RESULTS OF THE PARIS DECLARATION EVALUATION

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Abstract: The Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness comprised principles and specific commitments for improving development aid processes, accepted by an unprecedented coalition of developing countries and aid donors. The Synthesis Evaluation used data from a variety of sources to answer questions on (a) the relevance of the Declaration and its implementation for aid effectiveness, (b) the actual record of implementation, (c) contributions to aid effectiveness and development results, (d) changing burdens of aid management, (e) added value of Paris Declaration-style development cooperation, and (f) key implications for future aid effectiveness. Conclusions of the synthesis evaluation and recommendations aimed at policy makers in partner countries and donor agencies are presented. The campaign to make aid programs more effective is relevant and showing results. But improvements are slow and uneven in most developing countries and especially among donor agencies. The Declaration’s original aspirations are neither fully implemented nor yet outdated.

Résumé: La Déclaration de Paris sur l’efficacité de l’aide comprend des principes et des engagements spécifiques visant à optimiser le fonctionnement de l’aide au développement et ayant recueilli l’adhésion d’un nombre sans précédent de pays en développement et de donateurs. Dans la synthèse de l’évaluation, des données provenant de sources diverses sont utilisées pour répondre aux questions sur (a) la pertinence de la Déclaration et de son application pour l’efficacité de l’aide, (b) le niveau réel de mise en œuvre, (c) la contribution à l’efficacité de l’aide et aux résultats de développement, (d) l’effet sur le fardeau de la gestion de l’aide, (e) la valeur ajoutée de la coopération au développement s’inspirant de la Déclaration de Paris, et (f) les principales répercussions sur l’efficacité de l’aide dans le futur. L’article présente

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INTRODUCTION

The culmination of the Paris Declaration Evaluation was the distillation by the Core Evaluation Team of a high-level Synthesis report with policy-relevant findings, conclusions, and recommendations. This was developed in good time to be validated and peer reviewed and to feed into the preparations for the High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness in Busan, Korea, in December 2011. As described in Betts and Wood (2012), the findings were derived through a participatory, theory-based approach, using mixed methods across 21 country evaluations and 7 donor studies, and were then systematically analyzed and synthesized.

This article complements the focus on processes (Betts & Wood, 2012) by distilling the main substantive thrust of the Evaluation’s clearly linked conclusions and recommendations. These were framed around a set of agreed major policy questions about the effects of the Declaration campaign: its relevance, adherence to the agreed principles, achievements and value-added for aid effectiveness and development results, management burdens, and implications for the future. These questions cross-cut and validated the detailed evidence that had been organized around the three main Evaluation Questions:

1. What are the important factors that have affected the relevance and implementation of the Paris Declaration and its potential effects on aid effectiveness and development results? (“The Paris Declaration in Context”)
2. To what extent and how has the implementation of the Paris Declaration led to an improvement in the efficiency of aid delivery, the management and use of aid, and better partnerships? (Process and intermediate outcomes)
3. Has the implementation of the Paris Declaration strengthened the contribution of aid to sustainable development results? How? (Development outcomes)
The cross-cutting conclusion questions served the intended purposes of raising the report from the technical and analytical to a higher synthesis level and of strengthening its utility for policy makers.

The central message of the Evaluation’s Synthesis report was that the global Paris Declaration campaign to make international aid programs more effective is showing results. But the improvements are slow and uneven in most developing countries and even more so among most donor agencies, although the changes expected of them are less demanding.

As the principal authors of the Synthesis report (Wood et al., 2011), the co-authors of this article have summarized in the edited excerpts below the answers to the six conclusion questions (direct excerpts of main conclusions are in italics). Original references are well signposted within the original report.

CONCLUSIONS QUESTION 1: RELEVANCE

What has been the relevance of the Paris Declaration and the ways it has been implemented to the challenges of aid effectiveness?

Overall conclusion: The principles and commitments in the Declaration, based on the experience of partner countries and donors, have almost all proved relevant to improving the quality of aid and of the partnerships needed to make it work. The ways in which the Declaration has been implemented have sometimes strained, but not yet broken, its relevance, and there are valuable lessons for pursuing these goals in the future.

Taking account of the particular character of the Declaration as an evaluation object, its relevance was assessed in terms of its responsiveness and appropriateness to the needs, conditions, and contexts for aid reforms, in countries and internationally. Past evidence and future guidance for the Declaration’s relevance was found in several key conclusions, as follows.

First, a large, diverse group of countries and agencies have continued to display a sense of shared ownership and responsibility for the “campaign” of reform—a long-term set of efforts that culminated in the Declaration—and have invested a great deal of effort in it. The
context in each partner and donor country affects how these good practices will be adapted and applied, but most of them have been found to make sense for almost all “aid” relationships.

The Declaration’s core principles and commitments have built on, reinforced, and disseminated the earlier good practices of different countries and donors and become widely accepted norms for good practice in development cooperation. They have also provided a common vision and a common language for change.

