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Aid Effectiveness and the Challenge of Donor Accountability to Recipients: A comparative analysis of the Global Partnership for Effective Development Co-operation and the Grand Bargain

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Declaration

I confirm that this is my own work and the use of all material from other sources has been properly and fully acknowledged.

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Abstract

Concerns about the effectiveness of international aid have been a recurring theme in academia and policy circles for decades. Two key multi-stakeholder initiatives were established in the 2010s to promote system-wide effectiveness in development and humanitarian aid: the Global Partnership for Effective Development Co-operation (GPEDC) and the Grand Bargain (GB), respectively. However, progress has so far been slow, particularly in relation to the accountability of Western donors to aid recipients, and recent research on this issue has been scarce. This study compares and contrasts GPEDC and GB to garner lessons on what works in holding donors accountable to recipient governments and people in humanitarian crises. Through a critical overview of the author's previous publications, key informant interviews and an autoethnographic reflection on the author's professional experience with GPEDC and GB, the study identifies significant similarities and gaps in donor behaviour towards their recipients. Structural power asymmetries in both initiatives show how donor accountability remains elusive. Nevertheless, research findings also show it can be improved in two fundamental ways. The first one is by closing the feedback loop between taxpayers, as the ultimate providers of international aid in donor countries, and citizens in receiving countries as the ultimate recipients of aid. This solution implies establishing independent citizen committees in both donor and recipient countries, which would strengthen the monitoring of aid intermediaries' practices. A second way to ensure donor accountability to recipients is to significantly scale up the use of cash transfers in the aid system. By shifting the power of choice from donors to recipients, international aid would better respond to recipient needs and thus become more efficient and effective.

Table of Contents

2.4.3.   Accountability in aid effectiveness relationships

Conclusion

Chapter 3. Methodology

Introduction

3.1.   Methodologies used for the published works

3.1.1.   *Busan in a Nutshell: What next for the Global Partnership for Effective Development Co-operation?*

3.1.2.   *The Outcome of the 2nd High-Level Meeting of the Global Partnership for Effective Development Co-operation and why it matters*

3.1.3.   *A Win-Win: Multi-year flexible funding is better for people and better value for donors*

3.1.4.   *Focus on the Frontlines: How the Grand Bargain can deliver its promise to improve humanitarian aid*

3.2.   Research design for and approach to the new primary data

3.2.1.   Methods used for the new primary research

3.2.1.1.   Key Informant Interviews

3.2.1.2.   Autoethnography

3.2.1.3.   Document analysis

3.2.1.4.   Quantitative methods used in the new research

3.3.   Ethical considerations

3.4.   Research limitations

Conclusion

Chapter 4. Published works by Farida Bena

- *Busan in a Nutshell: What Next for the Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation?*

- *The Outcome of the Second High-Level Meeting of the Global Partnership for Effective Development Co-operation and Why It Matters*

- *A Win-Win: multi-year flexible funding is better for people and better value for donors*
- *Focus on the Frontlines: How the Grand Bargain can deliver on its promise to improve humanitarian aid*

Chapter 5. Integrative discussion

Introduction

5.1. Synthesis of research findings

    5.1.1. The added value of monitoring aid effectiveness commitments in a multi-stakeholder partnership

    5.1.2. Conflating accountability with monitoring efforts

    5.1.3. Political ambitions *vs*. technical discussions

    5.1.4. The trade-off between mutual accountability and inclusion

    5.1.5. Global *vs*. country-level accountability

    5.1.6. The 'evidence trap'

    5.1.7. Loss of institutional memory

    5.1.8. Siloed approaches

    5.1.9. The unresolved challenge of accountability to target populations

5.2. Research contributions

    5.2.1. Donor accountability and power

    5.2.2. Alternatives for improved donor accountability to aid recipients

        5.2.2.1 Donor accountability through citizen committees

        5.2.2.2. Donor accountability through scaled-up cash assistance

5.3. Preliminary conclusions

    5.3.1. Significance of the research findings

    5.3.2. Revisiting the conceptual framework of this thesis

5.4. Broader implications of the findings

Summary

Chapter 6. Conclusion

Introduction

6.1. Summary of key findings

      6.1.1. Key elements leading to higher donor accountability in GPEDC and GB

      6.1.2. Gaps in donor accountability within GPEDC and GB

      6.1.3. Ways to improve donor accountability in GPEDC and GB

6.2. Overall contributions of my research and practice

Final thoughts

References

List of figures

Figure 1. Implied generic theory of change for GPEDC

Figure 2. Accountability lines in donor and recipient countries

Figure 3. GPEDC's revised monitoring framework

Figure 4. The Principal – Agent problem in aid

Figure 5. Closing the accountability feedback loop in an ideal aid scenario

Figure 6. Closing the accountability feedback loop in the real world

Figure 7. The three dimensions of power

Figure 8. GPEDC's current monitoring cycle

Figure 9. Accountability lines in donor and recipient countries, revisited

Figure 10. A preliminary description of donor accountability to different GPEDC and GB recipient groups

Figure 11. A revised description of donor accountability to different GPEDC and GB recipient groups in light of the research findings

List of Tables

List of Boxes

Annexes

List of abbreviations

AIR	Annual Independent Report (of the Grand Bargain)
BRICS	Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa grouping
CALP	Cash and Learning Partnership
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
CVA	Cash and Voucher Assistance
DAC	Development Assistance Committee (part of the OECD)
DRC	Danish Refugee Council
FTS	Financial Tracking Service
GB	Grand Bargain
GCR	Global Compact on Refugees
GHD	Good Humanitarian Donorship
GPEDC	Global Partnership for Effective Development Co-operation
GRF	Global Refugee Forum
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
G7	Group of 7
G20	Group of 20
G77	Group of 77
HAP	Humanitarian Accountability Partnership Standard
IASC	Inter-Agency Standing Committee
IATI	International Aid Transparency Initiative
ICVA	International Council of Voluntary Agencies
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organisation
IRC	International Rescue Committee
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NRC	Norwegian Refugee Council
NRG	National Reference Group
OCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
ODA	Official Development Assistance

OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PRSP	Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SSC	South-South Co-operation
TRC	Triangular Co-operation
UN	United Nations

Chapter 1. Introduction

Introduction

This thesis investigates the accountability of donor governments which are members of the Development Assistance Committee of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD/DAC). I have chosen this group of donors because they provide most of what is usually referred to as international aid, or Official Development Assistance (ODA). I use OECD's definition of ODA as flows of official financing for the economic development and welfare of developing countries (OECD, 2024), including humanitarian assistance (OECD, 2019). By 'accountability', I mainly refer to the combination of two dimensions: 'answerability' of decision-makers to those whose lives are affected by their decisions; and 'enforceability' of sanctions if decisionmakers' performance is unsatisfactory (Goetz and Jenkins, 2005:9). Specifically, my study aims to assess donor accountability for the quality of donor aid, by which I mean both the efficiency and effectiveness of the financial aid flows provided. Most of the literature conflates these two aspects into 'aid effectiveness'. To narrow the focus of this vast literature, I compare and contrast how DAC donors have fulfilled their aid effectiveness commitments to recipients in two relevant multi-stakeholder initiatives: the Grand Bargain (GB) on humanitarian assistance and the Global Partnership for Effective Development Co-operation (GPEDC) on development aid and other forms of co-operation.

Concerns about the effectiveness of international aid have been a recurring theme in academia and policy circles for decades (Chambers, 2017:74; Easterly, 2006; Moyo, 2009; Yanguas, 2018). However, in recent years, academic interest in this topic has declined even though donor accountability for aid effectiveness is still a priority for many recipients and local actors (NEAR, 2023a:5). In the meantime, donor progress on their GPEDC and GB commitments has stalled (GPEDC, 2019b:21; Metcalfe et al., 2023:13). As a professional who has worked on both initiatives, I have therefore sought to draw attention to this challenge from the recipients' perspective. Building on my direct exposure to GPEDC and GB, my published works and personal reflections, I have aimed

to identify what works and what doesn't in holding donors accountable for their aid promises. My goal has been to preserve and disseminate these learnings, which would have otherwise been lost.

Section 1.1 of this chapter introduces my thesis by providing a brief background on my research topic. It describes my evolving role in the aid effectiveness field and explains my rationale for choosing the issue of donor accountability. Section 1.2 states the research aims, objectives and questions which have developed through my professional experience and which my publications address. Section 1.3 frames the significance of my work in terms of my research and professional contributions to aid effectiveness. Section 1.4 describes the main research limitations. Section 1.5 outlines how the thesis is organised and summarises the content of each chapter.

1.1. Background and context

Academic and policy literature on aid effectiveness is extensive, going back to post-war reconstruction efforts in Europe (Rist, 1997:69). For the sake of this thesis, I have limited the scope of my context analysis to aid effectiveness theory and policy in the last two decades. Looking at the specific issue of donor accountability to aid recipients since the early 2000s, three major trends emerge.

First, academic and policy discussions on accountability for aid effectiveness have become more complex. While the first two High-Level Fora on Aid Effectiveness in Rome (2003) and Paris (2005) still reflected a donor-driven approach to better aid (Vollmer, 2012:66), later Fora in Accra (2008) and especially Busan (2011) saw the engagement of additional stakeholders, including non-DAC providers and Civil Society Organisations (CSOs). In parallel, civil society and think tanks started complementing donor initiatives such as the Good Humanitarian Donorship (2003) with norm-setting efforts, like the Humanitarian Accountability Partnership Standard (2007). The establishment of GPEDC in 2012 and GB in 2016 formalised the adoption of a multi-stakeholder approach to effective aid and development co-operation. This gradual change happened against the backdrop of polarised academic views on aid effectiveness (Stiglitz, 2002; Sachs, 2005; Easterly, 2006; Moyo, 2009). For some academics (Kharas, 2014; Green, 2016), efforts to engage non-DAC

providers and broaden the discourse from aid effectiveness to 'development effectiveness' increased the risk of losing focus on the core aid effectiveness commitments agreed in Paris and Accra (see Annex I for the original list of commitments). In addition, in the absence of an explicit theory of change in either GPEDC (Davis, 2015) or GB (Metcalfe et al., 2021:30), the proliferation of new commitments since the 2010s has led to confusion about who is accountable to whom for what.

Second, moving away from a donor-centric view of aid effectiveness towards a more inclusive, multi-stakeholder approach has been welcome but it has also contributed to donors' diluted sense of responsibility vis à vis their recipients. By prioritising 'partnership' over 'donorship', donors have increasingly shared their accountability with other actors along the aid transaction chain (Drydyk, 2019:151). Concepts like 'global light, country-focused', 'locally led development' and 'accountability to affected populations' have allowed donors to put the onus of improving aid on receiving governments and implementing agencies (Kharas, 2011:7). Through this shift in focus, donor accountability to aid recipients has been outsourced to intermediaries, including local and national actors.

Third, global aid effectiveness initiatives, such as GPEDC and GB, have increasingly monitored progress on commitments to promote mutual learning rather than to hold donors and other key stakeholders to account for what they promised (Bracho, 2017:3). The proliferation of commitments since Busan and the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit have made it challenging to continue tracking stakeholder performance systematically (McKee et al., 2020:45, 56). Moreover, donors' funding constraints have led to a suspension in the publication of GPEDC and GB flagship progress reports for several years. These patterns have favoured a lighter approach to accountability based on self-reports and exchanges of best practices among GPEDC and GB members instead of independent scrutiny by a third party.

As a development and humanitarian professional, I have followed the evolution of donor accountability to recipients for aid effectiveness since 2007. I was a member of GPEDC's secretariat

(the OECD-UNDP Joint Support Team) from 2013 to 2015 and then became the representative of two GB signatories, the NGOs International Rescue Committee (IRC) from 2017 to 2023 and Save the Children in 2024. During my time with the IRC, I was also the coordinator of the Grand Bargain Caucus on quality funding, a multi-stakeholder working group established in early 2022 to negotiate, amongst other things, a substantial increase in multi-year humanitarian funding from major bilateral and multilateral donors. With Save the Children, I joined the negotiations in another GB Caucus, this time on anticipatory action.

