these conferences in the 1990s and macroeconomic policy which leads to poverty would be made visible.
- The development of instruments and practical tools which have allowed the measuring and evaluation of development aid effectiveness to move forward, such as gender indicators and mechanisms, audits and gender sensitive budgets.⁵

¹ Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, resulting from the Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing, 1995.

² Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women.

³ Resolution on Women, Peace and Security.

⁴ De la Cruz, Carmen., "La Agenda de los Derechos de las Mujeres y la Financiación para el Desarrollo", en *El Perfil Social del Desarrollo*, Plataforma 2015 y más, Icaria Editorial, Madrid, 2007.

⁵ De la Cruz, C., Barrig M., García, A., "El financiamiento para la igualdad de género y la nueva 'Arquitectura de la Ayuda'. Los casos de Guatemala y Perú", 2007. Soon to be published, Fundación Carolina, CeALCI, 2008.

Principles and disagreements: women in the Paris agenda

The literature on the matter, as well as the working papers produced by women's organisations to date, question the way in which gender equality has been incorporated into the PD, which is to say, as a transversal aspect of harmonisation procedures. Measures have not been established to value its impact, nor is it linked to the five principles defined by the PD.⁶ In a similar way, the challenges which it presents for countries' democratic ownership and accountability to citizens, as well as the risk of a reduction of resources available for women's organisations, have all been criticised. Moreover, its focus on matters of a high technical level in relation to finance and monitoring mechanisms guided by World Bank instruments (like the CPIA)⁷ create serious difficulties as much for national women's movements, as for organisations and networks of women in relation to the development of capacities, information, participation and inclusion. These reflections, amongst others, have generated a critical debate about the opportunities which the implementation of the PD can offer in influencing structures, institutions and their instruments, incorporating the accumulated gender experience to the implementation of the five principles. Great challenges have also been highlighted. The management mechanisms of aid flows have a significant impact on the nature of the results, as well as serious implications for the attainment of objectives. In the same way, the five key principles have an effect which goes beyond the delivery of aid itself. In fact, they are the principal reference points for dialogue on policies and in defining the content of the programmes of all sectors and in transversal matters.

The participation process which is the basis of the principle of "**country ownership**" offers a valuable opportunity to advance the agenda of gender equality. However, for it to be meaningful, it must be recognised as a central element of the development agenda in the first place. If this condition is not met, the participation of women's organisations in the planning process will have a limited effect and will lead to a vicious circle of persistent gender inequalities. In the same manner, the principle of **alignment** is the need to ensure that resources - both development aid and the national budget - be assigned to the priorities defined by the country. Gender mainstreaming on the development plane and in budgets should be a condition of this process which responds to the commitment signed by the governments at the international level. Similarly, donors could employ the new aid modalities (budgetary support or SWAPs) to ensure compliance with the reforms, as well as the resources for a multi-annual period (MTEF), including those relative to gender mainstreaming and the empowerment of women.

In principle, the **harmonisation** of donors should allow for a greater definition of their comparative advantage and allow them to share the work in this regard. Even allowing for the risk that, because of this division of labour, many donors may neglect their commitments in matters of gender equality in their sectoral actions, the application of the PD represents a wide ranging opportunity to develop a common strategy or a number of strategic actions, both at the international and national levels. Furthermore, **managing for results** allows for the possibility of making the impact of gender more visible. The principles of human rights and the rights of women and the legal obligations of donors and governments must be used to determine the effectiveness of policies and focuses - particularly the impact on women and children. Statistics broken down by sex should be made available, and human rights-based indicators employed to monitor governmental obligations. The existent examples of female empowerment, participation, accountability in managing for results should be used.

In relation to **mutual accountability**, all of the actors should be overseen in terms of their

⁶ Gaynor, C., "The Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness and Gender Equality", United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women Expert Group Meeting on financing for gender equality and the empowerment of women, Oslo, Norway 4-7 September 2007.

⁷ Country Policy and Institutional Assessment

development commitments. It is important to know how parliament and the wider participation of other actors within civil society have supported donors to ensure transparency and accountability of commitments in terms of gender rights and the rights of women. The existence of plural monitoring mechanisms to ensure the identification of the changes or the absence of the commitments is fundamental. This will only be possible when organisations from civil society and strong, independent women's organisations with the necessary resources exist.

Finally, it is necessary to pay more attention to tackling gender inequalities in "fragile states". Being unaware of the different ways in which "fragility" affects women and men, the opportunity to incorporate women as agents of change may weaken the effectiveness of identical strategies meant to tackle it.

Impact of the new modalities

The reviews carried out in various reports point to the existence of critical variables in integrating the dimension of gender in national development strategies. These include:

- (i) The institutionalisation of participation procedures for gender activists in all phases of the planning cycle;
- (ii) A systematic focus which articulates development policies and priorities, including those regarding gender, with programming, budgeting and monitoring based on results;
- (iii) The establishing of clear lines of responsibility and accountability towards all of the national actors, including parliament and citizens; and
- (iv) The need for donors and associated countries to work closely together, consistently applying the five principles of the PD.

