

**Expert Group Meeting
At the DCF High-level Symposium in Luxembourg
Monday, 17 October 2011**

REINFORCING INTERNATIONAL MUTUAL ACCOUNTABILITY

1) Background

The urgent need to promote transparent and accountable development cooperation has been repeatedly underscored notably at the United Nations International Conference on Financing for Development, the 2008 and 2010 UN Development Cooperation Forum (DCF) and the DCF Symposium held in Vienna in November 2009. The paramount role of mutual accountability was also most recently reflected in the MDG Summit Outcome Document and the Istanbul Programme of Action. The 2010 DCF decided that the DCF should continue to conduct regular assessments of progress in mutual accountability and transparency. This echoed a reference to the DCF in the Accra Agenda for Action, welcoming the forum's contribution to the international dialogue and to mutual accountability on aid issues (para 31).

The recent Mali High-level Symposium to prepare for the 2012 DCF concluded that mutual accountability between donor and programme countries at global level is vital to promote progress in mutual accountability at country level. The DCF was encouraged to continue to regularly review progress in mutual accountability on aid commitments at national and global level, with special emphasis on Least Developed Countries. There is scope to further deepen the analysis and to showcase country level experiences in the DCF.

Analysis conducted for the DCF (see 2) points to the following two policy recommendations:

1. Much more effort is needed to **connect international and national-level mutual accountability processes**. DCF analysis finds that virtually no information on provider and recipient country comparative performance filters from the international level to analysis presented to national mutual accountability forums. Such information could help set benchmarks for progress and identify how they can be achieved.
2. There is a strong need for **regular global assessments** of progress on national-level mutual accountability, to learn lessons and create pressure for further progress. Annual assessments will continue to be conducted for the DCF, but these require wider dissemination. Meetings of the Working Party on Aid Effectiveness (WP-EFF), and regional meetings of programme countries should identify where more advances are needed and how the international community can accelerate progress.

2) What do we mean by global mutual accountability?

There are a multiplicity of global and regional mechanisms aiming to promote mutual accountability. They include independent non-official assessments (e.g. by civil society organizations, peer review mechanisms and official mechanisms for providers, programme countries and other stakeholders to review one another's performance. An Oxford Policy Management study of global mutual accountability mechanisms in 2008 found that many independent non-official assessments have a strong record of providing transparent, independent 'evidence'. But, to some degree, precisely because they are independent, these mechanisms lack 'ownership' by stakeholders, which limits their impact on development cooperation behaviours. On the other hand, mirrors¹ and two-way mirrors² have

¹ peer review mechanisms among donor countries; or among developing countries

² official mechanisms whereby donors programme countries and other stakeholders can oversee each other's performance

high ownership, but do not always provide high quality evidence, especially on individual providers in specific developing countries. Therefore they can also be weak in promoting changes in development cooperation behaviours.

The study's key recommendations were to:

- Promote improved evidence, ownership and debate in the best mechanisms, especially those which are fully inclusive of developing countries and other stakeholders;
- Rationalize mechanisms by cutting back those which are least effective;
- Increase coordination and complementarity among mechanisms;
- Strengthen developing country voice in all mechanisms;
- Strengthen peer and other formal review processes in regional donor groupings and the multilateral development banks; and
- Integrate non-official independent assessments into official processes.

Since then, evidence has shown that while the Paris Declaration and the Accra Agenda for Action provide a basis for many providers and recipients to agree on clear commitments, developing countries have made much greater progress than providers in implementing these and changing behaviour. This may be because providers are held much less accountable individually.

The effectiveness of global accountability mechanisms depends on the quality of their evidence base, the level of ownership by all stakeholders, and the degree of dialogue and behaviour change they provoke. Analysis for the DCF has found that clear principles are needed to ensure that global mechanisms support accountability. These include (i) responding to the information needs of different stakeholders; (ii) providing timely, accurate and up to date data; (iii) making additional information available such as the conditions attached to aid and the terms of concessional loans; (iv) being relevant for economic analysis, budgeting and planning, social and environmental appraisals, and analyzing progress of projects and programmes as well as progress towards the internationally agreed development goals; (v) providing a mechanism to trace aid through the system from provider to intended beneficiary; being classified to match local budgets and plans, in a common data format which is easy to integrate into local systems; (vi) coming from all possible providers, including non-DAC, foundations and charities; (vii) and being easy to access for all stakeholders, especially those in developing countries.