Playing these professional roles over the years has allowed me to witness donor behaviour closely from a variety of perspectives. Within GPEDC's secretariat, I acted as a neutral broker trying to find common ground between different GPEDC constituencies. This is when I started experiencing the challenge of keeping high-level stakeholders, such as ministers, involved. Their gradual disengagement led to a surge in overly technical discussions, which became a barrier to participation for GPEDC members with lower capacity to follow, such as recipient governments. I also observed how the production of new technical data, while valuable, added complexity to a partnership without a clear direction of travel. This is when I noticed conversations between donors and other GPEDC stakeholders were confusing. They were going in circles rather than moving forward.

Similar dynamics surfaced in GB. By the time I became the coordinator of the quality funding Caucus, it was hard to find a politician willing to engage. Technical jargon dominated the discussion about the need for predictable funding and several donors still hesitated to implement their commitments to multi-year funding despite a significant body of evidence of its value produced by implementing agencies over the previous five years.

Two additional challenges led me to question donor accountability to aid recipients within GPEDC and GB. The first one was the fact that they operated in silos despite covering similar system-wide aid effectiveness issues from a development and humanitarian perspective, respectively. Even though GPEDC has a broader scope than the aid effectiveness commitments agreed in Paris and

Accra, donors still have a responsibility to fulfill them (OECD, 2011:4). In addition, both initiatives call for nexus approaches (OECD, 2011:8; The GB, 2016:14). Since GB's establishment in 2016, however, there have been neither formal nor informal linkages between these two initiatives. To my knowledge, there has not been a single academic study looking into both. This situation has resulted in unnecessary duplication of efforts, for example on aid transparency. It has delayed the implementation of several donor commitments.

A second related challenge I have personally encountered has been the concerning loss of institutional memory in GPEDC and GB alike. For all the evidence and best practices accumulated over the years, new generations of policymakers would periodically re-open previously held discussions, for example on GB's commitment to flexible funding. There seemed to be deep resistance to using these learnings to advance aid reforms. In particular, I noticed how donors would ignore past evidence on the grounds that it was no longer relevant to the evolving aid landscape. This erosion of institutional knowledge, whether natural or intentional, fueled frustration among other GPEDC and GB recipients. It also motivated me to document what I was seeing in four publications which I either wrote or co-wrote for the organisations I represented over the years. These papers are presented in the next section and included in Chapter Four.

Currently, most DAC donors are cutting down their aid budgets due to funding constraints. After years of declining interest in aid effectiveness from policy and academic circles, donors are once again paying attention to how aid quality can be improved, although mainly from the angle of 'cost effectiveness' for now (USAID, 2024b). I argue this is the right time to fill the research gap on donor accountability for GPEDC and GB commitments from the recipients' perspective. To do so, I have decided to complement insights from my professional experience and my published works with new primary research, as the next section explains.

1.2.   Research aims, objectives and questions

The main goal of my research is to help design better donor accountability mechanisms for current and future aid effectiveness initiatives, particularly at system level. The aid financing landscape is likely to change dramatically in the coming years but for now donor governments continue to play a powerful role in how humanitarian and development aid is used. The objective of this study is to share my experience and research to show how improved donor accountability to aid recipients can contribute to the higher effectiveness of the overall aid system.

To reach this goal, my objective has been to explain how and why I have selected GPEDC and GB as two highly relevant multi-stakeholder initiatives in recent years. A second objective has been to compare and contrast GPEDC and GB to identify similarities and differences between the two, as well as gaps in their original design in relation to donor accountability to recipients. A third objective has been to garner lessons learned on donor accountability which can prove useful in either improving GPEDC and GB or designing other aid effectiveness-related initiatives.

Through a comparative analysis of GPEDC and GB, I have addressed three research questions:

a) Have GB and GPEDC led to higher accountability of donor governments to aid recipients?
b) To what extent did the original design of GB and GPEDC result in gaps in donor accountability to aid recipients?
c) How can GB and GPEDC be improved to address donor accountability to aid recipients?

As the question of accountability cannot be separated from the question of power (Goetz and Jenkins, 2005; Eyben, 2008; McGee, 2020), I have analysed my research findings through a power lens and conceptual frame. Similarly, I have looked at aid in terms of power relations between key aid stakeholders in recognition of the fact that aid and power are closely intertwined (Eyben, 2006:4-5; Olivié and Pérez, 2020).

In reply to the three research questions, I have reviewed four of my most relevant publications, which are included in Chapter Four. They include the following published works:

- *Busan in a Nutshell: What Next for the Global Partnership for Effective Development Co-operation?* (Bena, 2012). I wrote this paper, to which I refer as *Busan in a Nutshell* in short, on behalf of Oxfam International during the OECD-DAC negotiations on GPEDC's monitoring framework. The paper presents a concise assessment of the discourse on development aid effectiveness from the early 2000s to GPEDC's establishment in 2012. It includes a brief history of aid effectiveness discussions at the global level, highlighting policy milestones and key political moments, such as the Fourth High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness in Busan, which I personally attended as a policy and advocacy professional. The paper then moves on to describe the state of GPEDC's monitoring and accountability system being negotiated post-Busan. Building on intelligence gathered during the negotiation process, I make specific recommendations to relevant decision-makers, especially donor governments, to strengthen accountability to aid recipients. In particular, I argue that there needs to be a strong vision, high-level political engagement and a robust but flexible accountability mechanism for GPEDC to fulfill the promise of aid effectiveness made by development stakeholders in Busan.

- *The Outcome of the Second High-Level Meeting of the Global Partnership for Effective Development Co-operation and Why It Matters* (Bena and Tomlinson, 2017). I wrote this paper (*The Outcome* in short) as an independent aid effectiveness expert, with insights from Aidwatch Canada's Executive Director Brian Tomlinson. The purpose of the paper is to crystallise key learnings on GPEDC's progress on major aid effectiveness commitments five years after its establishment. I do so by reflecting on the outcome of GPEDC's second ministerial-level conference in Nairobi, Kenya in November 2016, which I attended in person, against the backdrop of the Addis Ababa Action Agenda on financing for development and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) globally adopted the previous year. The paper argues that GPEDC's little progress against the original aid and development effectiveness commitments is largely due to a combination of confusing definitions, missing timelines and limited donor engagement

at the country level, which has resulted in faulty accountability. Nevertheless, I end the paper by arguing in favour of GPEDC's enduring relevance to development aid effectiveness.

- *A Win-Win: multi-year flexible funding is better for people and better value for donors* (Bena et al., 2020). This paper (*A Win-Win* in short), which I co-wrote with three International Rescue Committee colleagues, provides both quantitative and qualitative evidence of the effectiveness of multi-year flexible funding. As the team leader for the project, I designed the structure and framing of the report and was responsible for its overall production. I also chose the methodology to be used for the selection of the qualitative case studies and the cost effectiveness analysis carried out by my colleagues. To draw the key findings, I held several discussions with the research organisation Development Initiatives, which provided technical support. In terms of content, I wrote the executive summary, the key findings, the recommendations and the conclusion chapters. I also contributed to the introduction and provided substantive feedback on the case studies and the cost effectiveness research.

  A Win-Win was designed to be a definitive answer to donors' continuing requests for incontrovertible evidence of the added value of multi-year flexible financial assistance to both donors and humanitarian aid recipients. It focuses on predictability and flexibility as two essential components of better-quality funding. The paper is divided into two parts. The former is a series of case studies from Cameroon, the Central African Republic and Côte d'Ivoire highlighting the long-term effectiveness of multi-year flexible funding. The latter section is a quantitative analysis of the efficiency gains in multi-year flexible funding through a comparison of cost effectiveness data from cash transfer distribution projects financed by short *vs.* long-term grants in Somalia. While the paper explicitly calls for more and better-quality humanitarian aid, based on the latest evidence of its added value, it is also meant to prevent donors from backtracking on their Grand Bargain commitments to quality funding as they prioritise the Covid-19 pandemic response.

- *Focus on the Frontlines: How the Grand Bargain can deliver on its promise to improve humanitarian aid* (Bena, 2021). I wrote this paper (*Focus on the Frontlines* in short) on behalf of the IRC to support a continuation of the Grand Bargain's mandate five years after its establishment in 2016 and beyond its original expiry date in 2021. At a time when some signatories were privately skeptical about the Grand Bargain due to its slow and uneven progress, the paper suggested a comprehensive strategy for accelerating the pace of humanitarian aid reforms, particularly regarding localisation and quality funding. The basic argument of the paper is that more robust accountability for humanitarian aid effectiveness requires a two-tier approach: 1) systematic monitoring of humanitarian financial flows, particularly flows to implementing agencies on the frontlines of humanitarian action; and 2) improved measurement of desired outcomes for affected populations. Annex I of *Focus on the Frontlines* develops these points by suggesting several GB-specific indicators of progress. By analysing primary data from GB signatories' self-reports (GB 2021), the Grand Bargain Annual Independent Reports (AIRs) (GB 2017-2023) and humanitarian trends over the previous years, *Focus on the Frontlines* also gave me the opportunity to formulate IRC's first-ever public position on localisation, clarifying the organisation's thinking on what was already a major humanitarian trend in the early 2020s.

In addition, Annex VI includes an article I wrote for Devex at the end of my collaboration with the OECD in 2015. It is a reflection on the lessons learned from my work within GPEDC's secretariat.

To contextualise my research, I have complemented these publications with a critical reflection on my professional experience with, and direct exposure to, GPEDC and GB, using a qualitative autoethnographic method. To triangulate these data, I have drawn on insights from interviews with 28 key informants knowledgeable about either GPEDC or GB or both. Two additional informants helped triangulate my findings by sharing their legal expertise on government accountability in non-binding multi-stakeholder initiatives.

1.3. Significance of my research and role

I believe my research and practice on aid effectiveness are valuable for several reasons.

First, they contribute to filling a gap in recent literature on donor accountability to aid recipients. As illustrated in the literature review in Chapter 2, since the 2010s, increasing attention has been paid to the recipient end of aid delivery. As a result, a vast academic and policy literature on the accountability of Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) to assisted populations has emerged. While I am aware of this trend, which has been positive in putting the focus on what people in need think of the aid received, a consequence of this shift has been to pay less attention to the donor side of the transaction chain. This thesis therefore aims to put the focus back upstream on donor behaviour to rebalance the accountability equation between providers and recipients of international cooperation.

Second, through a comparative analysis of GPEDC and GB, my research surfaces key similarities, differences, gaps and lessons learned between these two system-wide initiatives, which have so far been largely ignored. In this regard, the contribution of my new research is twofold. On the one hand, it contextualises findings from the publications selected for this thesis with additional primary data. On the other hand, it connects the dots between GPEDC and GB by comparing and contrasting these two multi-stakeholder initiatives explicitly. Exploring the coherence, or lack thereof, between development and humanitarian aid effectiveness can help identify better coordinated strategies to ensure higher donor accountability to the end users: recipient populations living in poverty and/or in crisis.

Third, the combination of my research and practice brings to the fore hard-to-detect power dynamics between donors and recipients in aid effectiveness. Through a power analysis lens, I question the widespread assumption that multi-stakeholder initiatives such as GPEDC and GB promote peer relations among their members. In addition, my conceptual framework highlights the unresolved challenge of closing the feedback loop between taxpayers in donor countries and aid recipients in receiving countries for higher aid effectiveness. Drawing on my collaboration with

other aid practitioners, I propose two possible solutions to improve donor accountability to recipients, in complementarity and beyond GPEDC and GB. The first solution, which should be piloted, introduces an element of independent scrutiny into aid effectiveness by establishing and connecting citizen committees in donor and recipient countries. The second solution, which can already rely on a robust body of evidence, involves a significant increase in cash assistance to shift the power of choice from donors to recipients.

