

Engendering aid: analysis of the Accra outcomes

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This comment paper analyses the results of the Accra Agenda for Action (AAA), adopted in September in the capital of Ghana, from a gender perspective. On the basis of the AAA, both donors and developing country members have committed themselves to continuing to progress aid reform under the framework of the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness (2005). The present document argues that although progress has been made in gender equality and women's empowerment with respect to the 2005 Declaration, gains have been modest. In a similar vein, we will briefly review the mobilisation process of women's rights organisations in the lead up to Accra, going on to analyse the results obtained, and mentioning some of the challenges and opportunities which lie ahead in the lead up to the IV High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness which will take place in 2011.¹

The mobilisation process leading up to Accra

The Paris Declaration (PD), agreed back in 2005, neglected to include policies which are decisive for development such as trade, investment, agriculture, debt and the environment (amongst others), as well as universal matters such as gender equality and the empowerment of women, human rights and the environment. In fact, the PD only incorporated the matter of gender mainstreaming into the harmonisation processes, and this has prevented clear strategies from being developed with respect to the link between aid effectiveness and gender equality. Considering that the Paris commitments and their operative mechanisms are linked to meeting the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) and the reduction of poverty, this amounts to a serious obstacle.

Women's rights organisations began to mobilise around these issues from the middle of 2007 onwards, aware that the principles of the PD provided opportunities for moving forward gender equality and the empowerment of women.² In the process leading up to Accra, alliances have been built between organisations for women's rights and development organisation actors from civil society,³ as well as multilateral platforms like UNIFEM⁴ or the Gender and Development Network (GenderNet) of the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). Women's rights organisations added their voice to the process leading up to Accra, first of all by pointing to the limitations of the PD's political framework: aid effectiveness must be measured first and foremost by its contribution to poverty and inequality eradication and its support for the advancement of gender equality, human rights, democracy and the environment. Seen in this light, aid effectiveness merely forms part of a process leading to effective development, rather than constituting the whole process itself.

¹ This comment paper is based on the article "A gender analysis of the Accra Agenda for Action" by Nerea Craviotto in *Conditionalities undermine the Right to Development*, by Alemany, C. y Dede, G. (2008) AWID: Mexico.

² See Carmen Cruz: From Beijing to Paris: The relevance of gender equality for aid effectiveness, FRIDE comment paper, April 2008

³ The alliance between AWID, DAWN, FEMNET, IGTN, NETRIGHT, WIDE and WILDAF, and the support of ActionAid International are worth highlighting here.

⁴ United Nations Development Fund for Women, created in 1976.

In terms of more specific demands, women's rights organisations drew up a series of recommendations for the governments of donor and developing countries, agreed at different consultation meetings at the international and regional level⁵ during the lead up to Accra. These recommendations have been used when lobbying governments and, above all, the DAC Working Party on Aid Effectiveness (or the WP-EFF as it is also known), providing the language for different drafts of the AAA. The following can be highlighted from the analysis carried out by women's rights organisations:

- Aid reform should contribute to advancing the implementation of international human rights and women's rights commitments undertaken by donor and developing countries, such as the Beijing Platform for Action, the Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination against Women (or CEDAW) and the MDG, particularly MDG number 3 (promote gender equality and empower women).
- Owing to its relevance in the European context, The European Union must meet its international and regional gender and development commitments.⁶ The European Union must therefore undertake an effort to harmonise and consolidate a political dialogue around gender equality and women's empowerment with partners in the South and support - with specific financial resources - the implementation of national commitments with respect to gender equality and women's empowerment. This dialogue ought to take place in a context of democratic ownership, be accompanied by accountability mechanisms to assess progress, and be monitored by a vigorous civil society, above all by women's rights organisations.
- Define participative and democratic ownership as a guiding principle of the PD, without establishing new forms of conditionality. That includes, amongst other things, the commitment of governments to support the necessary conditions for women's rights organisations and others from civil society to carry out their roles in development processes (in planning, implementing, monitoring and evaluating).
- Donor governments must comply with the historic commitment to increase ODA to 0.7% of GDP, in addition to debt relief, and this must be provided in the form of grants, not loans.
- Provide transparent information on the allocation of Official Development Assistance (ODA) and to what extent it corresponds to people's needs. Governments must also provide transparent and public information on state budgets.
- Measure development results in the PD framework by adopting the current existing report and follow up systems which are used to evaluate compliance with human rights; amongst others, the Gini income inequality index, as well as other methods such as the CEDAW, the MDG or Resolution 1325 of the United Nations Security Council. If new indicators are established, these should be designed in the context of a more inclusive process, including beneficiary populations and other local actors.

