

Preparing for the 2014 Development Cooperation Forum
DCF GERMANY HIGH-LEVEL SYMPOSIUM

Accountable and effective development cooperation in a post-2015 era

Executive Summary of Background Study 2
Third Global Accountability Survey on Mutual Accountability

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¹ *This document was prepared by a consultant and does not necessarily reflect the views of the co-organizers of the symposium.*

Executive Summary

Background and purpose of study

Mutual Accountability (MA), that is, the accountability between the providers and recipients of development cooperation, is deemed an essential principle and framework for the effectiveness of development cooperation. The Development Cooperation Forum (DCF) convened by the United Nations Economic and Social (ECOSOC), commissioned a study on national mutual accountability. The study formed part of a series of background papers commissioned for the DCF in preparation for the High-level Symposium of the Development Cooperation Forum held in Berlin in March 2014. The study was based on the Third Global Accountability Survey conducted by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA) in collaboration with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) between 9 December 2013 and 20 January 2014. The study built on the previous study and survey conducted in 2011, with the objective to:

- review progress made in implementing national mutual accountability with participation of all key stakeholders;
- identify how to implement enablers of mutual accountability such as partnership policies, results frameworks and dialogue platforms;
- identify key challenges or barriers to mutual accountability and how these can be addressed; and
- promote inclusive national dialogue and accelerate progress in strengthening Mutual Accountability mechanisms; and
- promote global policy dialogue on Mutual Accountability.

Key findings

- (a) **The available data from the survey suggest that there has been some progress with the implementation of MA and the trajectory is in a positive direction, though at a moderate pace.** MA can be considered to be ‘a work in progress’. The respondents’ assessment on the strength was that MA in their countries was moderate (53 per cent), and 31 per cent reported that MA was strong in their countries. The majority of recipient countries felt that there had been progress in MA since the Paris Declaration of 2005, albeit at a moderate pace for 43 per cent of countries.
- (b) **There were small changes since the previous survey in 2011, notably, the increase in the number of countries reporting that they had national aid policies in place.** This number (46), however, still constituted a small proportion of the 139 countries invited to participate in the survey.
- (c) **Recipient countries have set targets in their national policies, predominantly for recipient governments.** There appears to be an improvement in setting targets for providers since the 2011 survey, though less than half (48 per cent) of recipient countries reported setting targets for individual providers. Assessments of progress against targets were conducted in at least 73 per cent of the recipient countries, but

tended to focus on the performance of recipient governments and seldom on the performance of providers of development cooperation. This undermines the notion of 'mutuality'.

(d) **Recipient countries were able to identify several important practices that could influence the behaviour of recipient governments and providers to improve the effectiveness of development cooperation.** These practices related to:

- Recipient government ownership and leadership of the development cooperation agenda in their countries demonstrated through active involvement in the development of country assistance strategies of donors.
- Having sound structures and processes in place to monitor commitments and review progress.
- Having a dedicated unit within the recipient government to responsible for the overall coordination of development cooperation
- Making information on development cooperation transparent and accessible to the public.

(e) **Recipient countries rated the overall impact of national MA processes as moderate and that the extent of behavioural change was slightly greater within recipient governments than among providers.** Some of the positive behavioural changes identified in recipient governments included an increased commitment to transparency and accountability; willingness to take ownership and leadership of development cooperation; improved information and reporting on development cooperation. Better alignment with national development priorities; and commitment to report regularly on their activities in the aid information platform were identified as changes in provider behaviour.

(f) National MA coordination forums in terms of inclusiveness of key stakeholders showed minor changes in the extent of their participation compared to the 2011 survey. Except for civil society organisations and the private sector, the participation of other groups was limited. **Parliamentarians and local government agencies had limited participation in national MA forums.**

Implementation challenges

The study identified a number of implementation challenges for MA in recipient countries.