These contributions fill existing gaps and provide practical value to the aid effectiveness field against the backdrop of a fast-evolving global aid financing landscape.

1.4.   Main research limitations

This thesis is, in part, based on an autoethnographic account of my research and practice as an aid effectiveness expert. Choosing autoethnography has been my way of capturing knowledge that would have otherwise been lost or forgotten. Indeed, my new primary research confirms that institutional memory loss is a key theme emerging from GPEDC and GB alike. In complementing my past research, I have drawn on my personal notes, recollections, professional interactions and reflections on aid effectiveness throughout my career as a humanitarian and development professional, especially since the mid-2000s. To reduce subjectivity bias, I have triangulated my findings with document and thematic analysis. In addition, I have interviewed 30 key informants currently working in the aid sector in different world regions from the Global North and Global South.

Another limitation of my research has been the fungible nature of development aid. OECD's definition of ODA specifies that it targets the 'economic development and welfare of developing countries' (OECD, 2024). As such, ODA refers to governments, not people, as the official recipients of development aid. Aid fungibility therefore makes it challenging to assess donor accountability to specific target populations in countries receiving development aid.

1.5.   Outline of the thesis

In Chapter 1, I have introduced the background and the context of this study. I have identified the research aims, objectives and questions, presented my published papers and argued the value of my work. I have also shared the main research limitations.

In Chapter 2, I will review the aid effectiveness literature since the early 2000s to situate and demonstrate the relevance of my research. Specifically, I will describe major trends in donor accountability to recipients for their aid effectiveness commitments and introduce my conceptual framework based on four theoretical constructs.

Chapter 3 will present my methodology. I will explain why I have adopted a qualitative, inductive research approach and justify my choice of autoethnography as a valid, relevant and appropriate method for the new research. I then discuss the methodology used in selected publications and summarise the specific data collection and analysis methods followed for the additional primary research. I will conclude the chapter with a detailed description of ethical considerations and research limitations.

Chapter 4 will include the four publications I have selected for this thesis, which I have briefly introduced in Section 1.2 of this chapter.

Chapter 5 will integrate my published works with a discussion of the findings on donor accountability to aid recipients from my comparative analysis of GPEDC and GB. I will complement my writings with a critical reflection on my direct exposure to GPEDC and GB and draw on insights from key informant interviews.

Chapter 6 will conclude this thesis. I will reply to my research questions and reiterate the overall contributions of my research and professional practice to the topic of aid effectiveness and the challenge of donor accountability to aid recipients. I will then recommend opportunities for further studies.

The Annexes provide additional information on key aid effectiveness milestones, such as the High Level Fora on Aid Effectiveness held in Paris, Accra and Busan. They also include a list of donor-specific GB monitoring indicators, my analysis and published work on the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR), background research material and relevant online articles I have written over the years.

Chapter 2. Literature review

Introduction

This chapter presents a critical review of the literature on the accountability of OECD/DAC donor governments to aid recipients for the quality of their humanitarian and development assistance. In this context, quality refers to both the efficiency and effectiveness of the aid provided, although most of the literature tends to conflate the two terms into 'aid effectiveness'.

In Section 2.1, I clarify key definitions related to the separate concepts of aid effectiveness and donors' accountability to aid recipients. I assess the main concepts and assumptions behind GPEDC and GB as two relevant multi-stakeholder initiatives seeking to improve the effectiveness of development and humanitarian aid, respectively.

In Section 2.2, I review recent aid effectiveness trends in academic and policy literature, including the increasing complexity of accountability for aid effectiveness, the paradigm shift towards locally led approaches to accountability and the tendency to monitor progress against commitments for learning, rather than for accountability, purposes.

Section 2.3 summarises the main challenges in addressing donor accountability to recipients in relation to aid effectiveness. It identifies conceptual and methodological gaps in the existing literature, which my research aims to fill.

Section 2.4 presents my conceptual framework, which combines four different theories to deepen my understanding of the research questions.

2.1. Definitions of aid effectiveness and donor accountability to aid recipients

Aid effectiveness has been a recurring theme in academia and policy circles for decades. A vast literature has addressed issues related to the quality of the Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) provided by OECD/DAC members, for the 'economic development and welfare of developing countries' (OECD, 2024). This includes the quality of assistance to people affected by humanitarian crises (OECD, 2019).

2.1.1. Aid efficiency vs. aid effectiveness

For all the lengthy technical discussions on aid effectiveness, there are plenty of implicit assumptions about what it is and what it should achieve. To start, several basic definitions are unclear, including 'aid effectiveness' itself. As noted earlier, there is a propensity to conflate 'effectiveness' with 'efficiency'. Anderson et al. (2012) attribute this tendency to the adoption of business principles by the aid sector and note how

> this trend is based on a sense that improving the efficiency of aid delivery will ipso facto also improve its effectiveness, and it is primarily motivated by the aid providers' desire to be more accountable both for funds spent and results achieved.
>
> (Anderson et al., 2012:35).

In his keynote speech at the 2014 UN Development Co-operation Forum, Chambers (2014) notes the increasing focus on procedures, frameworks and value for money, rather than people, since the 2005 Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness. The word 'results' is most frequently mentioned in association with organisational effectiveness and management rather than with outcomes that improve people's living conditions over the long term (Sjöstedt, 2013:146; Holzapfel, 2016:6-7, 15-17).

Not only does this additional meaning of the word 'results' add confusion about the end goal of aid effectiveness efforts; it also creates inherent tension between two different kinds of accountability, compounded by time pressure: short-term outputs for donors eager to show their citizens how

well their funding has been used and longer-term outcomes that make a lasting positive impact on the ultimate recipients of aid (De Renzio, 2016).

2.1.2. What exactly is accountability for aid quality?

Accountability is generally defined as 'liability to account for and answer for one's conduct, performance of duties, etc.' (Oxford English Dictionary, 2024). As Goetz and Jenkins (2005:8) explain, accountability is a relationship of power. In humanitarian and development aid, it describes a relationship between the citizens of a country as the less powerful 'principal' holding their government, the more powerful 'agent', to account for its actions (Goetz and Jenkins (2005:8).

The definition of accountability becomes less clear when it is referring to donor accountability to aid recipients. Goetz and Jenkins (2005:9) note how accountability consists of two key elements: *answerability* of decision-makers to those whose lives are affected by their decisions; and *enforceability* of sanctions if decisionmakers' performance is unsatisfactory. O'Neill et al. (2007:3) reiterate this notion in reviewing the development strategies and policies of seven DAC donors. To my knowledge, however, there has not been a single instance of sanctions imposed on donors for their poor track record on aid effectiveness. To the contrary, there are several known examples of sanctions (e.g. withdrawal of funding) imposed *by* donors on implementing agencies delivering aid to recipients due to compliance issues over donor regulations. When it comes to donor accountability, enforceability has either been missing or only working in donors' favour. For example, in 2016 the NGO Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) reported losing Euro 34,000, which had been granted as a contingency fund for emergency operations in Palestine because they could not get a response from the donor in four months, despite having contacted them six different times (NRC, 2016:16). On the other hand, in 2018, another NGO, Mercy Corps, discovered that USD 639,000 worth of aid might have been lost in the Democratic Republic of Congo due to a fraud scheme. The then UK's Department for International Development (DfID) immediately withdrew their funding as a result.

To further complicate the picture, accountability is often used interchangeably with 'transparency'. Aid effectiveness literature has been consistent in highlighting the close relationship between transparency and accountability, and indeed transparency and mutual accountability are mentioned together as an aid effectiveness principle in both the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness (2005:8) and the Busan Outcome Document (OECD, 2011:3). Nevertheless, improvements in transparency do not automatically translate into improvements in accountability (McGee, 2013:S108). In addition, there is not enough empirical evidence to prove that access to more data will lead to more transparent information, including for accountability purposes (Fox, 2007:667). To date, there is no theory of change unpacking the relationship between transparency and accountability in aid effectiveness. As McGee notes, this makes it hard to demonstrate their impact on donor behaviour as it is not clear against what to track progress (2013:S114).

More recent academic research further clarifies the distinct role of accountability from monitoring and transparency (Fox, 2015; McGee, 2020; Anderson, 2022; Fox, 2022; Fox et al., 2024). Three important points emerge from these studies, which focus on social and government accountability but can also be applied to donor governments. First, new literature reiterates that accountability is all about power; hence, aid initiatives focusing on accountability also need to be all about transforming power relations (McGee, 2020:51). Second, disclosing more information does not equal being more transparent as data can be illegible or hard to access. This type of 'opaque' transparency does not contribute to accountability. Instead, 'clear' transparency relies on actionable and accessible information that can be used by those who demand it (Fox, 2022:47). Third, for accountability to have a lasting impact, it must lead to institutional change by the powerholder. Simply responding to demands from citizens or aid groups is not enough, as donors can choose to do so at their discretion and backtrack on their promises in the future. In contrast, accountable responsiveness implies an *institutional* obligation to respond to citizen voice (Fox et al., 2024: 19). It is accountability 'with teeth' (Fox, 2015: 353).

2.2.   Recent trends in aid effectiveness

Bearing in mind the key definitions explained above, this section identifies three major trends in academic and policy literature on aid effectiveness since the early 2000s. The first one is the increasing complexity of accountability for aid effectiveness. The second one is the gradual shift towards nationally and locally led accountability. The third one is the tendency to prioritise monitoring for learning over monitoring for accountability purposes.

### 2.2.1.   The increasing complexity of accountability for aid effectiveness

2.2.1.1.   *Donor accountability to whom and for what?*

There are no explicit theories of change clarifying who is accountable to whom in major aid effectiveness initiatives, including in GPEDC and GB. The former was established in the wake of the 2011 Fourth High-Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness in Busan, South Korea to inject new momentum after a series of landmark multilateral and multi-stakeholder agreements promoting higher-quality development assistance in the 2000s (Bena, 2012:2-3). The latter was a key outcome of the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit held in Istanbul to promote a multi-stakeholder pact that would increase the efficiency of the overall humanitarian system, originally within five years (The GB, 2016).

In his critique of the GPEDC, Davis (2015) tried to develop a theory of change for the Partnership *ex-post*, which is illustrated in Figure 1. As a first step, the theory posits that the effective development cooperation policy process promoted by the High-Level Aid Effectiveness Fora of Rome, Paris, Accra and Busan has produced a set of global norms which provide a basis for pursuing commitments and action (see box A in Figure 1). These norms sustain commitments and action through country-led monitoring of progress and multi-stakeholder dialogue among relevant constituencies (box B). Together with the international policy space provided by GPEDC, these factors contribute to behaviour change, including by donors (box C). In turn, better behaviour change gradually improves monitoring of progress through a series of 'implied feedback loops' (2015:2). The result is that different actors operate in a more coordinated fashion (box D), leading to improved development impact (box E). According to Davis's theory then, accountability for

commitments improves through a dynamic interplay between global policy discussions and multi-stakeholder dialogue at the country level based on data collected through regular monitoring of progress.

