

Mutual Accountability and Ownership

Introduction

In March 2005, the Paris Declaration (PD) on Aid effectiveness introduced ownership and mutual accountability as two of the five partnership commitments. In fact the first principle of the PD is the ownership of aid inflows. In other words, emphasizes on the need for recipient countries to develop strategic agendas for leading the inflow and absorption of development aid. The final PD principle tackles the issue of mutual accountability. At the heart of mutual accountability lies the concept of shared accountability for development results. The three elements of mutual accountability are designed to create an environment of mutual trust and accountability between donors and recipient countries as a means to better development results. These elements include (i) a shared agenda, (ii) a monitoring framework and (iii) a process comprising dialogue and negotiation.

The realisation of mutual accountability depends on domestic accountability mechanisms which come from ownership of the development agenda from the recipient countries. Ownership therefore entails the recipient countries'

ability to lead their development policies and strategies effectively. Ownership of the development agenda requires participation at all levels of society in each country while mutual accountability requires transparency of practices and processes. These two principles enforce each other through participation and transparency. In addition to the PD, the Accra Agenda for Action in 2008 (AAA) reiterated these principles by commitment to "strengthening country ownership over development" and also to "building more effective and inclusive partnerships for development".

Who is Accountable to Whom and for What?

Mutual accountability is one of those PD principles that have proven elusive to put in practice for two reasons. The first being that it is simply a complex concept and secondly, there are no guidelines on how to it should be done. If practiced mutual accountability offers a great opportunity to break from the traditional idea of aid being treated as a "gift" from one country to another and creates a situation of reciprocal obligations.

While the original concept was narrow in that it



placed accountability between the donor and the recipient, the AAA expands this concept to cover accountability to citizens of the respective countries. This means that the recipient countries are primarily accountable to their citizens for development aid and not the providers of development aid. This accountability places the parliaments of the recipient countries' at the core of mutual accountability. Ideally there should be greater parliamentary oversight of development aid resources coming into the country and their subsequent utilisation. This stronger role of citizens, through parliament can only be effective if there is transparency of the development aid processes and information on the volume, allocation and impacts of development aid.

The problem is that there is a major divergence between the donor country's accountability and the mutual accountability spirit. Donor organisations are primarily accountable to their own tax payers and parliaments and this often times makes it difficult for donors to practice the PD principles like use of country systems when their citizens have concerns about corruption in developing countries.

Donor countries also shift the accountability focus from the citizens of the recipient countries to themselves. They recipient countries to account for their use of aid funds and the major focus is often times on financial integrity

and not development results. This creates a constraint on the recipient countries obligations to their own citizens as donors still exercise substantial control over how funds are spent in the recipient countries.

The legitimacy of recipient countries comes from the ballot box and not the use of development aid. The issues that makes governments popular are much more than the uses of development aid but encompass the whole political and development agenda. Democratic governments win elections based on their policies and achievements in development. In many cases donors' priorities are not in tandem with the aspirations of the people. In this situation the recipient governments have to juggle between accountability to donors and risk losing elections. When developments projects fail, who is accountable for the failure, the recipient who owns the project, or the donor who controlled the design, the disbursement and sometimes the management of the project?

The PD principles create confusion on what the partners are accountable for. The mutual accountability concept in the PD focuses on being accountable to meeting the PD commitments and not development results. The focus is on technical points regarding the delivery of aid and not on the impact of aid on development. The PD indicator is stated as

“number of partner countries that undertake mutual assessments of progress in implementing agreed commitments on aid effectiveness including those in this declaration”. The basis for the mutual accountability indicator should be development results and not aid effectiveness. Donors focus too much on financial accountability (an accurate account of how aid money is spent) and not what the aid money is achieving on development.

Who owns the Development Agenda?

When it comes to ownership, one of the indicators is the extent to which recipient countries have established “operational development strategies”. The question that needs to be answered in this case is how the operational development agendas are created. In most developing countries, these strategies are heavily influenced by the donors with little local political leadership and honest participation of the citizens. They are drafted with donor influence, assessed and approved by the donors and therefore controlled by them. The strategies the PD refers to are normally the poverty reduction strategy papers (PRSPs). In this case ownership has been reduced to the simple act of adopting externally determined development agendas. For ownership to truly be effective it must move towards the notion “democratic ownership”. Democratic ownership entails a situation where

parliaments, civil society and citizens drive and shape the development agenda of their respective countries.

Policy Recommendations

Mutual accountability is a very good concept but it is an abstract and complex concept. There is lack of clarity of meaning and modalities to put it into practice. The best way to operationalise it in Africa will require a broader and more specific understanding of the principle than that presented in the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness and the AAA.

Mutual accountability and ownership should not constrain each other. They are actually complementary if certain preconditions are put in place in the recipient countries. These concepts enforce each in stable economic and political environments in order to allow the citizens, partners and policy makers to develop trust, to define clear responsibilities and to establish a monitoring structure on agreed commitments. Donor countries should minimize policy conditionality and create policy space for democratic participation. In the long run a development cooperation relationship that is supported and benefits the citizens is inevitable.

The conceptualisation of mutual accountability must be adapted to the African situation and



efforts must be made to translate the principle into clear processes and mechanisms that will make it applicable.

Mutual accountability has to be inclusive and reinforcing the country ownership. The setting of development priorities for the country should not be the exclusive niche of "technocrats and donors" but an inclusive development process. Governments need to create the political space and establish institutional mechanisms that allow citizens participation in policy dialogues in their countries and beyond. This participation should be at all levels of development from planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the development results of aid.

For strong mutual accountability, African countries must have the technical capacity and political determination to produce policies and procedures for the active management of aid, and their governments must provide a coherent approach, strong central leadership, and a clear and credible framework for dialogue.

Parliament has the potential to play an important role in enforcing mutual accountability and ownership in both the donor and recipient countries. However, there is a need to strengthen the parliamentary role in setting development strategies and budgets in recipient countries. Parliaments should be pro

active in reinforcing participatory approaches together with civil society and the media in assessing development progress and holding governments to account.

Donors should be transparent and predictable in their aid disbursements as such predictability and transparency will assist in making sure those resources whether from aid or other sources are used to achieve the people's aspiration as articulated in the national development plans. Donors need to provide better, timely and comprehensive information on aid flows.

Donors, recipient countries, Civil Society Organisations and citizens need to focus their relationship on development results. The recipient country should be free to decide how best to achieve the results. An appropriate focus on results supported by appropriate information and monitoring arrangements, allows a more productive dialogue on strategies for achieving results, pinpointing necessary actions by both partner country and donor.

This Policy Briefing is based on research conducted in Nigeria, Uganda and South Africa by AFRODAD with support from EED. The full reports are available at www.afrodad.org

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