⁵ International Consultation of Women's Organisations and Networks on Aid Effectiveness, January 2008, Ottawa, Canada (organised by AWID and WIDE). Consultation on gender equality and women's empowerment: challenges and opportunities ahead in the new European aid environment, May 2008, Brussels, Belgium (organised by WIDE & UNIFEM). African women's regional consultation on aid effectiveness and gender equality: road to Accra, May 2008, Nairobi, Kenya (organised by FEMNET). West African women's regional consultation on aid effectiveness and gender equality, May 2008, in Togo (organised by WILDADF). Latin American & Caribbean consultation on gender equality and aid effectiveness, June 2008, Sta. Marta, Colombia (organised by AWID and IGTN). Accra International Women's Forum, August 2008, Accra, Ghana (organised by AWID, DAWN, FEMNET, IGTN, NETRIGHT, WIDE and WILDADF).

⁶ For example, I would like to point out the Conclusions of the Council of the European Union on General Affairs and External Relations of May 15th 2007, Communication 2007 (100) : *The Council recognises the Commission's and the Member States' responsibility to support developing country partners in eliminating discrimination and gender inequality by increasing visibility and accountability on gender equality and women's empowerment in development cooperation. Therefore, the Council calls the Commission and member states to efficient channelling of development aid in support of country owned gender policies on the basis of an in-depth policy dialogue with partner governments and key non-government stakeholders, including women's rights organisations.*

- Pay special attention to the needs and restitution of the rights of victimised women in fragile countries (states in conflict, emerging from a state of conflict or in post-conflict situations) and in communities registering localised conflicts and xenophobic attacks, through the participation of women in peace-building, and by channeling specific development aid to women's organisations with the aim of tackling the concerns and needs of surviving women, including the strengthening of capacities, access to sexual and reproductive health care, information and services, as well as activities aimed at putting an end to violence against women.
- Establish a strategic plan to finance gender equality⁷ and women's empowerment reflected in the budgetary guidelines of the PD implementation follow up process. Guarantee direct financing with clear mechanisms, ensuring the participation of civil society, including women's rights organisations.
- Aid reform and international cooperation cannot be considered in isolation from a wider context which includes the participation of all development actors/actresses, as well as other aspects such as the economic and financial situation. Systemic matters ought therefore to be discussed under the aegis of the United Nations; more specifically, the ECOSOC's Development Cooperation Forum should be the space where aid reform and development advances are secured and progress monitored.

The Accra outcome: the agenda moves forward, but without much political commitment

The commitments undertaken in Accra to a certain extent reflect the effort from different arenas (governmental and non-governmental) to integrate gender equality and women's empowerment into the framework of the PD. However, the progress made is still modest. The final text of the AAA stresses the centrality of poverty eradication and human rights in development policies and the importance of human rights, gender equality and environmental sustainability as "cornerstones for achieving enduring impact" (paragraph 3). It goes on to affirm that "Developing countries and donors will ensure that their respective development policies and programmes are designed and implemented in ways consistent with their agreed international commitments on gender equality, human rights, disability and environmental sustainability" (par 13c) and that "at country level, donors and developing countries will work and agree on a set of realistic peace- and state-building objectives that address the root causes of conflict and fragility and help ensure the protection and participation of women" (par 21b). In addition, the AAA recognises the need to improve the availability of statistical information which is broken down by gender, region, and socio-economic status, thus contributing to strengthening the design, implementation and assessment of policies (par. 23a). So, of the 32 paragraphs which make up the AAA, only three include commitments which might contribute to advancing gender equality and the empowerment of women.

From their different areas, the defenders of gender equality and the empowerment of women have not only made an effort to defend the importance of gender equality and women's empowerment in moving towards poverty eradication, human rights and sustainable development; they have also provided ideas which go about integrating these matters into each and every one of the Paris principles (gender mainstreaming), thereby preventing the kind of "neutrality" of policy which might end up replicating unequal results in practice. However, in terms of the mainstreaming of gender equality and women's empowerment, the final AAA text leaves a lot to be desired.