In practice, this theory of change raises more questions than provides answers. Importantly, the theory does not clarify who is accountable to whom for GPEDC commitments. Also, it does not unpack assumptions about causality and context, nor does it explain how they may interact with the proposed change. As Davis himself labels it, Figure 1 can only summarise an implicit and generic theory of change, which is based on GPEDC's achievements at the time. However, it is interesting to note that Davis finds a major gap in the lack of incentives for policy changes at donors' headquarters and for clear communication of those changes to country offices (Davis, 2015:3). These two factors – or lack thereof – are highly relevant to donor accountability for aid effectiveness commitments.
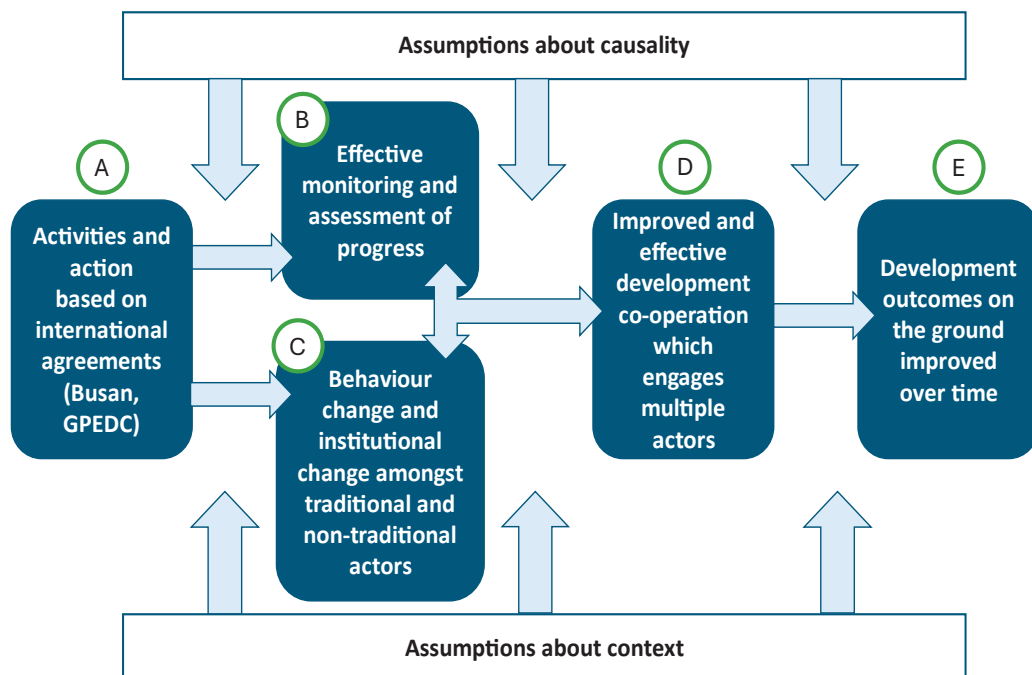
Figure 1: Implied generic theory of change for the GPEDC.

Source: Author's adaptation of Davis, 2015.

With regard to humanitarian aid effectiveness and efficiency, the number one recommendation from an independent review of the GB at five years was to

> elaborate a brief but clear theory of change… the action plan should be elaborated to include targets that are ambitious but achievable within the two-year timeframe (i.e. by mid-2023) and measurable (i.e. data exists or can be easily accessed in order to measure progress against the targets), as well as clear roles and responsibilities for agreed actions.
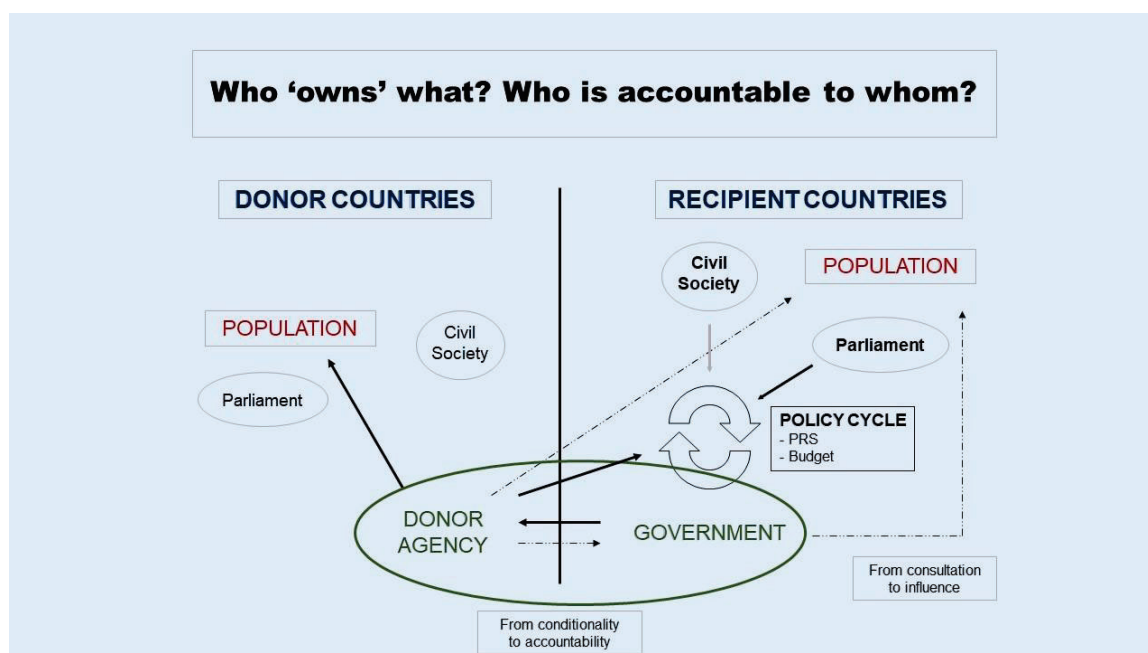>
> (Metcalfe et. al, 2021:154).

While the third iteration of the GB, which started in 2023, has made some progress in clarifying its complex governance structure, no theory of change has been developed to date.

2.2.1.2. Donors' multiple accountabilities

ODA, which includes humanitarian aid, is meant to promote and specifically target 'the economic development and welfare of developing countries' (OECD, 2024). Donor accountability should be measured against this definition only. However, the reality is far more complex as ODA may serve additional, and often more pressing, donor motives, be they of a geopolitical, commercial or other nature (Easterly, 2006; De Renzio, 2006b, 2016; Dreher et al., 2024). Aid agencies therefore need to reconcile different domestic and foreign interests and manage multiple accountability lines simultaneously for the assistance they provide abroad. Aid recipients may represent only one of those accountability groups, and they are often the weakest (Easterly, 2006:206; Green, 2008:256). Caught between their taxpayers and legislators on the one hand, and aid recipients on the other, donor agencies tend to prioritise the former as the more powerful. This leads them to value efficiency (how donors' money is spent) over effectiveness (what outcomes aid should produce, such as improved health conditions in the recipient country), to a point where the two concepts are conflated. Hence, this explains donors' over-emphasis on compliance requirements and efficiency gains which can be showcased to their domestic stakeholders (Chambers, 2014).

From DAC donors' perspective, accountability to populations affected by humanitarian crises is even more challenging than accountability to recipient governments. Indeed, humanitarian aid is technically a portion of ODA – around 11.3% or USD 25.3 billion in net 2023 ODA figures (OECD, 2025) but is not necessarily provided through government channels. Donors can choose to allocate their funding to implementing agencies, such as NGOs and UN agencies, especially in situations where the government may have contributed to the crisis, for example in conflict settings. Nongovernmental and multilateral agencies therefore act as additional intermediaries managing donor funding to assist affected populations. The accountability lines in this case are longer, multidirectional and sometimes overlapping, as shown in Figure 2:

Figure 2: Accountability lines in donor and recipient countries.
PRS: World Bank's Poverty Reduction Strategy.
Source: De Renzio, 2006b.

Besides the sheer complexity of aid relationships, Figure 2 captures their fundamental inability to close the feedback loop which usually ensures citizens of a given country can hold their government to account for its actions, either through political elections or parliamentary scrutiny or civil society's oversight. Instead, in the case of public humanitarian and development assistance, citizens of the providing country (the taxpayers funding aid) have no way to connect directly with citizens of the receiving country (the ultimate recipients of aid), nor is there a way to hold their respective governments to account for how well they play their intermediary role in channeling aid from providers in country A to receivers in country B (McGee, 2013:S112). In addition, the disconnect between ultimate providers and ultimate receivers of aid makes these intermediaries more vulnerable to interference from other actors, be they domestic or foreign interest groups, who may leverage their influence for non-aid purposes. These incomplete feedback loops have generated much of the general distrust and confusion about donor agencies' efforts to hold themselves accountable to recipients for the quality of their assistance.

2.2.1.3. *More commitments, more accountability?*

A final point which illustrates the growing complexity of the aid effectiveness debate is the increasing number of commitments to improve development cooperation, including by donors, since 2005. Annex I includes the key development and humanitarian aid effectiveness agreements between donors, recipient governments and other major stakeholders over the last two decades. The *Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness* (2005) included 56 commitments under the five principles of recipient country ownership of development strategies, donors' alignment to national priorities, harmonisation of donors' actions, managing for results, and mutual accountability and transparency. Table 1 summarises the most important Paris commitments from that Declaration, as measured by 12 indicators and related targets by the end of 2010. They range from donors using procurement systems of recipient countries to disbursing aid more predictably to putting in place mutual donor/recipient assessment reviews. As the Table shows, donors met only one out of 13 targets in five years. They improved their coordination in support of national strategies.

Table 1. Key aid effectiveness commitments as measured by the Paris Declaration Indicators and targets in 2010. (Source: Author's creation adapted from OECD, 2012).

	Paris Declaration Indicator	2010 Actual	2010 Target	Status
1	**Operational Development Strategies** % of countries having a national development strategy rated "A" or "B" on a five-point scale	37% (of 76)	75%	Not met
2a	**Reliable public financial management (PFM) systems** % of countries moving up at least one measure on the PFM?CPIA scale since 2005	38% (of 52%)	50%	Not met
2b	**Reliable procurement systems** % of countries moving up at least one measure on the four-point scale since 2005	--	No Target	--
3	**Aid flows are aligned on national priorities** % of aid for the government sector reported on the government's budget	41%	85%	Not met
4	**Strengthen capacity by co-ordinated support** % of technical co-operation implemented through co-ordinated programmes consistent with national development strategies	57%	50%	**Met**
5a	**Use of country PFM systems** % of aid for the government sector using partner countries' PFM systems	48%	55%	Not met
5b	**Use of country procurement systems** % of aid for the government sector using partner countries' procurement systems	44%	No target	--
6	**Strengthen capacity by avoiding parallel PIUs** Total number of parallel project implementation units (PIUs)	1 158	565	Not met

	Paris Declaration Indicator	2010 Actual	2010 Target	Status
7	**Aid is more predictable** % of aid for the government sector disbursed within the fiscal year for which it was scheduled and recorded in government accounting systems	43%	71%	Not met
8	**Aid is untied** % of aid that is fully untied	86%	More than 89%	Not met
9	**Use of common arrangements or procedures** % of aid provided in the context of programme-based approaches	45%	66%	Not met
10a	**Joint missions** % of donor missions to the field undertaken jointly	19%	40%	Not met
10b	**Joint country analytic work** %of country analytic work undertaken jointly	43%	66%	Not met
11	**Results-oriented frameworks** % of countries with transparent and monitorable performance assessment frameworks	20% (of 44)	36%	Not met
12	**Mutual accountability** % of countries with mutual assessment reviews in place	38%	100%	Not met

The *Accra Agenda for Action* (2008), also included in Annex I, deepened the commitments agreed in Paris while gradually including non-state stakeholders in the discussion. Three years later, the outcome document of the *Busan Partnership for Effective Development Co-operation* (OECD, 2011) (see Annex I) added around 70 multi-stakeholder commitments and actions to the list. Many of them were without a timeline, such as donors' commitment to use the country systems of the recipient to channel their financial flows:

> [w]e will build on our respective commitments set out in the Paris Declaration and Accra Agenda for Action to… [u]se country systems as the default approach

for development co-operation in support of activities managed by the public sector, working with and respecting the governance structures of both the provider of development co-operation and the developing country.

(OECD, 2011:5)

An exhaustive list of Busan commitments has never been compiled, probably because the document's wording lends itself to different interpretations of the count. GPEDC High-Level Meetings held in Mexico City in 2014 and Nairobi in 2016 and the Geneva Summit in 2022 added even more promises, including 39 'Voluntary Initiatives' (GPEDC, 2014:8). These were either unilateral or joint activities launched by a range of countries and organisations in the margins of the main meeting. For example, Australia and OECD committed 'to increase aid to tax matters, and to refine ways to measure aid going to tax system development.' (Mexico High-Level Meeting Communiqué, 2014:10).