A survey conducted in 2009 for the DCF helped to identify eight systemic gaps explaining the slow impact of global mutual accountability mechanisms on development cooperation. This led to the following recommendations that should be discussed as part of this expert group meeting:

1. DAC data and donor publications – hence development cooperation providers – are virtually the only source used by global mutual accountability mechanisms. Non-executive government stakeholders (parliaments and local governments) and other civil society groups are barely consulted

Sources of Data and Analysis: It is vital that all global mutual accountability mechanisms make greater efforts to collect and use source data and analysis from recipient countries, independent analysis and other stakeholders such as parliaments, local governments and civil society groups, as well as donors.

2. Developing country governments are woefully under-represented in designing and leading the assessment process in global mutual accountability mechanisms. Other key stakeholder groups – notably parliaments, local governments, and civil society representatives, have even less voice in many key global or regional mechanisms.

Stakeholder Involvement in Processes: It will be vital to involve developing country governments and non-executive stakeholders much more closely in choosing indicators, designing assessment tools and processes, and generating and presenting results, to achieve genuine mutual accountability.

3. The content of assessments is dominated by the concerns of providers, and by the issues on which consensus could be reached among providers in negotiating global compacts such as the Paris Declaration. Two other issues also receive attention, on which much progress has been made since Accra, because they were monitorable action points in the AAA: multiyear predictability and aid transparency. Much less attention is paid to policy coherence. The issues which are of greater concern to recipient country governments – reducing conditionality, ensuring that technical assistance is transformed into capacity building, and maximizing flexibility of development cooperation providers to fund national development programmes across all sectors, are even less analysed.

Content of Assessments: Though many global mutual accountability mechanisms stress concern about overall accountability and transparency of providers, they need to engage in assessments of transparency and multi-year predictability of providers at the level of recipient countries and examine the degree to which providers participate in national-level mutual accountability and transparency mechanisms to change provider behaviour.

4. Another factor limiting impact of global mutual accountability mechanisms is the relatively narrow coverage of many mechanisms. Most limit their coverage to DAC providers and major multilateral institutions, or a subset of these. No mechanism provides a fully “mutual” assessment in the sense of analysing both provider and recipient country performance, or the performance of individual providers at the level of individual recipient countries.

Coverage of Providers/Programme Countries: It is crucial that global mutual accountability frameworks review progress against clear targets for individual providers, and demand from them detailed implementation plans to ensure these are reached. A great deal more work is needed to involve non-DAC providers in defining future agendas (built around their own separate frameworks as necessary), so that mutual accountability can become genuinely global.

5. In terms of frequency, almost all mechanisms are annually updated. On timeliness, most of the mechanisms aim to publish the data and analysis they collect each year within six months of the base year for the data.

Timeliness/Frequency: Assessments need to be updated as frequently as possible (preferably annually) and with maximum timeliness (preferably in the six months following the year assessed).

6. There has been a considerable amount of cooperation among international and regional mechanisms in the sense of using one another’s data. In contrast most official processes do not draw on independent analysis mechanisms’ results. There has been little discussion about the possibility of merging or rationalizing mechanisms: recently there has been a proliferation of mechanisms.

Cooperation among mechanisms: There is a strong need for mutual accountability mechanisms to cooperate more closely by exchanging data, and rationalising data and analysis collection processes, especially in ensuring that official mechanisms draw on independent analysis.

7. Very few of the global assessments are used in national-level mutual accountability mechanisms. It is difficult to see how they could be relevant, partly because they do not track provider progress at the recipient country level, but also because many of them are not constructed to reply to the key concerns of recipient governments or stakeholders.

Links/Usefulness for National Mechanisms: There is a need to make much stronger efforts to ensure that global level assessments are used in national-level Mutual Accountability mechanisms to increase provider and recipient behaviour change.