⁷ Based on the recommendation of the meeting of the experts group on Financing for Gender Equality of the United Nations which calls on governments to meet the 10% of ODA for gender equality and women's empowerment before 2010 and 20% by 2015, establishing in the action plan of donors, recipient countries and the DAC the strategies to achieve this goal, monitoring its execution and evaluating impact (Expert Group on Financing for Gender Equality - United Nations Commission on the Status of Women, Oslo, September 2007).

Besides, the advances observed in the AAA are undermined by the lack of new goals or follow-up commitments (e.g., new indicators) geared to gender equality and women's empowerment. Nor are commitments identified on the question of the resources required in order to fulfill the promises made; this points once again to donor countries, developing countries and multilateral agencies lacking the political will to make gender equality and women's empowerment a priority in the process of aid reform.

Towards 2011: some still outstanding matters for gender equality

Beyond specific mentions, the commitments undertaken in Accra open up new opportunities to continue moving forward the gender equality and women's empowerment agenda in the framework of aid reform, with a view to the 4^o High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness which will take place in 2011. The following are worth highlighting:

- The commitment of governments "to continuing efforts in monitoring and evaluation that will assess whether we have achieved the commitments we agreed in the PD and the AAA, and to what extent aid effectiveness is improving and generating greater development impact." (par.11) - something which raises the possibility of accountability.
- On ownership: although the AAA doesn't mention "democratic ownership", it does identify the "ownership" of development processes by countries as one of the key areas and commits governments in developing countries to "taking stronger leadership of their own development policies" through "engaging with their parliaments and citizens in shaping those policies" and donor governments by "respecting countries' priorities ... making greater use of their systems to deliver aid, and increasing the predictability of aid flows" (par. 8). Likewise, the delegates at the HLF3 committed themselves to "working in more inclusive partnerships so that all our efforts have greater impact on reducing poverty" which, taking into account paragraph 13a, would include civil society organisations since "Developing country governments ... will also engage with civil society organizations". In addition, in paragraph 13b donor governments commit themselves to "increasing the capacity of all development actors—parliaments, central and local governments, CSOs, research institutes, media and the private sector—to take an active role in dialogue on development policy and on the role of aid in contributing to countries' development objectives."

Despite advances on "ownership", the AAA doesn't identify new mechanisms or new indicators to evaluate the progress of commitments undertaken at Accra. With the principle of "ownership" reduced once more to the existence of Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSP) and the plans of related governments, this basically amounts to debt relief mechanisms which give preeminence to creditors.⁸

As for the recognition of civil society organisations as development actors in their own right (par 20), there is no mention whatsoever of the establishment of clear financing mechanisms to support their participation, nor a clear commitment to ensure that participation in each of the steps of national development processes (such as planning, programming, management, monitoring and evaluating aid).

- On transparency and accountability: in comparison to 2005, the AAA offers stronger language here, beginning with a recognition that "Transparency and accountability are essential elements for development results" (par 24). Governments of developing countries thus commit to 'implementing greater transparency in public financial management, including public

⁸ Alemany, C., Craviotto, N. et al. (2008), *Implementing the Paris Declaration: Implications for the Promotion of Women's Rights and Gender Equality*, CCIC: Canada.

disclosure of revenues, budgets, expenditures, procurement and audits” and the governments of donor countries to “publicly disclosing regular, detailed and timely information on volume, allocation and, when available, results of development expenditure to enable more accurate budget, accounting and audit by developing countries.” (par 24a). Paragraph 24 also includes a commitment to use “credible independent evidence” in assessment and an agreement to “examine the proposals for strengthening these mechanisms (mutual assessment reviews) before the end of 2009”. This opens up new possibilities for accountability on the use and impact of aid in donor and developing countries.