On the humanitarian side, over 3,700 commitments were made at the World Humanitarian Summit (WHS) in 2016 (Agenda for Humanity, no date). They include donor financial commitments ranging from promoting partnerships with a broader range of stakeholders to widen and diversify the resource base to supporting the Central Emergency Response Fund to provide funding for rapid response and underfunded emergencies (Agenda for Humanity, no date). In this case, too, there is no clarity on the exact number or timeline of aid effectiveness commitments. Some of them were double counted as part of the 51 GB commitments made in the same year (see Annex I for the complete list of GB commitments).

Perhaps inevitably, as the number of donor commitments increased, the mechanisms put in place to monitor their implementation became less systematic. Whilst the Paris Progress Report and Final Evaluation (Dabelstein et al., 2013:32) were praised for their comprehensive assessment of aid effectiveness commitments based on a well-defined set of indicators and targets, subsequent monitoring efforts, even when robust, could only focus on a select number of commitments. GPEDC's monitoring framework in Figure 3, for example, focuses on measuring progress against 30

key commitments, while GB's set of indicators prioritises eleven out of 51 commitments, as listed in Table 2.

Table 2. List of GB commitments prioritised in 2018. (Source: Author's creation based on GB, no date a).

Workstream	Core commitment (with commitment number in brackets)
Greater transparency	Signatories make use of appropriate data analysis, explaining the distinctiveness of activities, organisations, environments and circumstances (1.2).
More support and funding tools for local and national responders	Increase and support multi-year investments in the institutional capacities of local and national responders, including preparedness, response and coordination (2.1).
	Achieve by 2020, a global aggregated target of at least 25% of humanitarian funding to local and national responders as directly as possible to improve outcomes for affected people and reduce transaction costs (2.4).
Increase the use and coordination of cash-based programming	Increase the routine use of cash, where appropriate, alongside other tools. Some may wish to set targets (3.1 and 3.6).
Reduce duplication and management costs with periodic functional reviews	Make joint regular functional monitoring and performance reviews and reduce individual donor assessments, evaluations, verifications, risk management and oversight processes (4.5).
Improve joint and impartial needs assessments	Provide a single, comprehensive, cross-sectoral, methodologically sound, and impartial overall assessment of needs for each crisis to inform strategic decisions on how to respond and fund, thereby reducing the number of assessments and appeals produced by individual organisations (5.1).
Participation Revolution: include people receiving aid in making the decisions which affect their lives	Improve leadership and governance mechanisms at the level of the humanitarian country team and cluster/sector mechanisms to ensure engagement with and accountability to people and communities affected by crises (6.1).

Workstream	Core commitment (with commitment number in brackets)
Increase collaborative humanitarian multi-year planning and funding & Reduce the earmarking of donor contribution	Signatories increase multi-year, collaborative and flexible planning and multi-year funding. Aid organisations ensure that the same terms of multi-year funding agreements are applied with their implementing partners (7.1.a).
	Donors progressively reduce earmarking, aiming to achieve a global target of 30% of humanitarian contributions that is unearmarked or softly earmarked by 2020. Aid organisations reduce earmarking when channelling donor funds with reduced earmarking to their partners (8.2 and 8.5).
Harmonise and simplify reporting requirements	Simplify and harmonise reporting requirements by the end of 2018 by reducing the volume of reporting, jointly deciding on common terminology, identifying core requirements and developing a common report structure (9.1).
Humanitarian-development nexus	Perform joint multi-hazard risk and vulnerability analysis, and multi-year planning where feasible and relevant, with national, regional and local coordination in order to achieve a shared vision for outcomes. Such a shared vision for outcomes will be developed on the basis of shared risk analysis between humanitarian, development, stabilisation and peacebuilding communities (10.4).

(Following page). Figure 3. GPEDC's revised monitoring framework. Bold font shows indicators from the previous framework. Source: GPEDC, no date c.

COUNTRY OWNERSHIP

WHOLE-OF-SOCIETY

Engagement and dialogue	Parliamentary oversight	CSO enabling environment	Private sector engagement

• Countries and development partners engage diverse stakeholders in preparing their national development strategies
 	
• Countries include diverse stakeholders in: dialogues on development priorities and results; joint assessments towards development co-operation targets
	• Countries regularly provide information on development co-operation to parliaments
	
	• **Development co-operation is recorded on the national budget**
		• **Civil society organisations (CSOs) report improvement to their enabling environment due to:**
		  • **the government**
		  • **development partners**
		  • **their own effectiveness**
			Kampala Principles Assessment
			• Countries and development partners:
			  • have a policy framework that builds on a consultative process to identify priorities for private sector engagement (PSE) in development co-operation and the role of PSE stakeholders
			  • organise inclusive and relevant multi-stakeholder dialogues
			  • facilitate PSE partnerships in development co-operation
			• PSE partnerships deliver development outcomes, are transparent and accountable

STATE AND USE OF COUNTRY SYSTEMS

Planning	Respect for country's policy space	Public financial management	National budget	Gender budgeting	Accountability mechanisms	Information management	Procure-ment
• Countries have quality national development planning	• **Development partners use country-owned results frameworks and planning tools (SDG 17.15.1)**	• Countries have quality public financial management (PFM) systems (PEFA) ▶ • Countries strengthen their PFM systems ▶ • Development partners use partner country PFM systems for funding channelled to the public sector	• **Development co-operation is predictable** • **Development co-operation is recorded on the national budget**	• **Countries have systems to track and make public allocations for gender equality and women's empowerment (SDG 5.c.1)**	• **Countries have inclusive, regular, transparent, result-focused accountability mechanisms captured in a policy framework**	• Countries have information management systems for development co-operation • Development partners report to these information management systems	• **Aid is untied** ▶

TRANSPARENCY

Countries' action	Development partners' action

• Countries make publicly available:
  • information on development co-operation, national development plans and their progress reports
  • results of joint assessments towards development co-operation targets
	• Development partners:
	  • **report to global systems and standards (OECD CRS, OECD FSS, IATI)** ▶
	  • make publicly available their country-level strategies

LEAVING NO ONE BEHIND

Consultation	Target and results	Data and statistics

• Countries and development partners engage vulnerable and marginalised groups in preparing national development strategies and country-level strategies
• Countries include vulnerable and marginalised groups in:
  • dialogue on development priorities and results;
  • joint assessments towards development co-operation targets
	• National development strategies and development partners' country-level strategies include development priorities for vulnerable and marginalised groups
	
	• National development strategies include disaggregated targets and results indicators
	
	• Development partners use distributional analysis to define targets and results indicators for beneficiaries of interventions
		• Data-based assessments inform national development plans/ development partners' country-level strategies
		
		• Disaggregated data and statistics are available to monitor progress on targets and results indicators

INCLUSIVE PARTNERSHIPS

Collective accountability

TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

SDG Indicator 17.16.1

FOCUS ON RESULTS

The following section investigates the implications of this tendency to increase quantity at the expense of quality of commitments for monitoring donor performance on aid effectiveness.

2.2.2. From donor-driven to locally led approaches to accountability

2.2.2.1. The shift in development aid effectiveness

Compared to the previous decade, the mid-2000s saw an increased interest in assessing donors' efforts to improve their international assistance. Concerning long-term development cooperation, in line with donor-driven initiatives such as the 2005 *Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness* and the 2008 *Accra Agenda for Action*, academic research focused either on 'mutual accountability', that is, the willingness by relevant stakeholders (mainly donor governments) to hold each other to account for their aid effectiveness commitments, or on accountability of implementing agencies *to* donors for their efficient and effective use of the aid received from those donors.

Two polarised schools of thought have since emerged on the effectiveness of development aid. One the one hand, Stiglitz (2002) and Sachs (2005) staunchly defend development cooperation. In Sach's view, better aid is, first and foremost, more aid and the only reason why aid may not be working as well as it should is because it is too little compared to the magnitude of the problems it seeks to address, such as poverty reduction. Improved aid quality is the natural result of increased aid quantity as it allows donors to unlock aid's full potential only when it is at scale (Sachs, 2005:259). In 2005, supported by the advocacy campaign 'Make Poverty History', Sachs invited donors to dramatically increase their ODA to meet the ambition of the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and, later, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

On the other hand, aid critics (Easterly, 2006; Moyo, 2009) have thoroughly questioned the effectiveness of donor assistance, citing limited recipient feedback, top-down accountability and 'perverse incentives' to keep aid flowing as the main reasons for aid's poor performance (Gibson et al., 2005:7, 54, 58). Gibson et al. have explained how these 'perverse incentives' can arise from lack of ownership of development policies at the country level, unequal distribution of aid benefits by local elites, uncertainty over available budgets, unclear information and other factors which may

influence daily interactions in the development aid sector, including within donor agencies. In Gibson's view, these negative factors run counter to effective aid delivery as they encourage institutions such as donor agencies to maintain the status quo instead of working towards sustainable outcomes (2005:142).

Each school of thought has valid points supported by select findings from economic research. In fact, Foster and Killick (2006:26) have demonstrated how aid's contribution to one of its official objectives – economic development of 'developing' countries (OECD, 2024) – remains unclear as the overall body of research on aid's impact on economic growth has produced both positive and negative results. Both schools of thought therefore show selective bias in arguing either for or against aid effectiveness based on economic research findings (Miller, 2011).

In the early 2010s, the discussion continued following the evaluation of the *Paris Declaration* (Wood et al., 2011) and the progress report on the implementation of the *Paris Declaration* (OECD, 2011a), which confirmed that donors had met only one out of the 13 aid effectiveness targets they had agreed to reach by 2010 (see Table 1). The evaluation also found that donor governments had on average demonstrated less commitment to aid effectiveness than their recipient counterparts (Wood et al., 2011:56). The 2011 Fourth High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness, held in Busan, South Korea, marked a turning point in the accountability debate. Kharas (2011:4) noted how DAC donors, instead of intensifying their efforts to reach their previous aid effectiveness objectives, chose to formally reach out to non-traditional providers like China, India and the Gulf States, as well as the private sector and philanthropy, to broaden the accountability frame, without much success. The Outcome Document of the Busan High-Level Forum (OECD, 2011b) introduced a two-tiered approach to accountability based on the concept of 'differential commitments' (OECD, 2011b:1). Specifically, donors who had endorsed the Paris and Accra agreements renewed their pledge to implement them in full, while Southern providers – some of them still receiving aid from DAC members – were willing to adhere to new commitments on a voluntary basis.

With the establishment of the OECD-UNDP-hosted Global Partnership for Effective Development Co-operation (GPEDC) in 2012 and the publication of the first progress report on effective development co-operation in 2014 (OECD/UNDP, 2014), skepticism about DAC donors' accountability to recipients for past aid effectiveness commitments only grew. As noted by Green (2016), since Busan, confusion about the scope and ambition of the aid effectiveness agenda had increased. Instead of addressing their own limited progress on past aid effectiveness commitments, donors preferred to broaden the scope of the debate, talking less about 'aid effectiveness' and more about 'development effectiveness', which they started using interchangeably with 'effective development co-operation'. In Green's view, this shift was problematic as aid effectiveness referred to a limited set of commitments made in Paris and Accra, while development effectiveness had no clear reference. In addition, if one accepts Sen's (1999) definition of development as expanding freedom to be and to do, Green argued, then talking about development effectiveness is redundant because the term 'development' already implies a successful outcome. Kharas (2014) reiterated the need for the aid community to refocus their efforts sharply on the Paris agenda. Rather than heeding these calls, subsequent progress reports further blurred the lines between effective development co-operation and development effectiveness by using these terms interchangeably (OECD/UNDP 2016:13-16; OECD/UNDP 2019:29). The core aid effectiveness agenda agreed in Paris and Accra also featured less prominently than in previous reports, mostly in relation to commitments to untie aid and increase aid predictability (OECD/UNDP 2016:70-75; OECD/UNDP 2019:93-95, 110, 119). The International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI) launched in Accra in 2008 represents a notable exception to this trend as it features extensively in the 2019 report as a key tool to assess donor transparency (OECD/UNDP 2019:141-149).