Authors such as Williams affirm that the working mechanisms recommended by the PD, denominated "new aid modalities",⁸ are not neutral from the social or gender perspective and that it will be necessary to promote creative forms of intervention to turn them into empowerment tools for the equality of gender, adding that: *"Each one of these new modalities should be analysed and evaluated in relation to its potential impact on social and economic development, gender equality, the empowerment of women, democracy and participation"*.⁹ In order to do this, two matters must be broached: the first is related to the degree of availability which the new modalities allow in relation to the provision of good quality public services such as, for example, health care, education, water and energy, amongst others, to the extent that they are linked to the social and economic empowerment of women and have an impact on gender. The second is linked to specific gender interventions and in what way the new modalities can be used to augment the finance of said interventions. In the same manner, other authors have also pointed out that women's rights have not been an integral part of the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers, nor have external matters which affect poverty, such as trading terms, national debt, and the way in which countries are incorporated into the economy, as well as implications for the gender division of labour and access to the control of resources. Another issue is related to the direct support of budgets which raises important problems for monitoring and accountability, and the reduction of resources for women's organisations.

⁸ General budgetary support, Sector-wide approaches (SWAPs); Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper, Basket Funds, Joint Assistance Strategy.

⁹ Williams, Mariama, "Financing Development, Democracy and Gender Equality", conference given at the VIII Commonwealth Women's Affairs Ministers Meeting, May 2007.

The opportunities and challenges which are offered by the changes in the new modalities are numerous. What follows is a list of some of the most critical issues:

- How to ensure the qualified, sustained and systematic participation of women's networks in all stages of planning, including the programming, budget elaboration, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the same.
- How to avoid the breach between gender mainstreaming and the present assignation of resources.
- How to ensure that gender equality is not lost in thematic, sectoral or programmatic actions.

As the application of the PD and the development of its working mechanisms advances, the fundamental task is to build the capacities of countries to lead and to influence the development agenda from a gender perspective. This would require supporting key actors - individuals and organisations - so that they can place gender equality at the forefront of the agenda. It is here that donors can play a key role. The sector wide approaches (SWAPs) also offer a wide-ranging potential to incorporate and assign resources from a gender perspective. The multi-annual phase of the SWAPs can offer a systematic and institutionalised procedure in which to involve national women's movements and other social activists. These organisations could identify benefits, guarantee gender mainstreaming in the sectoral policies and programmes, ensure that technical assistance supports the construction of gender capacities, and ensure that both monitoring and evaluation procedures include gender results. This process may also be important in the building of alliances, ensuring their participation in organisms and decision-making mechanisms, and promoting institutional reforms which support the incorporation of gender perspectives in the governmental agencies responsible for SWAPs.

Recommendations with a view to Accra: reinterpreting the spirit of Paris.

• Preparations for the Accra High Level Forum, which will take place in September 2008, will inform on the progress of the PD in the medium term and will offer an important opportunity to consolidate achievements and advance in the reinterpretation of the spirit of Paris, beyond Accra and the horizon of 2010. In this sense, diverse opportunities exist at the national, regional and international levels which can be used to ensure that the objective of gender equality be incorporated into the debate and procedural practice. We shall now go on to make some short-term recommendations:

• **Donors and associated countries must assign and commit aid** based on their pledges within the international human rights framework and other key agreements on women's rights and development, such as BDPA, CEDAW and the MDGs.

• **Donors and associated governments must promote information and debate** about the processes of aid effectiveness within civil society, both in partner countries and donor countries. The identification of key gender messages which can be incorporated into communication initiatives is necessary.

• **Donors and governments must strengthen the capacities, resources and authority** of the national women's movements, parliamentary commissions and other governmental institutions to influence the planning of national development aid, as well as budgetary assignments for gender equality and women's rights.

• **Donors as well governments should ensure direct funding and establish clear participation mechanisms for women's rights organisations** as part of civil society, especially of women's groups which are socially excluded, in all processes of policy dialogue, planning, managing, monitoring and evaluation.

• **The Accra High Level Forum must ensure by way of its Action Agenda the definition of a work plan** for 2010, evaluating the new development aid modalities in terms of their impact on the objectives of poverty reduction, promotion of equality and guaranteeing of human rights.

• **The Accra Agenda for Action (AAA) must recognise women's organisations and the organisations of civil society** as development actors and create the conditions which allow them to carry out an effective role in the programme, the elaboration of budgets, monitoring and evaluation.

• **The AAA must promote the creation of an independent monitoring and evaluation system for the PD** and its impact on development. The monitoring and evaluation process must pay more attention to the links between the reforms of aid modalities and the results in terms of development and progress in human rights.

• **The AAA must promote the creation of multi-sector mechanisms in order to make governments and donors accountable.** Multi-sector mechanisms must be developed for government and donor accountability regarding the use of the aid. They must be open, transparent, and periodic, with real space to enable women's organisations and other social organisations to oversee governments and donors.

- The substantive participation of women's organisations and other organisations from civil society in the Accra High Level Forum is necessary. They must to take part in official discussions, even at the Ministerial level and in the preparation of the AAA document. The agenda of the High Level Forum should reflect the concerns of groups which are often excluded from these procedures, and gender equality and women's rights must form part of the debate at each one of the nine envisaged round tables.

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