(a) **Setting targets for providers and holding them accountable remains a challenge for several countries.** Related to this was the challenge of securing greater predictability of aid flows. Countries highly-dependent on aid, fragile or post-conflict states expressed difficulty in holding providers accountable.

- (b) **Many countries lacked gender-specific targets in their policies**, and also did not track gender-disaggregated information on expenditures and results.
- (c) **Insufficient investment in developing capacity for MA at the level of local government.** This has implications for those recipient countries that use local governments as implementing agents.
- (d) **Parliaments played a minimal role in MA in a number of countries.** They were seldom consulted on national aid policies; they seldom provided analytical inputs to recipient governments on development cooperation; they had relatively low usage of development cooperation information; and they received limited capacity development support. This has implications for parliament's oversight role.
- (e) **Several recipient countries reported that non-traditional providers do not participate in MA coordination forums.** Although various discussions welcomed Southern partners as part of a more inclusive development there is no clarity on whether non-traditional providers form part of the MA framework and how they are to be incorporated into national MA activities.

Conclusions

The overriding conclusion from the data available in this analytical study is that Mutual Accountability is a 'work in progress'. There has been modest progress with the implementation of MA at national level with an increasing number of recipient countries having national aid or partnership policies in place, but this represents a small proportion of recipient countries. The relationship between recipient governments and providers of development cooperation remains asymmetrical in many countries and this asymmetry is demonstrated in the challenges recipient governments experience in setting targets for providers.

Mutual Accountability continues to focus on a narrow range of development partners and stakeholders. In practice, recipient governments and traditional/OECD-DAC donors are the primary partners in the implementation of MA. While various forums have acknowledged the increasing role and contribution of Southern partners in development cooperation, recipient countries each have their own way of engaging with Southern partners. Key national stakeholders such as parliamentarians and local governments in several recipient countries have little or no involvement in national MA forums. Non-state actors such as private philanthropic organisations and the business sector, although they are providers of development cooperation do not form an integral part of the MA framework. Civil society has multiple roles and these are not necessarily clear in the MA framework. Civil society organisations may be implementing agencies for government, recipients of donor funds, or play a 'watchdog' role.

Mutual Accountability at national level requires political leadership and capacity to implement it effectively. Government ownership and leadership are critical factors in the effective implementation of MA at national level. Political leadership is demonstrated in the willingness and ability of governments to negotiate and hold providers of development cooperation accountable on the one hand, and a willingness on the part of government to be accountable to citizens and to providers of development cooperation. The effective implementation of MA requires institutional capacity at country level. This includes:

- (i) Aid or development effectiveness coordination units at national level that are staffed with sufficient and competent officials;
- (ii) Monitoring, reporting and evaluation frameworks and systems that generate quality information on development cooperation that is accessible to implementing agents, development partners, stakeholders and the public; and
- (iii) Oversight bodies such as parliaments that have the requisite resources and expertise to interrogate processes and results from development cooperation.

Emerging issues for the post-2015 era

The High-level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 development agenda called for forging a new global partnership for development as the most important transformative shifts required for the post-2015 era, with a new spirit of solidarity, cooperation and mutual accountability underpinning the post-2015 agenda. The findings of this study on national MA propose the following emerging issues for the post-2015 era:

- (a) The development cooperation and development assistance landscape has been changing, and has become increasingly complex with a diversity of providers and stakeholders. The question is whether the existing MA frameworks are appropriate mechanisms for fostering mutually-beneficial and mutually-accountable relationships.
- (b) Gender equality and women's empowerment will remain a priority for the post-2015 agenda. An issue that emerges is why gender continues to be almost invisible in MA implementation and how this challenge can be addressed going forward.
- (c) The High-level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 development agenda called for inclusivity of the new global partnership for development that included for example, people living in poverty, traditionally marginalised groups, local communities, local government, the business community, academia and private philanthropy. One of the implementation challenges for national MA is how to make MA structures and processes more inclusive of those who have had limited involvement to date. This includes the need for greater involvement of parliaments in the oversight of development cooperation at national level.
- (d) MA frameworks to date have emphasised the global level and the national level and very little has been said about the role and contribution of regional institutions to MA. Regional economic communities and regional institutions such as the African Union will undoubtedly play a critical role in the post-2015 development era. The question is how regional institutions can be leveraged to reinforce MA at the national level and at the global level.
- (e) MA in the post-2015 era will require timely, accurate and useful information in development cooperation, that is accessible not only to key stakeholders, but also to the