In 2018, OECD and UNDP took the decision to review GPEDC's monitoring framework and suspend the publication of its progress reports from 2019 until 2026. While a fourth monitoring exercise is underway at the time of writing[1], these changes in language, focus and approaches to

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[1] GPEDC's fourth monitoring exercise started in 2022 on a rolling basis until 2026. 59 recipient countries have joined this round so far. Donor countries do not directly take part in the monitoring exercise but receive profiles on their performance from OECD and UNDP (GPEDC, no date b).

accountability point to donors' lesser engagement in GPEDC. Their responsibility to recipient governments for upholding the aid effectiveness agenda seems diminished in the absence of more consistent monitoring of implemented activities.

2.2.2.2.   Sharing accountability

In Busan, donors started emphasising the need to share accountability for aid quality through their support for participatory approaches and multi-stakeholder partnerships. These initiatives partly responded to non-state actors' efforts to play a more influential role in development aid policy. Winters (2010:235) tracks this trend back to the late 1990s, when the World Bank started supporting citizen participation in developing its Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs). He notes, however, how participation alone has not produced significant changes in donor practices as reviews of most PRSPs have not shown any variation in donor behaviour with the introduction of citizen participation mechanisms. Hence, there have been no significant changes in donor accountability to recipient governments (2010:237).

On its part, civil society has also supported multi-stakeholder approaches to aid effectiveness, although for different reasons, including as a way to gain access to senior decision-makers and strengthen accountability of duty-bearers to recipients. Both Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and a broader range of Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), such as community or religious groups, have long put pressure on politicians to increase aid quantity and improve aid quality (The Reality of Aid Network, 2024). Since the 2005 G8 Gleneagles Summit, aid campaigners have requested and gained access to key policymaking fora, first through civil society's participation at the Third High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness in Accra in 2008, albeit in an observer role, and then as an official constituency group from the Fourth High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness in Busan, South Korea in 2011 onwards. By the time DAC members, civil society and other stakeholders gathered in Busan, 'partnerships' and 'multi-stakeholder approaches' to development co-operation had become a mantra for donors and other participants alike (Taggart, 2022).

In hindsight, this influencing strategy by civil society has partly led to an unintended consequence for donor accountability. By advocating the broader engagement of other development actors in aid effectiveness policy, civil society has inadvertently contributed to DAC donors' lesser sense of responsibility for honouring their original aid effectiveness commitments, particularly those made in Paris and Accra. What these new collective approaches would imply for donor accountability to development co-operation recipients has been unclear since Busan. Subsequent conferences, such as GPEDC's High Level Meetings in Mexico City in 2014 and Nairobi in 2016, have simply referred to these core aid effectiveness agenda as 'unfinished business' (Mexico High Level Meeting Communiqué, 2014:2; Nairobi Outcome Document, 2016:10).

Therefore, since Busan, there have been two conflicting shifts at play. On the one hand, civil society has gained a more prominent role in aid effectiveness circles as a way to hold DAC donors (and other institutions) more accountable for their past commitments (Drydyk, 2019:144). On the other hand, DAC donors have gradually promoted the concept of 'partnership' to share their collective responsibility for the aid effectiveness agenda with other development actors, which in turn may have reduced their individual accountability role (Davis, 2015:3).

These two trends have resulted in an overall shift in responsibility for aid effectiveness from donors to implementing agencies. Drydyk (2019:151) notes how NGOs and CSOs have come under closer scrutiny for their own effectiveness and efficiency in delivering aid, as if accountability only concerned *them*. Already before Busan, civil society agreed to hold itself more accountable through the 2010 Istanbul CSO Principles on Development Effectiveness (Open Forum for CSO Development Effectiveness, 2010) and the 2011 Seam Reap CSO Consensus on the International Framework for CSO Development Effectiveness (Open Forum for CSO Development Effectiveness, 2011). A key indicator in the GPEDC monitoring framework measures, among others, CSOs' own organisational effectiveness in depth (GPEDC, 2020). In the meantime, a vast policy and academic literature on CSO and NGO accountability emerged to assess the effectiveness of their project-level interventions in support of target populations (David et al., 2006; Jordan and van Tujil, 2006; Kartika Dewi et al., 2021). While I am aware of these micro-level debates, I have chosen not to

cover them in detail in this literature review. This is because my research has deliberately focused more upstream on donor accountability in recognition of the fact that they still bear a responsibility towards recipients. In contrast, in the 2010s donor governments came under lesser scrutiny for their own performance, even though holding other stakeholders to account for effective development co-operation was an important step towards overall aid effectiveness (Drydyk, 2019:144).

Of all development actors, donors have held recipient governments more and more accountable for the implementation of GPEDC commitments. While donors' requests have been consistent with the principle of country ownership of development policies, a fundamental underpinning of the GPEDC, these calls have diverted public attention from donors' own aid effectiveness commitments to recipients. In Busan, a recurring slogan was 'global-light, country-heavy' to signal a sharper focus on country-level implementation and political engagement (GPEDC, 2014a:2). In adopting this slogan, however, donors put the onus of making development cooperation more effective squarely on the receiving end (Kharas, 2011:7). On several fronts, donors have since behaved in open contradiction with their solemn global commitments. For example, despite donors' promise to reduce aid fragmentation in Paris, Accra and Busan, this trend has intensified since 2011 (Makkar et al., 2022:7; Davis, 2015:5). As Drydyk (2019:144) concludes, Busan marked donors' 'retreat from accountability' under the pretext of promoting country ownership and grass-roots approaches to effective development co-operation. Donor governments' visibly limited attendance at the GPEDC Geneva Summit in 2022 was further confirmation of this trend.

2.2.2.3.   *A parallel shift in humanitarian aid*

Accountability for the effectiveness of humanitarian action emerged as a priority in the late 1990s, following a joint evaluation of the failures of the aid system in preventing the 1994 genocide in Rwanda. With the establishment of the Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance (ALNAP) in 1997, the launch of the Sphere Standards the same year and the Humanitarian Accountability Partnership (HAP) Standard in Humanitarian Accountability and

Quality Management in 2007, donors' responsibility for ensuring timely and appropriate humanitarian responses drew increasing attention from policymakers and academics alike.

In 2003, following the Monterrey Consensus on Financing for Development, 17 donor governments created the Good Humanitarian Donorship (GHD) initiative, 'an informal donor forum and network which facilitates collective advancement of GHD principles and good practices' (Global Humanitarian Donorship, no date). GHD aims to promote quality humanitarian assistance through accountability, transparency and good practices in humanitarian funding. Since then, GHD has grown to 42 donor members and has agreed 24 (originally 23) principles of effective humanitarian intervention ranging from promoting safe humanitarian access for implementing agencies to ensuring timeliness and transparency in donor reporting. However, there are no concrete commitments to turn those principles into action, nor has GHD publicly reviewed its performance to date. Externally, through its Humanitarian Response Index reports covering the period 2007-2011, the think tank DARA (DARA and AECID, 2013) adopted the GHD principles to assess donor performance on aid quality. They noted little change in donor behaviour from one year to the next, despite repeating the same recommendations to donors to better assist people impacted by humanitarian crises. On a related note, Metcalfe et al. (2019:23, 2020:16, 2021:29, 2022:108, 2023:42) have long recommended establishing formal links between GHD and GB to avoid duplication of efforts, but their recommendations have so far gone unheeded.

The first significant shift from top-down efforts to improve the quality of humanitarian assistance to more participatory perspectives on aid accountability took place as a collective reckoning in the aftermath of the 2004 tsunami emergency. With the release of its Transformative Agenda in 2012 (Inter-Agency Standing Committee, 2012), the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), the main humanitarian coordination forum, introduced the concept of Accountability to Affected Populations (AAP), which highlighted the crucial need to consider the views of aid recipients for stronger accountability in humanitarian action.

In the seminal *Time to Listen: Hearing People on the Receiving End of International Aid* (2012), Anderson et al. summarise the findings from a survey on international assistance (humanitarian and development alike), including on aid effectiveness and efficiency, involving almost 6,000 aid recipients. Among the deep reforms needed to refocus on results that truly matter to people in need, the authors highlight the importance of being present on the ground as a key prerequisite for improving the accountability of both donors and implementing agencies to recipients for the aid provided (DARA, 2013:2). This is because donors' physical proximity to project sites makes them more accessible to aid recipients, who then have an additional tool to hold donors responsible for the quality of the aid provided.

Building on these findings, as well as on the work of the Humanitarian Accountability Partnership, in 2014 the *Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability* (CHS) set out nine commitments to people affected by crisis (CHS, no date a; CHS, 2024). While several donor governments support (and fund) the adoption of the CHS by humanitarian and development agencies, it remains a nongovernmental initiative promoted by around 200 civil society organisations (CHS, no date b). Donors are encouraged to integrate the CHS into their own humanitarian and development policy and practice, for example by providing flexible funding for collective Accountability to Affected Populations (AAP) across the humanitarian programming cycle or by supporting the participation of local actors in AAP processes. Nevertheless, the extent to which they have done so today remains unclear (Featherstone, 2023:31). A reason for this lack of clarity may be that the CHS has been primarily designed for implementing agencies, which are closer to the frontlines than the donor governments funding them. Donors can still join the CHS Alliance as associate members, which requires them to align their work with the Alliance's vision, mission and objectives (Featherstone, 2023:20). To date, there has been no independent evaluation of such alignment. There seems to be a gap in holding donors accountable for the quality of the humanitarian assistance they fund, as if accountability to affected populations only concerned their implementing partners.

Academic literature on donor accountability to recipients of humanitarian assistance is particularly scarce and tends to focus on how donors can promote more AAP by making it a funding requirement for their implementing partners. Daun (2020:11) and Rattmann (2023:29) note how accountability to affected populations becomes a priority for humanitarian agencies only if donors are willing to fund this type of accountability work. In other words, making funding available for AAP seems to be the main way donors hold themselves to account to affected populations. Other means include improving inter-donor coordination on AAP funding and demanding more systematic collective action on AAP through global humanitarian coordination mechanisms, such as IASC (Holloway, 2020:6; Featherstone, 2023).

The 2016 World Humanitarian Summit (WHS) in Istanbul catalysed donors' attention to AAP and locally led humanitarian efforts with a couple of major initiatives. The former was the implementation of the UN Secretary-General's Agenda for Humanity (no date), a comprehensive plan to 'address and reduce humanitarian need, risk and vulnerability' (Agenda for Humanity, no date). Of the over 3,700 commitments made by WHS participants in and since Istanbul, several focussed on donors' efforts to ensure their funding supports AAP, as well as local and national systems. For example, the US government committed to supporting partner organisation efforts to incorporate accountability to affected populations into their programming (Agenda for Humanity, no date).

On closer inspection, monitoring participants' performance against WHS commitments only amounted to the submission of self-reports by conference participants to a now archived online platform for a total period of three years. To date, there has been no evaluation of the implementation of WHS commitments nor any academic research on donor accountability to aid recipients for those commitments. Recently, however, the Journal of International Humanitarian Action has launched a call for submission to their collection called *Agenda for Humanity Revisited* (Journal of International Humanitarian Action, no date), so there may be a few relevant studies in the pipeline at the time of writing.

The latter initiative launched at the WHS was the Grand Bargain (The GB, 2016). Originally, it was meant to be a deal between donor governments from the Global North and their implementing partners to increase humanitarian aid efficiency. Two out of its ten workstreams – the Localisation and Participation Revolution workstreams – prioritised accountability to aid recipients by aiming to pursue three main objectives. First, to promote more equitable partnerships between donors and local actors. Second, to increase the percentage of humanitarian funding going to local and national actors 'as directly as possible'. Third, to bring AAP into key humanitarian decision-making processes (Grand Bargain, no date d). A turning point in global discourse on localisation was the COVID-19 pandemic, which severely hampered international relief efforts due to travel limitations but also showed the fundamental role played by local efforts in humanitarian response (Kerkvliet et al., 2024:1). Since then, localisation and locally led approaches to humanitarian assistance have gained momentum in global aid effectiveness discussions (Roepstorff, 2020:286).