In most partner countries these norms and supporting actions have helped launch or sustain reforms that countries have found to be in their interest. Virtually all donors express a continuing commitment to these norms and can point to changes they have made to apply them, albeit to varying degrees.

The record suggests that the reform campaign helped to support rising overall aid volumes and, in most donor countries, rising income shares of aid over the past decade. Additionally, these norms have also attracted the interest of aid providers operating outside the Declaration framework—including non-OECD governments and South-South partners, non-governmental organizations, foundations, and philanthropic organizations—and stimulated a lively global debate about improving the effectiveness of all development cooperation efforts.

Three specific areas were identified in the Evaluation where the Declaration and the ways it has been applied have been less relevant:

1. A narrow focus on the technicalities of results management frameworks and indicators has in practice obscured the original broad intention of the principle of “managing for results”—working to deliver results against clearly defined development goals, using information to improve decisions and strengthen performance.
2. A few specific Declaration commitments have been shown to be unrealistic—such as that calling for partner countries to “provide clear views on donors’ comparative advantage”—or have received little apparent attention, such as those aiming for better environmental assessments.
3. The country studies have shown that at least 4 of the 12 Monitoring Survey indicators have proved of questionable relevance.
Several main factors have also put strains on the Declaration’s relevance. The Declaration was never meant to prescribe a rigid, “one size fits all” model for countries, and its relevance has been jeopardized when it has been misinterpreted or misapplied that way rather than being adapted to each country’s circumstances.

The starting points for individual partner countries and donors were also different, with some engaged and advanced in the aid effectiveness agenda well before 2005, and others less so. A few now appear to have almost completed the work of reform in key areas, others to have barely begun.

Even with this spread, the basic timeframe for the Declaration’s goals—with expectations and some targets focused on 2010—has so far just managed to remain relevant for all countries, but the Evaluation found that resetting timeframes after 2010 for each country will be a more difficult challenge.

Among donors, the rates of implementing the Declaration are more uneven. Future timeframes will either have to bring the late starters and slow movers up to speed, accept that some donors are only partially committed or slow down the reforms of the whole donor community. Either of the last two options would reduce the relevance of any future reform campaign for partner countries.

In a small group of middle-income and emerging economies, aid has supplied a shrinking share of capital flows and development resources, and they can increasingly offer aid and experience to others. The Declaration remains relevant to them but in distinctive ways that need to be recognized and harnessed more effectively in the global development effort.

The Declaration principles and practices have been more difficult to apply in fragile situations and humanitarian relief, but they are still relevant. Adaptations should be more a matter of degree than of kind, with donors and other outside actors bearing a special share of responsibility in these settings for applying good practices flexibly and helping empower country partners. Finally, official aid reform has often come to be treated as almost an end in itself, not taking enough account of the broader context for aid and losing relevance as a result. The realistic perspective that was found in the Declaration needs to be restored—seeing aid as just one part of the resources that countries and people can mobilize for development, and taking account of other actors, forces, and events that shape its course.
The final test of relevance assessed in the Evaluation is the actual record of implementation. Aid reform under the responsibility of the partner countries has mostly been slow to take hold since 2000–05, but has now done so in most cases. In the majority of cases, the commitment and incentives to implement the reform agenda were not sufficient by themselves to generate the needed support. But they were instrumental when combined with countries’ felt needs to improve their systems for reasons going beyond aid, for example in better financial management, public procurement regimes, or accountability measures. In some countries it is clear that greater political will and commitment are needed. However, because most partner countries are hard pressed to find or build the capacities needed to implement the Declaration reforms in the expected time-frames—and receive less help to do so than pledged—the relevance of the generalized time-bound targets for all partner countries by 2010 must be questioned.

The Evaluation also noted that the reforms asked of donors under the Declaration agenda are less demanding and donors’ capacities for implementing change are greater. But the stakes are not as high as for aid-receiving countries, so in most cases the necessary political, bureaucratic, and public understanding and support for difficult reforms have been hard to secure and maintain. The relevance of the expected drivers of change in the Declaration—“continued high level political support, peer pressure, and coordinated actions at the global, regional, and country levels”—has been sharply different for different donors, and this has been reflected in their uneven implementation.

CONCLUSIONS QUESTION 2: PRINCIPLES

To what extent has each of the five principles been observed and implemented and the Accra Agenda priorities reflected? Why?

*Overall conclusion:* The Evaluation found that of the five principles, “country ownership” has advanced farthest, with “alignment” by donors to country priorities and “harmonization” among donors progressing more unevenly, and “managing for development results” and “mutual accountability” advancing least.

The findings on the principles were presented in depth in the Synthesis chapter on contributions to aid effectiveness and in a fuller
tabular summary of aggregate progress toward intended outcomes (Wood et al., 2011, p. 19). Perhaps the Evaluation’s most important overall finding on the implementation of the principles was the clear and almost universal failure to advance on making direct “mutual accountability” between partner countries and donors more transparent, balanced, and effective. This gap remains a critical obstacle to taking aid partnerships to a more mature level, and points to the need for specific measures to try to overcome the real difficulties and break out of this dead end. The Evaluation’s recommendations gave priority to this area, as seen at the end of this article.

