

THE PARIS DECLARATION ON THE EFFICIENCY OF DEVELOPMENT AID AND ITS POSSIBLE EFFECTS FOR MONITORING AND EVALUATION AND THE ROLE OF CIVIL SOCIETY AND NGOS

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Introduction

Efficiency is the key word that defines the promising "Paris Declaration", which was agreed on over a year ago, in March 2005. The Declaration puts forth clear goals to improve the efficiency of development aid through appropriation, harmonisation, alignment and outcomes and mutual responsibility. However, there are many doubts regarding its implementation process. This document questions and analyses the implications of the "Paris Declaration" to the civil society and NGOs as well as the lack of appropriate "Monitoring and Evaluation" systems in the implementation process. Likewise, in some cases, it makes reference to the specific situation of Spain as a member country in this process.

The aim of this document is to encourage participation and dialogue between governments, NGOs, civil society and the international development cooperation community in general.

The Paris meeting focussed the agenda on actions that have a direct impact on the efficiency of development aid. Twelve indicators were developed to oversee progress achieved. As in Monterrey, the importance of an increase in the volume of aid directed towards development activities was recognised. The Declaration is extremely promising but its success is based on many assumptions. Not only support to partner countries to help their governments improve implementation of development aid will be of great importance, Not only the support given to partner countries when assisting their governments improve the implementation of development aid will be of great importance, but also the participative processes and the Monitoring and Evaluation systems that are used at the time decisions are made will be influential, as democracy in some countries is questionable. All of this will be even more important if the existing and the new bilateral and multilateral initiatives bring with them an increase in development aid.

In this second High-level Forum on the Efficiency of Development Aid, it proceeds with the Declaration adopted during the High-level Forum on Harmonisation in Rome (February 2003) and the fundamental principles achieved during the Round Table in Marrakech on Management aimed at development results (February 2004) inasmuch as it is believed that they will increase the impact of aid to reduce

poverty and inequality while accelerating growth and hastening the fulfilment of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).¹

In the Paris Declaration document the following goals were established:

- Increase the efficiency of development aid;
- Adapt and apply to the different situations of countries;
- Specify indicators, calendars and goals;
- Supervise and evaluate implementation.

As cooperation commitments and to be able to improve the efficiency of development aid, the following topics are considered relevant:

- Appropriation;
- Alignment;
- Harmonisation;
- Management aimed at results and mutual responsibility.

The Role of NGOs and Civil Society

To be able to define the role of NGOs and civil society it is important to understand their definition:

“A non-governmental organization (NGO) is a not-for-profit, voluntary citizens’ group, which is organized on a local, national or international level to address issues in support of the public good. Task-oriented and made up of people with a common interest, NGOs perform a variety of services and humanitarian functions, bring citizens’ concerns to Governments, monitor policy and programme implementation, and encourage participation of civil society stakeholders at the community level. They provide analysis and expertise, serve as early warning mechanisms and help monitor and implement international agreements. Some are organized around specific issues, such as human rights, the environment or health.”

Source: Department of Public Information, United Nations

*The World Bank uses the term civil society to refer to a **wide range of non-governmental and non-profit organisations** that have a presence in public life, expressing the interests and values of their members or others, based on ethical, cultural, political, scientific, religious or philanthropic considerations. Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) therefore refer to a wide array of organisations: community groups, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), labour unions, indigenous groups, charitable organisations, faith-based organisations, professional associations and foundations.*

It is clear that the Paris Declaration is an agreement established at government levels. The participation and the role of NGOs and civil society in this Declaration has not been dealt with and, perhaps to a certain degree, it goes without saying that it will be the partner countries who, from now on, define the role that civil society and NGOs will play in this process. Moreover, the Paris Declaration shows some limitations since it only concentrates on measuring the efficiency of development aid but does not take indicators of effectiveness or of the impact of the aid into consideration.