In 2023, then UN Emergency Relief Coordinator Martin Griffiths launched the 'Flagship Initiative', a three-year project piloted in Colombia, Niger, the Philippines and South Sudan to make humanitarian aid more efficient, effective and accountable to affected populations (UN OCHA, 2023b). To achieve this objective, UN Humanitarian Coordinators are engaging local communities and responders more systematically, including by providing micro-grants to implement humanitarian activities that are more aligned with community priorities. Findings from the first year of the initiative (Sida et al., 2024) point to a lack of conceptual clarity among stakeholders and under-resourcing by donors. At the same time, there is pressure on Humanitarian Coordinators and the broader humanitarian community to produce some visible results in year two.

2.2.3. Monitoring for learning rather than monitoring for accountability

Another major trend in the aid effectiveness debate is donors' increasing focus on reporting progress on their commitments for shared learning purposes rather than for their own accountability to aid recipients. It is important to note here that the literature on the dichotomy between monitoring for learning *vs*. monitoring for accountability in aid effectiveness is particularly scarce and limited to the periodical progress reports published by GPEDC (2014, 2016, 2018), ODI

(Metcalfe et al., 2018, 2019, 2020,2021, 2022, 2023), ALNAP (2022) and very few other organisations.

Both GPEDC and GB have invested considerable resources in building complex monitoring systems to sustain their constituencies' actions, and yet neither of them has led to a dramatic improvement in donor accountability over time.

Building on the rigorous evaluation and progress report of the Paris Declaration, the OECD Working Party on Aid Effectiveness spent almost a year negotiating the indicators and targets which eventually became part of GPEDC's monitoring framework in 2012 (Abdel-Malek, 2015). In addition, the Busan High-Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness launched 39 'Voluntary Initiatives' (GPEDC, 2014: 8-12), mostly by DAC donors in collaboration with other development actors, which are broadly inspired by the Busan principles. Ten 'Building Blocks' (GPEDC, 2014:6-7), or self-selected, multi-stakeholder working groups were also launched in Busan to catalyse action on specific challenges, such as reducing aid fragmentation and supporting private sector engagement.

Yet, today, little is left of this flurry of activities to uphold donor accountability to recipients. By design, Voluntary Initiatives can be terminated or become dormant for any reason and without any monitoring mechanism (Abdel-Malek, 2015:297). The only available report of progress on the ten Building Blocks launched in Busan in 2011 dates back to 2014 (GPEDC, 2014). Since the 2018 monitoring round, GPEDC has carried out a comprehensive review of its monitoring framework, which will be used to assess again progress on effective development cooperation no sooner than in 2026. This leaves a seven-year accountability gap at the global level while individual monitoring updates from a few donor and recipient governments are made available online (GPEDC, no date b). In the meantime, GPEDC's constituencies have taken contrasting positions on the alliance's accountability for past commitments. On the one hand, receiving governments and civil society often mention the monitoring exercise as GPEDC's most promising accountability tool to improve development co-operation (Eurodad, 2023). On the other hand, provider governments and middle-income countries who both receive and provide development co-operation favour opportunities

to share their practices for visibility and learning purposes, rather than for accountability. Donors prefer to talk about 'lessons learned' and 'best practices' over reporting. GPEDC is more about 'discourse' than about 'action' (Bracho, 2017:3). Indeed, the only initiative that has been consistently taken forward since 2014 has been the Busan Global Partnership Forum, an annual event sponsored by South Korea as a follow-up to the Busan High-Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness it hosted. The primary aim of the Forum is to 'foster reflections on progress and share knowledge' on innovative solutions (GPEDC, 2023).

The GB has followed a similar trajectory. It started in 2016 with an original set of 51 commitments, which would ideally lead to saving USD 1 billion in efficiency gains over the course of five years (Parker, 2016). By 2018, the alliance had already agreed to prioritise eleven of those commitments, leaving it to signatories' individual initiative to continue to make progress on the remaining forty (GB, no date a; also see Table 2 for a list of core GB commitments). By 2021, a sharper focus further reduced the shortlist to two major 'enabling priorities': enhanced quality funding (that is, funding that is both predictable and flexible) and localization (Metcalfe-Hough et al., 2021:26). GB signatories also agreed to continue monitoring progress by commissioning annual independent reviews and by submitting individual self-reports against a reduced set of indicators tracking signatories' performance on the eleven core commitments (GB, no date a). This streamlining process continued in 2023 with the introduction of a new GB framework, which re-arranged the eleven core GB commitments under six major outcome areas to be measured by constituency-specific indicators (GB and Development Initiatives, 2024:25-31). In addition to the enabling priorities of quality funding and localisation, the revised monitoring indicators focus on participation, accountability to affected populations, the outcomes of the GB Caucuses and the cross-cutting issues of gender and risk-sharing. Annex II provides a summary of donor-specific indicators. Interestingly, there is no indicator of progress to monitor donor accountability to affected populations (AAP), as if to imply that AAP is expected only of donors' implementing partners.

On the other hand, as GB monitoring efforts have concentrated on fewer and fewer priorities, GB has increasingly amassed a body of lessons learned, case studies, catalogues of best practices, and guides. One of the original GB work streams focusing on the humanitarian-development nexus, a major aid effectiveness challenge, was first turned into a 'repository of learning' in 2018, and then permanently closed in 2019, although reconsidered as a 'cross-cutting priority' as of 2023. This emphasis on learning, to the exclusion of accountability, in both GPEDC and GB weakens the answerability and enforceability dimensions of accountability without demonstrably increasing the likelihood that donor signatories will integrate those learnings into their aid effectiveness policies and practices. Here, too, the underlying hypothesis is that learnings will automatically lead to improved accountability. To date, there has not been a meta-analysis of the uptake of lessons learned from either forum. In GPEDC's case, the closest to such analysis has been an evaluation of the impact of DAC Peer Reviews on donor performance, which includes an assessment against the aid effectiveness indicators and targets agreed in Paris (Ashoff, 2013). The evaluation concluded that many aid effectiveness commitments lacked clear indicators and recommended the DAC donors either consider endorsing indicators developed by other stakeholders or delegate a standard-setting role on aid effectiveness to GPEDC (Ashoff, 2013:4). This has not happened.

For the GB, Metcalfe et al. (2021:30) recommend a 'robust analysis' of self-reporting through an independent process that considers the inherent subjectivity of this tool. This seems to be a particularly important recommendation given that GB has recently suspended the publication of its annual independent reports until the end of its current iteration in 2026 (incidentally, the same year as the publication of GPEDC's next monitoring report). Meanwhile, DAC members have become more demanding in linking their humanitarian funding to donor visibility requirements, particularly with UN agencies (Worden and Saez, 2021:11). For example, donors may hesitate to provide flexible unearmarked funding as it does not always allow them to show their domestic audiences how their contribution has been used at the country level. Increasingly, reporting progress is seen as an opportunity to showcase donors' performance to taxpayers in DAC countries rather than a way to hold donors accountable to their peers and aid recipients.

2.3.   Where are the gaps?

This literature review has identified a few unresolved challenges in how academics have addressed the issue of DAC donors' accountability to aid recipients for the quality of humanitarian and development assistance provided over the last two decades.

Clearly, there has been a loss of momentum in the accountability debate since the establishment of GPEDC in 2012 (in relation to development aid effectiveness) and GB in 2016 (in relation to humanitarian aid effectiveness). The increased complexity of the aid landscape, both in terms of the number of actors involved and the exponential rise in commitments to aid recipients, has confused many academics and policymakers alike. They are now either resigned or doubtful about the credibility of GPEDC and GB's monitoring systems, particularly regarding donor performance (Glennie, 2022; Sørensen, 2022).

I argue that the gaps created by this lack of academic interest are too important to ignore, not only for the sake of the aid effectiveness debate but for donors' broader accountability for the humanitarian and development co-operation they provide.

On a conceptual level, the Integrative Discussion in Chapter 5 will address key assumptions about the efficiency and effectiveness of aid, such as assessing donor behaviour without giving due consideration to either visible or hidden pressure on the donor agency from domestic interest groups; or thinking that availability of more data will automatically lead to more and better data use. Having noted the absence of explicit theories of change for either GPEDC or GB, my research will draw on empirical experience, as well as key informant interviews with policymakers and academics, to propose a donor accountability model based on closed feedback loops and significantly increased cash assistance to recipients.

On a practical level, my research will help assess the state of DAC donors' accountability to aid recipients for the aid effectiveness commitments they have made through their participation in GB and GPEDC.   The concluding chapter will identify commonalities and differences in donor

accountability between the two multistakeholder partnerships. Finally, I will draw on my research findings and conceptual framework to propose a more balanced approach to donors' multiple accountabilities, both to domestic and foreign stakeholders, which remains an area of ambiguity in donors' decision-making process.

2.4.   The conceptual framework of this thesis

This section describes the conceptual framework for my thesis based on the key concepts found in the literature concerning notions of power, accountability and aid effectiveness. First, I draw upon the over-arching definitions of aid and accountability as two distinct forms of power. Together, these concepts provide a set of lenses through which I address my research questions on donor accountability to aid recipients. Second, I combine elements from two accountability theories (De Renzio, 2006b and McGee, 2013) to describe the relationship between taxpayers in donor countries as the ultimate providers of aid and citizens in receiving countries as the ultimate recipients of aid. In particular, I analyse donor accountability to aid recipients through existing feedback loops in the public aid system. Third, I integrate two theoretical constructs by Gaventa (2006, 2007, 2011) and Faul (2016) to look at how donor accountability for aid effectiveness changes when donors and recipients interact in a multistakeholder partnership setting, such as GPEDC and GB.

2.4.1.   Aid and accountability as power

International aid has been widely recognised as a form of power (Eyben, 2008:36). Providing financial or other kinds of assistance to governments or organisations from the Global South creates an imbalance in the relationship between the giver and the receiver since the giver has more control over the resources provided and can choose how to allocate them. The receiver can either passively accept this power differential or try to compensate for it with other forms of power. For example, recipient governments may try to diversify their donor base to reduce their dependency on a single donor (Whitfield and Maipose, 2007). In defining aid as power, I also refer to the different forms of pressure influencing donor behaviour at global and country level (Dreher, 2024). Besides ODA's original objective of promoting the economic development and welfare of

developing countries, donors may have a range of other motives – commercial, military, political etc. – justifying their aid management decisions (Dreher, 2024).
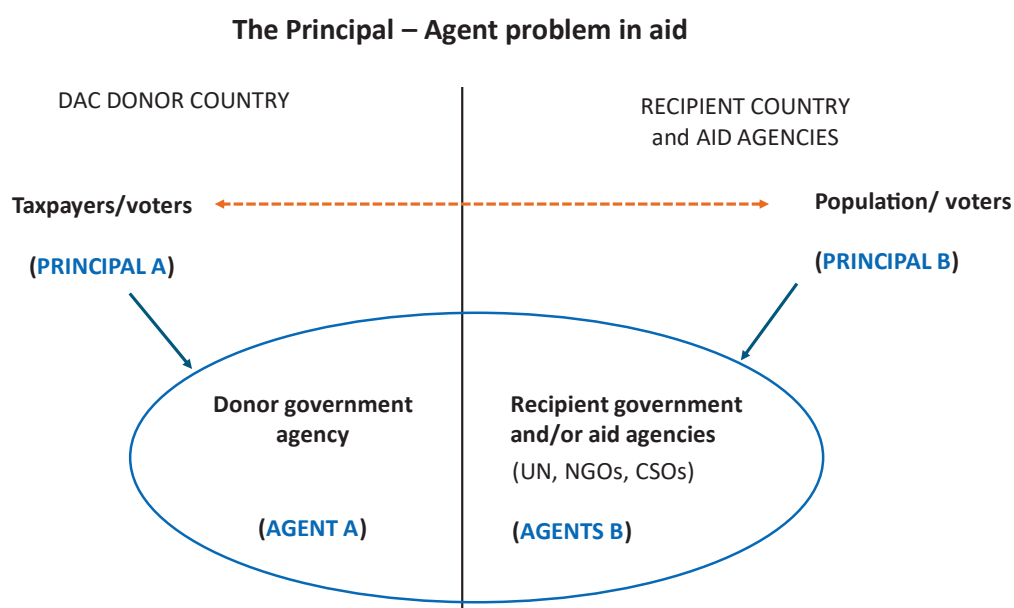
Accountability is another form of power – specifically, the power to hold an individual or an institution responsible for their behaviour. For example, in a relationship between A and B, A is accountable to B if A needs to justify their actions to B and B can sanction A if A provides an unsatisfactory explanation (Goetz and Jenkins, 2005:8, O'Neil, 2007:3). As seen in the previous chapter, accountability is therefore made of two dimensions: *answerability*, that is, getting someone to justify their choices; and *enforceability*, that is, the ability to apply a sanction if that justification is not adequate. Donor accountability refers to the aid recipients' power to hold donors answerable and sanctionable for their behaviour. In the aid sector, these power dynamics largely favour the donor agency, which can sanction the recipient – a government, UN agency or other organisation. In contrast, the donor agency is rarely sanctioned if it fails to honour its aid promises (see Section 2.1.2).