Several key factors were cited in country and donor evaluations to explain why so few direct mechanisms of mutual accountability have evolved despite the specific policy-level commitment to do so. These included

- the imbalanced or asymmetrical relationships, leverage, and sanctions between aid providers and receivers;
- the complex geometry of an aid-receiving country having to initiate and structure mechanisms to deal with multiple donors/agencies on mutual commitments;
- the lack of a generally accepted framework for defining and measuring mutual accountability in aid; and
- tensions with donors’ concerns to satisfy the accountability requirements of their home administrations, and slow movement on the Declaration commitment to harmonize among donors.

With respect to the course corrections in the reform campaign that were recommended in the Accra Agenda of 2008, the country evaluations were unable to obtain sufficient responses on the reflection or influence of the Agenda to date to support a meaningful synthesis assessment.

CONCLUSIONS QUESTION 3: ACHIEVEMENTS

What has the Paris Declaration achieved for aid effectiveness and development results? How significant are these contributions? How sustainable?

*Overall conclusion: In terms of aid effectiveness, the Evaluation found that the Declaration campaign has made several significant differences in clarifying and strength-
The Declaration, according to the Evaluation, has pulled together and focused global attention on ambitious, experience-based measures to improve development cooperation and aid. It addressed a range of problems that were 50 years in the making, and held out a vision of much more ideal conditions for aid and ultimately for development without aid. While recognizing that the challenges could not all be rapidly resolved, it has focused on a very short, five-year timeframe for measurable or visible improvements. Not all of these targets were realistic, or even reliably measurable, but its principles and commitments have been applied, if gradually and unevenly, among partner countries and more unevenly among donors.

Aid Effectiveness

The Evaluation found that the Declaration campaign has made several significant differences, for example by

- clarifying and strengthening good practice in aid relationships, thus legitimizing and reinforcing higher mutual expectations;
- contributing to movement, although sometimes slow and modest, toward most of the 11 outcomes set out in 2005, and in the process making some contributions to better development results;
- playing a role, probably in combination with the awareness-raising effects of the Millennium Development Goals, in supporting rising aid volumes; and
- improving the quality of a number of aid partnerships, based on strengthening levels of transparency, trust, and partner country ownership.
The results of the Evaluation showed that, while changes expected of partner countries have been more demanding than those expected of donors, most partner countries evaluated have now embedded many of these change processes, not just because they manage aid better but because they serve the countries’ national needs. The complex, long-term challenges of capacity development are the most important constraints for most countries, and they do not allow for “quick fixes” or bureaucratically engineered solutions. Partner countries can do more to identify priorities for strengthening capacities in targeted areas, however, and donors can do more to support those priorities in coordinated ways, to strengthen country systems by using them, and to reduce donor practices that undermine the development of sustainable capacity.

The evidence showed that on the whole, donors—with a number of striking exceptions—have demonstrated less commitment than partner countries to making the (less demanding) changes needed in their own systems. The Evaluation did not underestimate the difficulties faced by those directly responsible in donor countries in securing the necessary attention, consensus, and action for reform. But it recognized that the Declaration campaign is a compact between nations. Endorsing governments—not just individual ministries or agencies—are accountable for their performance or their failure to perform. It is clear from the evidence gathered by the Evaluation that some donors have been too uncoordinated and risk-averse to play their expected proactive part in the relationship. Most donors have set high levels of partner country compliance as preconditions for their own reforms rather than moving together reciprocally and managing and sharing risks realistically. Moreover, because these agreed system changes, peer pressure, and collective donor action have not yet become sufficiently embedded in many donor country systems, they are left vulnerable to uninformed policy changes, for example when governments or ministers change.

The relative performance of multilateral agencies in implementing the Declaration and good aid practice is still unclear and controversial, and the Evaluation had only limited multilateral participation. Two multilateral agencies (the Asian and African Development Banks) and one group of agencies (the UN Development Group) undertook studies as part of this evaluation. Most of the main multilateral agencies adhered to the Declaration and have been involved in its processes, applying parallel measures and checks of their own. The country evaluations show how the multilaterals benefit from a number of greater freedoms than bilateral donors—for example,
the capacity granted by their funders to make multi-year aid commitments, and a degree of insulation from short-term political pressures. The Evaluation encountered suggestions of both good and bad practice by multilaterals, but no convincing evidence either way to support any wider conclusion on this point.

Contributions to Development Results

The Evaluation design never anticipated that better aid practices, if achieved, could directly or rapidly lead to better development results—demonstrable improvements in the lives of people in partner countries, particularly the poor and vulnerable—in a five-year period. Since many other factors are usually more important than aid in determining these results, the country evaluations looked for

- first, evidence of development changes;
- then, plausible evidence as to whether aid had contributed to such changes;
- and, if so, plausible evidence that aid reforms might have strengthened the aid contribution, drawing on Mayne (2001).

