



## MUTUAL ACCOUNTABILITY AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

### *Why Mutual Accountability?*<sup>1</sup>

Accountable and transparent delivery of development cooperation is critical to improve its quality and effectiveness in achieving better development results. As a result, at the UN Summit on the Millennium Development Goals in 2010, Member States recognized that “greater accountability and transparency in international development cooperation can help to make financial resources more adequate, predictable, targeted and of improved quality”.

National mutual accountability (MA) mechanisms are those in which programme countries, as well as being held accountable for development results and management of development cooperation, hold development cooperation providers accountable for their development cooperation. **The ultimate goal of national MA mechanisms is to instil trust among all development actors and promote change in behaviour leading to improved aid quality. MA can for example help to make development financing more predictable, reduce use of parallel systems and project implementation units, encourage division of labour among providers, and promote the transparent use of development cooperation on the ground.**

DCF analysis and consultations show MA should include these elements to work best:

- (i) an **agreed national development cooperation policy/strategy** document, covering all aspects of quality, driven by strong country leadership;
- (ii) locally-driven frameworks to monitor the quality and results of development cooperation, including **specific annual performance targets for individual providers and the Government**, aligned to national development priorities;
- (iii) annual **analysis of progress towards these results** by individual providers and programme country government, and discussion at a national top-level meeting.
- (iv) full participation **of parliament and civil society organizations** in mutual accountability, including use of their independent analytical inputs.
- (v) comprehensive and publicly accessible databases containing **information on the quantity and quality of development cooperation**.

These pillars of national MA are rarely in place, and **progress is disappointingly slow**. Broad-based surveys conducted in 105 countries in 2010 and 2011 by UNDESA and UNDP for the DCF show that only 4 countries have established individual provider targets which are monitored regularly, though 9 are developing these. Only 15 countries show concrete evidence of regular reporting on provider performance, for example through performance assessment frameworks (PAFs), with 12 additional countries planning to introduce them.

Research also points to the crucial importance of strong global accountability frameworks (similar to the Paris Declaration, or the CSO Istanbul Principles) in promoting higher quality and more results-oriented cooperation. They also underline the need for political leadership in implementing lessons from accountability dialogues, both in programme countries, and by providers to promote changes at headquarters and decentralisation to fit national priorities. It is also vital to invest in capacity building for programme country stakeholders on accountability issues, and to ensure development cooperation is supporting a strong national development strategy and results framework.

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<sup>1</sup> For more details on these issues, see Mutual Accountability for Development Results, background study for DCF and AusAID background brief on mutual accountability.

## ***How Can Mutual Accountability and Sustainable Development Be Aligned?***

Accountability between programme countries and providers, and domestically to non-executive stakeholders, is also essential to improve development cooperation partnerships geared to achieving sustainable development. There are three sets of issues determining how accountability mechanisms can best promote sustainable development.

### **1. The Content of Mutual Accountability Frameworks:**

#### ***Development Cooperation:***

The growing number of sources and modalities of cooperation place considerable burden on programme countries to deliver and report on development results.

Existing mechanisms at country level need to be tailored to allow for the voluntary participation of all types of providers (non-OECD, civil society organizations, local authorities and private sector), to maximize results more broadly. In some cases, this requires multiple frameworks, tailored to reflect the specific characteristics of different flows, and based on or linked to strong global frameworks. Programme countries will require strong capacities to achieve this.

In addition, there is currently a major imbalance between the number of indicators and targets set for programme countries and those set for providers (with the former double or triple the latter). Yet both programme countries and providers would like to see frameworks streamlined so that there are fewer indicators to monitor.

#### ***Sustainable Development:***

To avoid even more complexity, national mechanisms need also to include indicators which apply to sustainable development, especially those which will allow participants to track progress on the indicators. These indicators contribute to results which have more recently become central to global debate (such as equity, decent employment and climate change).

This may involve strengthening sustainable development (including equity, rights or environmental) indicators in existing results frameworks, or ensuring new “global funds” are fully integrated into the frameworks.

Some programme countries have also already started to broaden accountability frameworks to cover “partnership policies”, on issues such as trade, debt relief, agriculture and technology, to produce policy change and coherence among providers and reduce their dependence on development cooperation over the medium-term. They may want to expand these to policies relating to global equity, rights or environmental issues.