broader public. An emerging issue is how existing aid management information systems should be adapted to monitor and report on progress with MA in the post-2015 era.

Proposals for improvement

MA at national level can be enhanced through practical guidance to recipient governments. From the responses of the countries that participated in the Third Global Survey, there is an interest in implementing MA, and an understanding of what has to be done (for example, putting in place a national aid policy). Practical guidance on the 'how to' of MA can be beneficial to recipient countries, and advance the implementation of MA at country level. This guidance could take the form of briefs or guidance notes on specific areas of MA, for example, how to develop and integrate gender-specific indicators in MA monitoring frameworks; how to secure the involvement and support of parliamentarians; or how to disseminate development cooperation information to the media to generate interest.

MA at national level can be enhanced through effective monitoring and reporting on development cooperation. By making explicit the progress or lack thereof on the key components of MA, recipient governments can change the nature of the relationship between themselves and providers of development cooperation and shift the relationship towards symmetry. A robust monitoring and reporting system can provide recipient governments with the evidence required to negotiate provider targets. Joint monitoring and review serves as a vehicle for learning by government and providers of development cooperation.

There needs to be investment in strengthening national capacity to monitor and report; and evaluate MA. The issue of capacity development was echoed by several recipient governments in the survey as something requiring attention. This capacity development is not only in terms of having skilled and trained officials in place, but includes policies, frameworks and systems for monitoring and reporting. Monitoring systems at national level could, for example, be designed in a way that facilitates reporting at the regional and global levels. Innovative use of ICT for monitoring should be explored. The widespread use of mobile phones and other hand-held devices in developing countries, together with decreasing costs of ICT opens possibilities for recipient governments to develop flexible, low-cost monitoring systems that can collect data from citizens who are the ultimate beneficiaries of development cooperation. Independent evaluation of MA should also be encouraged.

The capacity of parliaments to play an oversight role in development cooperation should be strengthened. While responsibility for implementing MA rests with the executive arm of government, parliaments are expected to perform an oversight function. It is essential that parliaments are equipped to perform this oversight function. Parliamentarians require expertise and support to engage in consultation processes, and to access, interpret and interrogate development cooperation information.

Differentiated inclusiveness of development providers and stakeholders should be explored. While inclusiveness of development cooperation providers and stakeholders in MA coordination mechanisms is a sound principle, it does not mean that all should be involved in equal intensity as this would make coordination unwieldy. National MA frameworks should specify differentiated roles and participation of development cooperation providers and stakeholders.

Incentives for Southern partners to participate in MA structures should be explored.

Southern partners potentially have a significant impact on development cooperation at national level, yet in many instances they do not participate in the formal MA structures at national level for various reasons. There are countries that are simultaneously recipients of development cooperation and providers of development cooperation and have established their own development agencies. While it is understood that the nature of the relationship between recipient governments and Southern partners is different to the relationship with traditional donors, this need not be a reason for not participating in MA coordination mechanisms.

The use of peer review should be promoted. Recipient countries should be encouraged to use peer reviews as such reviews, if conducted in accordance with sound review principles, can provide an independent view of progress on MA in a non-threatening way. Peer reviews are potentially an effective vehicle for learning and improvement. In this regard, the use of regional review mechanisms can facilitate knowledge exchange and learning among countries with common development challenges. Peer review can also be a vehicle through which recipient governments can encourage their Southern partners to engage more effectively in MA processes.