In fact, the findings exceed the very modest initial expectations of contributions to results in this short period. A strong cross-section of the country evaluations found evidence that Declaration-type measures, launched either before or since 2005 but usually reinforced since then, have contributed to more focused efforts, particularly at the sectoral level. These evaluations then found evidence that those efforts had already contributed to better development results, with good prospects of being sustainable. These effects were found mainly in the health sector, which had been preselected for more detailed examination in almost all the country evaluations. Beyond identified effects in health, there was not yet sufficient evidence to track plausible contributions of aid reforms to other development results such as accelerating achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.

Although insufficient capacity remains a formidable obstacle in many countries and aid could help more than it does, there is evidence that aid and aid reform have made at least some contributions to the long-term strengthening both of institutional capacities for development and of social capital.

The overall finding of little progress in most countries in giving greater priority to the needs of the poorest people, particularly wom-
en and girls, is accompanied by evidence of some positive contributions by aid and some value added by reforms and Declaration-style operations since 2000–05. The Evaluation cites the way this disconnect drives home the limits of aid and reforms when confronted with sufficiently powerful obstacles, such as entrenched inequalities, unless there is a powerful national commitment to change.

With respect to aid modalities, the Evaluation found that no single modality (e.g., budget or sector support, programs, or projects) will automatically produce better development results, and a mix of aid modalities has continued to make sense for partner countries and donors. At the same time, a wider range of options and innovations with modalities, particularly more joint donor support at the sectoral level, has improved actual or potential contributions to development results in half the evaluation countries since 2000–05.

Sustainability

In most partner countries, the Evaluation found that the Paris reform agenda is now seen to serve important needs other than aid management, and the change processes are now fairly firmly embedded, if still advancing only gradually. Even though more active political impetus is still needed in many countries, the basic momentum of change has now stood up through political changes and crises of various kinds, even without being able to claim dramatic results. However, for most donors—with a number of striking exceptions—the evidence shows that the commitment, capacities, and incentives to apply these good practices have not been strong enough to entrench them as more than broad norms and not enough to make the necessary changes in practice.

CONCLUSIONS QUESTION 4: AID MANAGEMENT BURDENS

What effects has the implementation of the Declaration had on the respective burdens of aid management falling on partner countries and donors, relative to the changing volumes and quality of aid and of the aid partnership itself? Are these effects likely to be transitional or long term?

*Overall conclusion: The changes made by the Declaration have not reduced the overall burdens of aid management.*
However, they have contributed to a better quality of aid and to improving aid partnerships, as well as supporting rising volumes of aid. There is evidence that, in a few cases, the ways in which Declaration-style aid, such as multi-donor funds, has been managed has actually increased the burdens on both donors and partner countries. It cannot be concluded that the delays in reducing burdens are only transitional.

The Evaluation found that the first effect of the Declaration in this area has been to legitimize and structure the longstanding concerns about the burdens of aid management—especially on partner countries—as a more prominent and explicit subject of serious discussion between partner countries and donors. In the spirit of ownership and alignment, a number of partner countries had already led the way by taking measures on their own—by producing their own aid management strategies or moving to limit the burdens imposed by multiple, uncoordinated donor missions.

At the time of study, the general trend showed little or no reduction in the overall burdens of aid management. There are exceptions, but also other cases where burdens appear to have increased. At the same time, in a majority of cases, the new practices are perceived to be improving the quality of aid and providing forums and mechanisms that make it easier for countries to maintain an overview and grasp of their aid relationships. A significant group of evaluations were silent on the possible effects of Declaration practices on the countries’ aid management burdens, sometimes implying that the countries’ own strong systems have ensured their control over burdens. On the other hand, several evaluations record complaints from the partner-country side about the workload involved in dealing with multi-donor structures and mechanisms for coordination and harmonization.

The incomplete and particularly the uneven implementation of Paris practices by donors had to be borne in mind by the Evaluators in assessing the results achieved, since more coordinated action by donors was a premise of the expected overall benefits. However, particularly when recalling the overwhelming pre-Paris burdens of aid management documented for many partner countries—even their inability in many cases to maintain a basic overview of all the aid activities on their soil—the Evaluation found that the situation has clearly improved. At a minimum the study felt that some of this improvement
must be linked to the higher expectations for respecting ownership, providing information, consulting, coordinating, and harmonizing activities that have been propagated and legitimized by the Paris campaign. Since today’s higher expectations are unlikely to diminish, improvements at this modest level will probably be sustainable.