¹ High-level Forum: Paris 28 February – 2 March, 2005. Declaration of Paris on the Efficiency of Development Aid.

There are many countries with frail governments, others where democracy is questionable and others where corruption prevails. In these countries, NGOs and the civil society very frequently play a crucial role in supervising and evaluating the countries' national strategies. The role of NGOs and civil society in the Paris Declaration has not been formalised nor have the guidelines of their participation, rights and duties.

In countries where the majority of development aid is currently being handled by NGOs, as is the case of Spain, NGOs are confronted with the following questions:

- What will happen when development aid is directly managed by the partner countries and their national governments and NGOs have to ask the recipient countries for funds?
- Will NGOs be obliged to align their strategies with that of the partner countries?
- How will the new Declaration affect the independence of NGOs and their role as supervisors and independent aid evaluators?

As an example one can refer to the new EU financing plans which demonstrate that co-financing mechanisms for European NGOs will not exist as all of the financing will be given directly to the EC offices or delegations in the recipient countries. In other words, NGOs will have to align themselves with the national strategy agreed between the EC and the recipient country respectively.²

During the International NGO Training and Research Centre (INTRAC) seminar in Sweden in October 2005, the Paris Declaration was presented to the participating European NGOs. Despite the fact that the Declaration had already been signed seven months earlier, it was surprising that NGOs were not aware of its existence and much less of what consequences it would bring. It seems that although the Paris Declaration concerns the entire international development cooperation community, the governments of these countries had done very little to make NGOs and the civil society aware of the existence of this declaration.

The Role of NGOs and Civil Society in the Area of Monitoring and Evaluation

As already mentioned, NGOs and civil society play a key role in some countries when it comes to supervising and evaluating the national strategies. The Paris Declaration contains many voids, above all with respect to the implementation of methods of monitoring and evaluation. It also makes it clear that accountability will be from country to country, thus leaving civil society and NGOs aside. Keeping this in mind, some points of the declaration and their effects at the moment of supervising and evaluating governments were analysed.

Area I: Reinforce the national development strategies of partner countries and their operative frameworks (for example, planning, budget and achievement evaluation frameworks) and

Area VI: Define measures and achievement and responsibility standards for the systems of partner countries in the areas of public finance management, supplies, fiduciary safe-conducts and environmental evaluations, applying them in a quick and extensive fashion, closely following the widely accepted good governance measures.

² INTRAC 2006: Newsletter No. 33 - Aid Harmonisation: Challenges for Civil Society.

The majority of NGOs and civil society are independent organisms; nevertheless, the Declaration indirectly obliges NGOs to be an extension of the governments given that they will depend on them whenever they need funding for their activities. The dependence that could arise could directly affect their independence and transparency; a fact which differentiates them from the governments of partner countries where they operate. In other words, NGOs will probably have to adapt themselves to the requirements of the partner countries. In countries with well established governments this is of no consequence, but it should be noted that democracy in many partner countries is often problematic. NGOs, above all, could find themselves confronted with a new reality which will not help improve development aid efficiency but perhaps even worsen it.

By creating such a controversial situation for the civil society and NGOs the question will be whether the citizens of partner countries and the results that are foreseen from the monitoring and evaluation processes to ensure accountability, will be transparent enough to really measure aid efficiency.

Area II: Increase the alignment of development aid with the priorities, systems and procedures of partner countries thus helping to increase their capacities.

The Paris Declaration stipulates that development aid should be aligned with the priorities, systems and procedures of partner countries, while helping to increase their capacity; this will mean that the national and local governments of the countries will create their own priority strategies. The question will be whether the governments of partner countries will allow NGOs and the civil society to participate when the time comes to make decisions on the priorities of the countries.