In Accra, agreement was also reached to revise the mutual assessment reviews at the international level. This is an important matter both for civil society and developing countries, aiming as it does to improve weak donor accountability to counterparts in the South. Thus the AAA affirms that “developing countries and donors will jointly review and strengthen existing international accountability mechanisms, including peer review with participation of developing countries” (par 24c) with a commitment to reviewing proposals by the end of 2009.⁹

However, the AAA does not go far enough, because it fails to identify mechanisms to monitor to what extent the allocation of aid corresponds to national priorities and people’s needs, and whether it contributes or not in terms of a positive impact on the agenda of gender equality, human rights and sustainable development. The obligations based on regional and international agreements on development, gender and development and human rights should be the normative and organisational framework of accountability in the aid system, but the AAA language is very vague in that sense

- On conditionality: the AAA recognises the link between ownership and conditionality (par 25a), but unfortunately no agreement was reached on reducing conditionality, despite the insistence that this be the case by both developing countries and civil society owing to the crucial nature of the issue. In Accra, it was only agreed to “make public all conditions linked to disbursements” to begin immediately to “increase emphasis on harmonised, results-based conditionality” in order that the conditions be “mutually agreed”.¹⁰

As has previously been noted, the process of aid reform in the shape of the PD has opened up new opportunities and mechanisms to translate government commitments in donor and developing countries on gender equality and women’s empowerment into improved practices, results and overall effect. The commitments taken on board at Accra, albeit modest, do constitute another step in this direction. Between 2008 and 2011 the challenge lies in operationalising - from each and every one of the arenas in which the defenders of women’s right are found - the commitments taken on board. For this to take place, the following points are necessary:

- From donor governments: the harmonisation of approaches and the alignment of resources to support national strategies advancing gender equality and women’s empowerment, without the need of resorting to new forms of positive conditionality,¹¹ as well as support for women’s rights organisations.
- From the governments of donor and developing countries: the implementation of specific actions on the basis of results and impact.
- From women’s rights organisations and other activists: to continue with the task of holding governments to account regarding their commitments to gender equality and women’s empowerment, and more specifically regarding the need to operationalise the commitments undertaken at Accra, as well as applying political pressure so that in 2011 there is assessment on the advances which have been made in the framework of the PD and the AAA.

⁹ Comité Directivo Internacional de la Sociedad Civil (2008), *Accra Agenda for Action: Moving from aid effectiveness to development effectiveness?* www.betteraid.org

¹⁰ Idem.

¹¹ For more information, see Alemany, C. y Dede, G. (2008), *Conditionalities undermine the Right to Development*, AWID : Mexico.

- From all areas: to push for gender mainstreaming in aid reform and most specifically in the framework of the PD and its principles of ownership, alignment, harmonisation, managing for results and accountability.

Beyond the results of the AAA, during the mobilisation process leading up to Accra, women's rights organisations have observed other important challenges worth highlighting and which should be taken into account in the work leading up to the IV High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness which will be held in the middle of 2011:

- The process of aid reform and, more specifically, the process around the PD on aid effectiveness are highly technical matters, and consequently a high level of technical competence is required in order to effectively influence the agenda. Women's rights organisations, in comparison with other actors from civil society, began mobilising somewhat late in the day, with two issues to resolve on parallel fronts: firstly, to influence policy geared towards Accra and secondly, the development of analyses, information and technical capacities around aid effectiveness and its opportunities and challenges. This, to a certain extent, is still a challenge for the mobilisation process in the run up to 2011, with the question of monitoring the implementation of the Accra outcome at the practical level to be added to that.
- Civil society organisations, and especially development organisations, have proved to be a key ally when it comes to putting gender equality at the centre of the aid reform agenda - i.e., gender equality as a means to obtaining sustainable development and the eradication of poverty. Leaving to one side that equality is the right of all human beings, women or men, and allowing for the fact that there is an awareness and sensitivity to the importance of gender equality for development in the space occupied by civil society, still too often that message goes no further than the general context, without it ever being expressed in specific demands and recommendations which are fundamental if we want to make an impact on aid equality.
- The language which dominates the production of analysis, information and the logistics of consultation meetings is still English, something which amounts to a serious obstacle for the mobilisation of many organisations from civil society in general, and especially for organisations which work at local levels in linguistic contexts other than English.
- Financial resources: civil society has played an increasingly important role in development processes (at the practical level, in the implementation of programmes and projects and policies), as the AAA acknowledges. Mechanisms which enable civil society, and especially women's rights organisations, to access resources therefore need to be established by governments of donor and developing countries to ensure the viability of these actors/actresses.

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