For donors, the evidence shows that the burdens and benefits of changing ways of doing business since Paris have been uneven. To the extent that they have attempted to apply the new approaches, all have been required to invest more in analytical, dialogue, and coordination work. The studies confirm that those who have genuinely decentralized more capacity and authority to their country offices have been able to cope better, other things being equal. But only a minority of donors have been willing and able to invest sufficient dedicated time, appropriate skills, and incentives to promote and actively support the necessary communication, coordination, and facilitation work required, alongside national representatives, on behalf of the donor community. Those most committed to the implementation of the Declaration’s good practices have done more than their share.

CONCLUSIONS QUESTION 5: VALUE

What has been the added value of Paris Declaration-style development cooperation compared with the pre-Paris Declaration situation, and seen alongside other drivers of development in the country, other sources of development finance, and development cooperation partners beyond those so far endorsing the Declaration?

Overall conclusion—“before” and “after” comparisons: Even with the limits documented in the Evaluation, comparing current practice with the aid situation 20 years ago presents a global picture of far greater transparency and far less donor-driven aid today. It is fair to say that the “free-for-alls” of competitive, uncoordinated, and donor-driven activities that were commonplace 20 to 25 years ago are now unusual enough to attract rapid attention and criticism, except in some fragile and humanitarian relief situations, where they are still all too common. Comparing the period since 2005 with the immediate pre-Declaration situation, the Evaluation concludes that the Declaration has disseminated commitments and instruments for reform that were previously being devel-
oped and tested in a fragmentary way by a few leading countries and donors. It has raised expectations for rapid change, perhaps unrealistically, but also strengthened agreed norms and standards of better practice and partnership. There is ample evidence here that these standards have been used to reinforce or legitimize demands that good practice be observed.

The effectiveness of the Declaration approach to aid reform was assessed as part of the Evaluation. The study found that the attempted reach of the program was extremely ambitious, but that it probably needed to be so in order to have a hope of galvanizing the necessary attention and motivation for change. Based as it was on long experience of partner countries and donors, it is not surprising that its basic diagnoses and prescriptions have been found to be relevant to aid relationships, although to differing degrees depending on circumstances. The built-in focus on monitoring and evaluating the implementation of the Paris agreements was also needed to maintain pressure for performance and mutual accountability.

SHORTCOMINGS AND UNINTENDED EFFECTS OF THE DECLARATION’S APPROACH

Several shortcomings and unintended effects have emerged over time. First, from a high-level political commitment to change international relationships to benefit development results in partner countries, the Declaration was often interpreted and used as mainly a “technical” and “process-oriented” government-to-government agreement to be managed by officials. As a result, it did not initially enlist the political and societal engagement needed to push through real changes.

Second, the international work on the Declaration commitments has been, in different ways, both too narrow and too broad to keep the necessary focus on the critical political choices: As examples:

- The 12 selected “indicators of progress” for the Monitoring Survey—while essential in principle to give accountability “teeth” to the mutual commitments—were not sufficiently representative, or in some cases reliable, and in practice became too much the focus of attention and action. This narrowed the reform agenda while demanding enormous national and international efforts for monitoring.
• While a participatory and balanced international super-structure was needed to mobilize and sustain the reform campaign, the demands of the process became heavy for all participants, particularly those from developing countries. An “aid effectiveness industry” has bloomed, with an overwhelming number of initiatives and specialized international working groups, meetings, and guidelines. But since the most critical shortage is not further analysis, but political will, aid reform fatigue has become a real danger, particularly for political leaders, policymakers, and frontline practitioners.

Additionally, the perception that there was a Declaration formula or model obscured the original expectation that the strategy would be adapted to different country situations and priorities. This has led to questioning the relevance of the reform agenda by some, and dangers of fragmenting the vital underlying consensus. As part of strengthening a joint focus on country-defined results, the Declaration has emphasized the need for partner countries to have in place national development strategies and priorities, able to guide national and international efforts at the operational level. As is often the case with planning, balancing the necessary direction and flexibility is a challenge—and the Declaration has perhaps erred on the side of the “planners” over the “seekers” in development (Easterly, 2007). It has also opened up divergent expectations and assessments of performance.

Critically, the hope that the Declaration-based process could make a major difference to the traditional imbalance between donor and partner country accountabilities has so far been disappointed.

Finally, the Evaluation did not conclude, as some have argued, that the Declaration campaign has focused so much on aid processes that it has had the unintended effect of diminishing the attention and action on ultimate development results for poor people, stronger respect for human rights and democracy, or more equitable international relations. There is no substantial evidence of such an effect.

The Accra High Level Forum recognized problems arising with the Declaration and agreed on a number of course corrections, but the Evaluation found that it was too early to assess their full effects.

*Overall conclusion—added value alongside other drivers of development and other sources of development finance:*
The Declaration was originally set in a framework that recognized the wider context and key domestic and international factors affecting development, well beyond aid programs. Yet assumptions about the potential role of aid have remained exaggerated, particularly in donor countries, as have expectations for rapid reforms by partner countries.