Keeping in mind that NGOs generally receive part of their funding from bilateral institutions, which have signed the Declaration, this will mean that from now on they will have to both consider and align with the priorities set out by the partner countries. For many NGOs, especially those that work in countries whose democracy is questionable, this could mean that NGOs will have to work towards the goals of the national governments while leaving their own goals or strategies aside. This point will represent a big challenge for civil society and the NGOs who do not always concentrate on following the goals of the governments but also follow their own goals since they are set up that way.

The idea that the partner countries define their priorities is excellent but let us not forget the experience with the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSP) which were severely criticized in many cases for excluding the vulnerable population, NGOs and the civil society. It is crucial that the bad experiences in some processes of the PRSP are not repeated and for this to happen it is necessary to create monitoring and evaluation systems that control and ensure the participation of not only the national and local governments but also of NGOs and the civil society while at the same time shielding the most vulnerable population during the processes of selection of priorities.

Area III: Intensify the mutual responsibility of donor and partner countries towards their citizens and parliaments regarding their policies, strategies and fulfilment of development objectives.

The intensification of the mutual responsibility of donor and partner countries towards their citizens and parliaments should also be based on empowering systems for civil society and NGOs. However, this is not mentioned in the Paris Declaration. In many countries the infrastructure that allows citizens, NGOs and civil society to supervise and evaluate the activities of the countries does not exist.

Empowerment systems are necessary to ensure the delivery of the services offered by governments and the fulfilment of strategic plans.

Area IV: Eliminate duplication of efforts and rationalize donor activities to ensure a maximum yield possible and

Key Area V: Reform and simplify policies and procedures of donors to encourage collaboration and progressive alignment with the priorities, systems and procedures of partner countries.

Eliminating the duplication of efforts and rationalizing donor activities to ensure maximum yield possible, as well as reforming and simplifying the policies and procedures of donors towards the collaboration and progressive alignment with the priorities, systems and procedures of partner countries, are goals that will surely have a positive impact on the increase of development aid effectiveness.

Action 1: [Change] weaknesses in institutional capabilities of developing countries and implement national development strategies aimed at results.

Although in many countries monitoring and evaluation systems and methodologies are clearly understood and carried out, there are still countries where basic evaluation techniques are not implemented, while in others monitoring and evaluation methodologies only have one control function. As an example it can be observed that Spain, although a country of the North, still has some challenges to overcome. Monitoring and evaluation in Spain have not been completely institutionalized and, in general, when the time comes to implement them they are more control-based. It is evident that a lack of knowledge exists in many countries regarding monitoring and evaluation, so it is clear that equipping countries will be a gradual process both in the North and in the South. The question is, how countries in which these basic systems have never been institutionalized will suddenly have to use national development strategies aimed at results.

NGOs and the Civil Society have to Take Action

The Paris Declaration does not specify how it wants to solve problems related to corruption, lack of transparency and monitoring and evaluation capabilities of some countries. In many places civil society has had a monitoring and analysis function of the fulfilment of the government's national plans. Despite the fact that this function of civil society is recognised, no mention of it has been made in the Paris Declaration.

Keeping in mind that many of these goals should largely be reached in 2010, the question will be how partner countries are creating their operative frameworks. Are they currently being created in collaboration with the civil society and NGOs? Progress towards the Paris Declaration goals will be supervised in 2008 which shows how urgently the role of civil society and NGOs within this Declaration needs to be clarified. At the same time, they should show their own initiative to attract attention for international development cooperation on this type of topic.

Foroaod – Spanish Development Aid

FRIDE organised the project “Spanish Development Aid - Mid-term Review and a Proposal for a Participative Consultation” between June 2006 and April 2007. This project aims to develop a consultation process about the current Spanish government’s development cooperation policy. We have created a forum for participation and debate, in order to assess the Spanish development cooperation reform agenda and to identify the main achievements and shortcomings in operationalising the initiatives based on the principle of “More Aid, Better Aid”. A set of recommendation guidelines were developed, through participative methods, with the objective of putting into practice the aspirations of the Spanish development cooperation policy.

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