*The three key questions in this area are:*

- *What indicators might need to be added to or reinforced in development strategies, results frameworks and provider accountability frameworks?*
- *What additional policy areas might need to be added to “partnership policies”?*
- *Should the survey of mutual accountability conducted for the DCF be adapted to include such issues?*

## 2. Institutional Coordination and Coherence:

### ***Development Cooperation:***

At country level, there are already multiple forums for dialogue with providers on issues related to national development strategies, results and development cooperation.

Even in the best organised countries, there may be a top-level annual meeting, a high-level quarterly meeting, and more regular executive committee or sectoral and technical working group meetings. In other countries the structures are even more complex and overlapping.

These structures already absorb a huge amount of time and resources for programme countries, providers and other stakeholders. Where they work well, they produce massive change in development cooperation behaviour, but in other cases they are seen by all involved as too bureaucratic and time-consuming.

In addition, some providers (notably global vertical funds, but also some South-South providers and CSOs) continue to work outside these structures, requiring more time to be spent in bilateral dialogue. This has begun to change in recent years with particular efforts by the Global Fund and Arab providers to participate in national coordination meetings, but a lot more progress is needed in this area.

### ***Sustainable Development:***

Lessons learned from existing institutional arrangements for sustainable development show a similar tendency to proliferation and complexity.

As agreed in the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation, national strategies for sustainable development have been established in 106 countries. However, these vary in the degree to which they give serious attention to sustainability issues, and so discussions on these questions often take place in parallel tracks.

In addition, more recently, countries have designed National Adaptation Plans of Action (NAPAs) on climate change, which are often piled on top of development strategies rather than integrated.

There is also the risk that if new global funds are established to channel financing for sustainable development and the green economy, they might establish new parallel discussions and structures

It would therefore be useful to explore the following questions about how to ensure that institutional arrangements for planning and implementing development strategies and sustainable development frameworks are fully coordinated and coherent:

- *What are best practice experiences of programme countries in integrating national priorities for sustainable development into their national aid policies, and ensuring a coordinated planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation process ?*
- *How can financial flows provided (and new global or regional channels established) to support sustainable development be integrated into planning and accountability structures already in place for development cooperation?*
- *How can providers which do not currently participate in national accountability structures be better encouraged to participate, for example by adapting processes and indicators to their needs and characteristics ?*
- *How can planning and accountability structures best be rationalised and streamlined to reduce demands on the time and resources of all involved ?*

### 3. Inclusiveness:

#### ***Development Cooperation:***

To ensure full accountability for results to citizens, mutual accountability mechanisms should ensure full participation of parliaments, civil society organizations (including women's organisations and trade unions), local authorities and the private sector. Only in 10 countries surveyed for the DCF in 2010 has there been progress, for example by inviting these actors to sectoral or thematic working groups, giving them speaking roles at high-level meetings on development cooperation, considering their independent analysis or involving them in decision making processes.

These actors need greater access to detailed aid information and analysis. They should be prominent in governance of accountability forums, including the formulation and implementation of aid policies. They should also present their independent analysis at top-level national accountability meetings. Parliaments should debate, approve and monitor progress on development plans, budgets and financing agreements.

Parliamentarians and advocacy groups in provider countries also need to develop strong accountability mechanisms to ensure that pledges on the quantity and quality of development cooperation are fulfilled.

#### ***Sustainable Development:***

In a similar vein, institutionalized processes for ensuring meaningful participation of all civil society actors, including the private sector and local government, are critical to ensure the quality, accountability and impact of sustainable development plans.

National councils and stakeholder advisory bodies have shown their potential as fora to articulate priorities and concerns and to monitor progress made in achieving sustainable development priorities. They have often involved different processes and actors both within and outside the executive than traditional mutual accountability processes. It has also often been easier for executive and non-executive bodies to work together to achieve common climate change and environmental goals.

Access to information on government budget and expenditures on key areas supporting sustainable development, and to the impact on equity, poverty, the environment and climate change of such expenditures, is also considered to be a critical tool for accountability and transparency on sustainable development.

- *What particular non-executive actors need to participate in mutual accountability forums, at national regional and global levels, to ensure that the sustainable development agenda is fully reflected in discussions?*
- *What additional capacity-building support might these actors need in order to be able to engage fully on the range of sustainable development issues?*
- *What are key analytical issues they would like to examine for themselves, and how might sectoral or technical working groups be restructured to ensure that the sustainable development agenda is prominent in country?*
- *How can different non-executive groups (parliamentarians, local governments and non-government representatives such as CSOs, private sector, women's organisations and trade unions) better work together to promote accountability for development cooperation and sustainable development?*