Much of the evidence in the Evaluation suggests that aid and the work of aid reform often continue to function in a world of their own, with managers and technicians on both the providing and receiving sides managing their specialized agendas and expectations. A wider perspective and a sense of proportion will be needed to carry aid effectiveness reforms to their full potential. Both partner countries and donors will also need to foster and harness better the many more powerful forces and policies for development that lie beyond the realm of aid.

Overall conclusion—added value alongside development cooperation partners beyond those so far endorsing the Declaration: Development cooperation actors, relationships, and arrangements have multiplied and taken on different forms, many of which are based mainly on normal interests in international relations. Using a generic definition of aid to distinguish it from other forms of commercial, political, or military support now yields a rough estimate that non-Declaration providers are disbursing about one quarter as much aid as OECD/DAC donors. The Evaluation’s thematic study on this subject found a critical lack of transparency and reliable data on many of these other forms and flows of cooperation. It adds the assessment that the major advances in the Declaration and Accra Agenda dealing with transparency, aid effectiveness criteria, and mutual accountability should be preserved and advanced further in order to include non-Declaration providers.

The Accra Forum also recognized that in recent years, development cooperation actors, relationships, and arrangements have multiplied and taken on different forms. On examination, many of these types of development cooperation are additional or varying approaches to the economic, political, and security cooperation that have always been part of international and regional relations. They are based on national and mutual interests, and have their own rationales and rules.
The Evaluation’s supplementary thematic study on other resource flows (Prada, Casabonne, & Bezanson, 2010, pp. 39–42) recalled that the Declaration campaign of reform has been specifically concerned with one major and distinctive strand among these different types of cooperation. This is development aid, best understood as “flows of official financing administered with the promotion of the economic development and welfare of developing countries as the main objective, and which are concessional in character” (that is, they include a substantial grant element). This definition, in its generic form, is taken as setting reasonable boundaries for aid as distinct from other forms of commercial, political, or military support.

In its Official Development Assistance form, this type of development assistance—non-existent before 1945—has since evolved extensive mechanisms and practices to provide transparent and reliable data, and to maintain and strengthen its distinctive mission. So, for instance, major disciplines have been worked out to distinguish private investment, export financing, mixed credits, and commercially tied aid, as well as military assistance. Many other efforts have been invested to improve the quality of aid. The initiatives leading into the Paris Declaration were thus a culmination of decades of work to strengthen the developmental mission and effectiveness of aid.

The thematic study found a critical lack of transparency and reliable data about many of the other forms and flows of development cooperation, but roughly estimated that the global total of flows of aid not yet covered by the Declaration to be about US$28–US$29.5 billion annually. This compares with better-documented aid from OECD/DAC sources at about US$125 billion. The growing number and diversity of new actors, especially civil society organizations, is increasing transaction costs for aid-receiving countries, which points to an even greater need than before for transparent information, coordination, harmonization, and governance leadership. The study added the assessment that the major advances in the Declaration and Accra Agenda dealing with transparency, the criteria for aid effectiveness, and mutual accountability should be preserved and advanced, and extended to include non-Declaration providers.

CONCLUSIONS QUESTION 6: IMPLICATIONS

What are the key implications for aid effectiveness in the future, taking account of new challenges and opportunities (for example, climate change) and new actors and relationships?
Overall conclusion: The Evaluation concluded that to the extent that existing and emerging forms of development cooperation aspire to the mission of development assistance, the principles and norms of good practice assembled and now tested in the Declaration reforms can offer a sound and transparent basis for their effectiveness. By applying and adapting these disciplines, new forms of development assistance can avoid repeating past errors and painstakingly negotiating new disciplines.

Today’s changing landscape includes a wider range of governmental players (including some that both receive and provide aid), regional organizations, global funds and initiatives, foundations, corporations, and civil society organizations. Interest and activity in South-South and triangular (two or more developing countries with donor[s]) cooperation has been growing rapidly, as has engagement by regional and local authorities. There are important reasons to reflect these new realities in aid effectiveness efforts.

Financing to developing countries to combat climate change has emerged as a major and growing feature of international financing flows, and will possibly come to rival Official Development Assistance in magnitude. It has many different strands and a great deal of further negotiation and institution-building to go through. It is clear, however, that these forms of financing will create many of the same challenges as have other forms of aid—perhaps even more—and yet there is very little coherent thinking or planning about adapting and applying lessons and good practices in effective aid to these new financing flows. Different institutions are involved in both partner and donor countries and internationally, and only the first tentative discussions have begun on how to anticipate and manage concerns about effectiveness. This is a critical issue of policy coherence and merits major attention at senior levels in the coming months.

Looking to the future of aid and ensuring its effectiveness, the Evaluation highlighted five main lessons:

1. Most of the agreed principles and norms for good aid practice captured in the Declaration consensus have proved valid and have started to yield improvements. To avoid reversals or new cycles of bad practice, this reform momentum should be further focused and extended.

2. In all countries, aid is a limited contributory factor in development, among many powerful drivers, obstacles, and
resources—and this range of factors is now widening. This perspective points to the need for more realistic expectations on both sides of aid relationships, including the need to accept and manage risks, and to maintain openness to learning. At the same time it calls for more focused aid contributions in areas where aid can be properly managed and will add the most value in terms of results.