8. It is clear that the Paris Declaration and its surveys have the most impact on behaviour change at national and global level. This impact could however be dramatically increased if progress reports on the implementation of the Paris Declaration incorporated analysis of individual providers. Other mechanisms such as the Africa Progress Panel, Mutual Review of Development Effectiveness (MRDE), and ONE have more impact at the global policy level, especially on G8 member state policies. But these are focused more on quantity and delivery of specific promises rather than effectiveness or results. Publish What You Fund (PWYF) and the Quality of ODA (QuODA) assessment might be able to have more focused impact at global level insofar as they intend to emphasize narrower issues of transparency and quality. Multilateral organizations take seriously and try to respond to the Common Performance Assessment System (COMPAS) and the Multilateral Organization Performance Assessment Network (MOPAN) findings. EU donors appear to take the Donor Atlas and EU Aid Watch reasonably seriously, as the providers of humanitarian assistance do the Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance (ALNAP) and Development Assistance Research Associates (DARA). Some recipient countries use the "Guide to Donors" to change their behaviour towards providers, prioritizing different providers, negotiating improvements in provider behaviour to match each provider's global best practices, and introducing additional elements to their aid policies or assessment frameworks. However, because it is not an official mechanism, they are loathed to publish its results or use it formally in negotiations.

Use of and Impact/Behaviour Change Resulting from Mechanisms: A top priority to increase the success of global mechanisms in promoting change should be further collection of evidence through surveys of potential users – and discussions among sponsors of initiatives and potential users, especially from Southern stakeholder groups. If global mechanisms are to be more helpful in spurring change in provider behaviour, they need to promote this at two levels: global changes in policy and practice due in part through advocacy by recipient country stakeholders; and national-level change negotiated with recipient country stakeholders. It is essential to enhance dialogue between provider and recipient country parliamentarians, through both global and regional networks. Similarly, civil society organizations including trade unions, NGOs and private sector organizations would benefit from more exchange on aid effectiveness issues at global and regional levels. This would be especially useful if developing countries participate and inform their counterparts from provider countries of realities on the ground.

In sum, the international community needs to set much higher standards for global initiatives to assure mutual accountability on development cooperation. This could include: assessing their progress annually against best practice norms, equipping a focal point to share best practice lessons, and fully funding the best initiatives. **Transparency mechanisms need to broaden information and information sources, make it more timely and aligned with recipient country systems, ensure it is systematically disseminated. It is also critical to build stakeholder capacity to use such information to enforce accountability. Official global mutual accountability mechanisms should be rationalized and increase their use of inputs from developing country governments and non-executive stakeholders. They should also improve their coverage, mutuality, timeliness and country-level**

relevance, to enhance impact on behaviour of recipient country and provider behaviour. Regional mutual accountability mechanisms also need to be reinforced and to focus more closely on development cooperation issues.

3) Objective

The objective of this expert group meeting is to exchange ideas on international mutual accountability based on the analysis conducted for the DCF and described above. The purpose is to identify ways to improve the evidence-base, representativeness, influence on behaviour change and coordination of international mutual accountability mechanisms participants on:

- What evidence is needed by key stakeholders (recipient and donor country governments, parliaments, local governments, Civil Society Organizations, women's organisations and multilateral institutions to assess the performance of individual providers of development cooperation and recipient governments? Is it being provided and made freely accessible to stakeholders?
- What can be done to increase the representativeness and legitimacy of the work of international mutual accountability mechanisms and their ways of assessing performance, especially by promoting leadership of recipient governments, parliaments, local governments, civil society organizations and women's organisations?
- What evidence is there that existing international mutual accountability mechanisms trigger real change in development cooperation behaviours at global and national level, and how can we ensure that all mechanisms increase their effectiveness in this respect?
- How can mechanisms cooperate to fill gaps and remove overlaps? In particular, what can be done to ensure that independent assessments are used in official mechanisms? Can a process be agreed whereby international mechanisms begin working together to further strengthen accountability?

4) Structure of the session (total 4.5 hours with half-hour coffee breaks)

- Opening by UNDESA and the chair of DAC Task Team (10 minutes).
- Presentation (20 minutes) on the state of play on global mutual accountability and on recommendations emanating from the work done for the DCF
- Discussion on each of the key issues in section 3 (45 minutes on each point)
- Conclusion on ways forward and closing (30 minutes)

5) Participants

A total around 30 participants, including 15 participants from global and regional mutual accountability mechanisms; and around 15 participants representing the different stakeholder groups engaged in the DCF (member states, parliaments, NGOs etc.) as well as DCF/UNDP Task Team.

6) Outputs

Conclusions on how to strengthen international mutual accountability, and identification of key opportunities for strengthening the evidence-base and representativeness of individual mechanisms and their impact on behaviour change, as well as of opportunities for coordination.