3. The processes for ensuring aid effectiveness need to be simplified and the commitment to the proven norms reaffirmed but applied to individual country contexts with appropriate flexibility.

4. Better policy coherence will be critically important. This is the case for both partner countries and aid providers. It applies especially in the face of new tests such as the need to ensure the effectiveness of climate change and other new sources of development financing. Donors need to work toward greater coherence: as a group; individually across their different policy areas that affect development; and in several cases even within their own internal aid systems.

5. Participation and ownership in the international aid improvement campaign needs to be widened as soon as possible to engage more actors and styles of cooperation. Without overreaching the boundaries of aid, it provides a key route toward improving other distinct cooperation relationships.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

A number of the Evaluation’s main recommendations are clearly not new—some are both familiar and seemingly obvious. But, as the Synthesis report reiterates, these key political actions must be pressed again—simply and starkly—both because they are so important and because they are also areas where donors or partner countries that endorsed the Declaration have so far failed to meet firm Paris and Accra commitments. Although it was beyond the mandate of the Evaluation to recommend specific actions to other groups, the Synthesis report stressed that the evidence strongly indicates that all the recommendations below are relevant to all these other actors.
A. Jointly to Policymakers in Both Partner Countries and Donor Countries and Agencies

1. *Make the hard political choices and follow through.*

The High Level Forum in Korea needs to find innovative ways to re-enlist and maintain high-level political engagement to take stock of experience, resolve hard issues, and set future directions. The Evaluation repeatedly found that the key driver for successful reform in countries and donor agencies has been senior political engagement and support. Its absence may be one of the crucial reasons for lagging progress elsewhere. A stronger focus on actions at the country level will lose impact if it depends only on officials dealing with officials, or donor officials dealing with partner-country ministers.

2. *Focus on transparency, mutual accountability and shared risk management.*

The next phase of reforms to strengthen the effectiveness of aid should build on the gains of the Paris Declaration campaign and improve on it by going beyond the global banner of the “grand declaration” to concentrate on the most needed changes. These include

- deepening adherence to the principles of country ownership, alignment and harmonization of donor support, and transparency and mutual accountability in tracking and achieving results;
- adding “shared risk management” to this framework of principles in the spirit of a mature partnership; and
- focusing mainly on country-led, coordinated action on the ground, with joint country-level forums managing aid relationships and the application of reforms.

Transparency has emerged repeatedly throughout the Evaluation as the indispensable foundation for effectiveness and mutual accountability. The focus on results is essential, but “managing for development results” should be more targeted and treated as a set of supporting techniques rather than a separate principle in itself.

3. *Centre and reinforce the aid effectiveness effort in countries.*

Leadership in future aid effectiveness efforts needs to be clearly situated and supported at the level of individual partner countries,
with stronger country-led mechanisms and independent facilitation as a widely used option. This should be supported by intensified peer pressure and monitoring of donor performance internationally. At the international level, the superstructure of standard setting, analysis, reporting on, and monitoring of aid effectiveness needs to be reset in order to be less onerous, especially for partner countries, and more directly useful.

4. Work to extend the aid reform gains to all forms of development cooperation.

The unprecedented coalition in the international campaign for more effective aid and the most important improvements achieved need to be further widened to engage other forms of aid and other actors with their own approaches and innovations. Not all the new or growing forms of development cooperation have an aid component, and the proven norms should not be overextended or watered down to try to go beyond aid. But, with a modest number of refinements and adaptations where they are shown to be needed, almost all of the 56 commitments of the Declaration—beginning with those that increase transparency—have proven valid and useful as basic norms and disciplines in virtually all forms of international support for development that have a concessional or grant element. This includes cooperation in fragile and humanitarian situations, new forms of support such as climate change financing, and the concessional development cooperation of providers now working outside the Declaration framework and parts of civil society, regional, South-South, and triangular cooperation.

5. Reinforce the improved international partnerships in the next phase of reforms.

It will be vital to build upon the advances that have been made at the international level through purpose-built joint partnership mechanisms between partner countries and donors to pursue the Paris Declaration reform campaign. With the proposed sharper focus on action in partnerships at the country level, the most important international need will be for more common purpose and demanding expectations on donors/agencies, whose activities span many different countries. The Evaluation found a potential and a need for tougher analysis, transparency, peer scrutiny, and pressure among the providers of aid—including multilateral agencies and non-DAC providers of assistance—to expedite reforms, with the key foundation
being a firm base of transparency on financing and activities at both the international and national levels.

B. To Policymakers in Partner Countries

6. Take full leadership and responsibility at home for further aid reforms.

Partner countries need to take on the full leadership and responsibility for further improvement in aid effectiveness in their own countries. This should be built on consistent engagement at senior political levels and stronger in-country machinery for engaging and coordinating donors. It should include a clear option of involving independent facilitators/rapporteurs to help monitor progress and support mutual accountability in the face of the asymmetrical and complex relationships of an aid-receiving country dealing with multiple donors on difficult issues.

All the stakeholders, including legislatures, civil society, and the private sector, can be more involved. Most importantly, it is clear that, by bringing the aid effectiveness agenda home, countries can keep on improving their systems not just for better aid, but in ways that serve their wider priorities for development, as many countries are now showing. The evidence is that most donors endorsing the Declaration will be prepared to rally behind clear country leadership, although some of their systems are not yet equipped to field the necessary authority, expertise, and continuity on the ground.

7. Set strategies and priorities for strengthening capacities.

Most partner countries need to craft workable strategies for further strengthening the capacities to carry through their most essential public policies and operations. This would produce clearer priorities to steer the donor support that is pledged for this purpose. Capacity development has been recognized as an urgent priority for decades, but progress has mostly been slow and difficult. It is ultimately a complex, organic, and long-term set of processes—not an area for “quick fixes” or bureaucratically engineered solutions.

8. Intensify the political priority and concrete actions to combat poverty, exclusion, and corruption.

Many partner country governments need to devote higher political priority and more focused action to further reducing the most stub-
born development challenges of poverty, exclusion, and corruption, in line with accepted international obligations and the accountability demands of their own people.

The Millennium Development Goals have done a good deal to raise awareness, rally efforts, and monitor progress on globally agreed development objectives. However, the Evaluation has confirmed—in assessing the widespread lack of progress for the poorest, and particularly women and girls—that even the best of aid and aid reforms can encourage and reinforce, but not replace, strong and effective national commitment and action. Meanwhile, the cancer of corruption, present everywhere in the world, is the focus of steadily growing public knowledge and anger in most countries and of the 2005 UN Convention Against Corruption, which now has 140 signatories. Corrupt practices continue to frustrate the best intentions and objectives of more effective aid and limit the potential for better partnerships.

These objectives are first and foremost important to public confidence in partner-countries themselves, but they are also fundamental to aid relationships and to the support for aid in donor countries.

C. To Policymakers in Donor Countries

9. Match the crucial global stakes in aid and reform with better delivery on promises made.

Most donor countries, at a top political level, need to register and rectify the gaps between their high stakes in aid programs and, on the one hand, the historic compact to improve them and, on the other hand, a slow and wavering record of reform.

As the Evaluation has shown, most partner countries have slowly but surely started making the changes to keep their more difficult side of the aid reform bargain. Moreover, a number of donor countries—all with their own political, institutional, and administrative constraints—have also shown that these can be overcome when sufficient political priority is invested and public understanding and support enlisted.

With the high geopolitical stakes involved, and the shared political commitment in the very first paragraph of the Paris Declaration to “far-reaching and monitorable actions to reform the ways we deliver and manage aid,” it is urgent that all donor governments find ways
to overcome the internal institutional or administrative obstacles slowing their aid reforms. Without this, the consensus will fray, and the momentum will be lost.

10. Face up to and manage risks honestly; admit failures.

Donor governments need to acknowledge frankly that development and development aid are inherently uncertain and risky and to put in place measures to manage risks jointly with partners in the spirit of a mature partnership. To try to avoid all risks in development cooperation is to risk irrelevance.

There are demonstrated ways of promoting a mature public understanding of the uncertainties and risks of development and aid work and how to handle and learn from them, including both cutting-edge initiatives and the effective use of tools like evaluation. Donors can learn from, and apply, some of these new techniques.

There is also further evidence in this Evaluation to support the conclusions of other major assessments that the new approaches to development cooperation are in reality no more risky than traditional tightly donor-controlled projects, and that there are sound ways of managing the risks in the new models while also enhancing the development benefits.

11. Intensify peer pressure on “free-riders” for more balanced donor efforts.

Donor countries and agencies need to harness, at a high political level, the instruments of constructive peer pressure that were expected in the Declaration to be drivers of better collective performance—a minority of reform-minded donors cannot hold up the donor side of the compact on their own. Highly uneven donor performance leads to an overall collective effort that falls short of the Declaration’s agreed vision. It will be important for donors to use all possible opportunities for constructive peer pressure to ensure a more balanced and collective response by the donor community.

A CONCLUDING MESSAGE

The Evaluation found that almost all the 56 commitments in the original Declaration—reinforced by the priorities adopted at the Accra Forum—have been and remain highly relevant for the im-
Improvement of development cooperation. That brief list of balanced commitments from 2005, deeply rooted in experience, has sometimes been lost from sight with the focus on broad principles, restricted indicators, or emerging trends. But the Evaluation reminded us that the commitment to aid reforms is a long-term one, and that the Declaration’s clear original undertakings—which have attracted such unprecedented support—are neither fully implemented nor yet outdated. The Evaluation stressed that they still set the standard for the Busan High Level Forum and beyond.

REFERENCES


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