2.4.2. Accountability in aid relationships

Building on these definitions of aid and accountability as power, my conceptual framework draws upon two theoretical constructs found in the aid effectiveness literature to analyse how accountability works in donor-recipient relationships.

The first construct is based on McGee's work on incomplete feedback loops in aid transparency and accountability initiatives (2013). First, McGee looks at how aid flows are managed from donor to recipient countries, drawing on 'principal-agent' or agency theory (Martens et al., 2002:8-9). DAC donor governments allocate aid on behalf of their citizens, the taxpayers. In this context, taxpayers are the 'principals' delegating their decision-making power to policymakers in their government, the 'agents' who manage public aid. On the other hand, recipient agencies (governments in the Global South in the case of development aid and/or UN agencies and NGOs in the case of humanitarian aid), manage the public funds they receive from donor governments on behalf of people living in poverty or in humanitarian crisis. As in the case of donor countries, citizens in

recipient countries can also be considered the 'principals' who entrust their power to manage the aid received to their 'agents': their governments (if they live in democratic systems) and/or aid agencies operating in their country. Figure 4 illustrates these mirror relationships. However, in the absence of clear transparency and accountability lines, the relationship between principals and agents becomes problematic because there is no way for principals to monitor how their agents manage public funds. For example, policymakers in donor countries (the agents) may abuse their decision-making power unless taxpayers (their principals) find out and entrust someone else, either through parliamentary audits or national elections or other monitoring mechanism. This is known as the 'principal-agent problem' (Martens et al., 2002:8-9) and it happens both in donor and recipient countries.

The Principal – Agent problem in aid

DAC DONOR COUNTRY   RECIPIENT COUNTRY
                           and AID AGENCIES

Taxpayers/voters <----------------------> Population/ voters

(PRINCIPAL A)   **(PRINCIPAL B)**

Donor government agency   **Recipient government and/or aid agencies** (UN, NGOs, CSOs)

(AGENT A)   **(AGENTS B)**

Figure 4. The Principal - Agent problem in aid.

Source: Author's creation based on McGee, 2013.

McGee (2013:S111) then identifies an additional layer of complexity in the principal-agent problem due to the international nature of public aid (ODA). While principals (taxpayers) in a donor country can hold their agents (donor agency staff) to account and entrust their decision-making power to

someone else if they are not satisfied with their agents' domestic performance, they do not have the same level of information and power in the case of international aid. Once aid reaches the recipient country, these taxpayers rely on agents in that country to deliver aid as planned but have no way to hold them to account directly. The arrow pointing from taxpayers to the donor agency in Figure 4 represents, in simplified form, how taxpayers hold representatives of their donor agency to account for how their ODA is managed, mainly through bilateral relations. Similarly, people who receive international aid from those taxpayers in the donor country have no way to hold donor agents to account, nor can they directly interact with the taxpayers. This is why Figure 4 shows a dotted arrow between Principal A and Principal B. Unlike the other arrows in the diagram, which represent direct relationships and accountability lines, the dotted line visualises an indirect connection, or lack thereof, between taxpayers and recipient populations. It is a double-headed arrow because, in theory, the communication between taxpayers and recipient populations should be mutual. In reality, recipient populations can only hold agents in their own country, such as their national government or international aid agencies receiving humanitarian aid directly from donors, responsible. Therefore, managing international aid flows relies on two separate systems of principals and agents operating in parallel without directly connecting the ultimate providers and recipients of aid. There may be some level of accountability within each national system through parliamentary oversight or elections or civil society scrutiny. In this case, accountability relies on closed feedback loops *within national borders*. In the case of international aid, however, feedback loops are left incomplete. Taxpayers and recipient populations do not interact with each other directly but through several agents acting as proxies across international borders. For example, a donor agency may allocate development aid to a local CSO through a UN agency, which acts as an intermediary agent channeling the funding received to a CSO partner, which is another agent in the aid delivery chain.

The second construct used to understand how accountability works in international aid relationships refers to De Renzio's theory (2006b), which further illustrates the accountability dilemma created by the disconnect between donor taxpayers and recipient populations. As seen in the literature review, in an ideal world, the ultimate providers and recipients of ODA should be able

to interact directly (Figure 5). In reality, not only are they not talking to each other, but the accountability lines that should connect them are confusing (Figure 6). It is unclear who is accountable to whom.
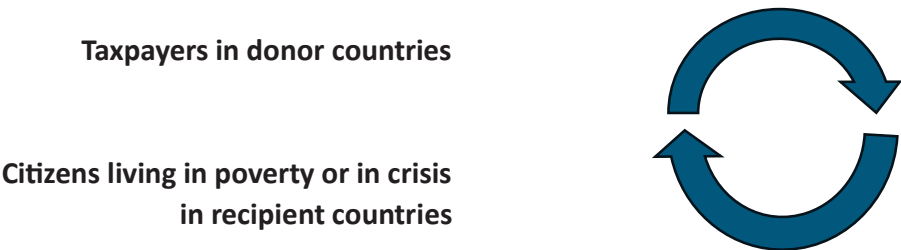
Taxpayers in donor countries

**Citizens living in poverty or in crisis
in recipient countries**

**Figure 5. Closing the accountability feedback loop in an ideal aid scenario.
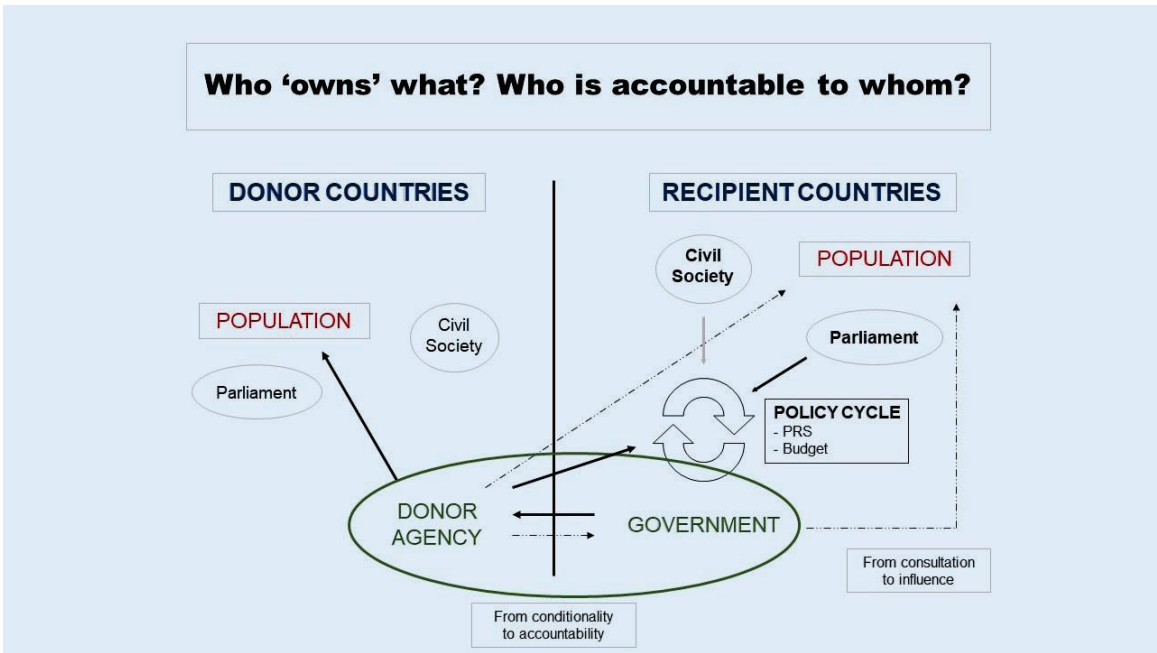Source: Author's creation.**

**Figure 6. Closing the accountability feedback loop in the real world.
PRS: World Bank's Poverty Reduction Strategy. Source: De Renzio, 2006b.**

Even though De Renzio does not focus on humanitarian assistance specifically, we can infer that accountability lines are even more confusing in the case of humanitarian aid. This is because humanitarian assistance may bypass recipient country systems altogether to flow from donor governments directly to implementing agencies (Hart et al., 2015). For example, if the government is party to a conflict causing a humanitarian crisis or does not have adequate systems in place to deliver humanitarian aid fast enough, donor agencies may channel their funds directly to implementing agencies, such as NGOs. This additional set of accountability lines further complicates the picture summarised by De Renzio. Taxpayers in donor countries may still be accountable to populations in receiving countries in theory but if and how this is the case in practice remains, at best, an open question.

2.4.3. Accountability in aid effectiveness relationships

In this section, I narrow the focus of my conceptual framework from donor accountability for public aid in general to the more specific area of donor accountability for the quality of that aid (aid effectiveness). In particular, I combine two theories on the power dynamics between bilateral donor and recipient and in multistakeholder partnerships to understand if and how donor accountability to recipients for aid effectiveness changes through their participation in multistakeholder initiatives, such as GPEDC and GB.

The first theory builds on Gaventa's analysis (2006, 2007) of the basic dimensions of power to investigate the bilateral interaction between donor and recipient agencies. Figure 6 illustrates his framework approach. The power cube identifies the levels, spaces and forms of power as three interconnected dimensions in constant and dynamic relationship.
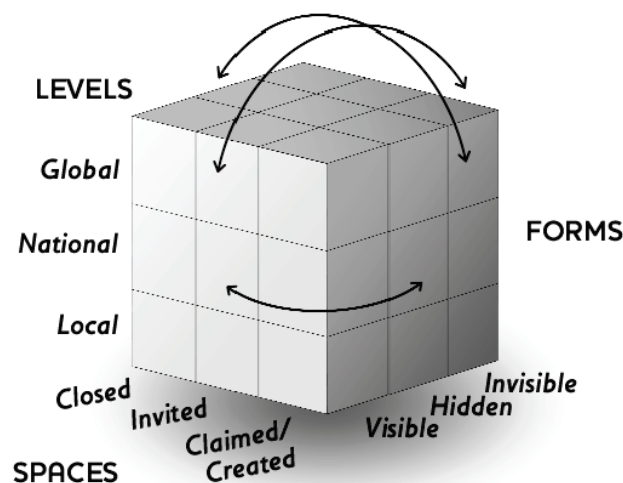
Figure 7. The three dimensions of power.
Source: Gaventa, 2006.

In particular, the levels dimension refers to the different layers of decision-making, from the local to the national to the global level. In the aid effectiveness community, local decision-making usually refers to local actors, including local authorities, implementing aid activities. The national level refers to the central government as the main recipient of development assistance from donor countries. In the case of humanitarian assistance, national decision-makers are the country representatives of donor agencies, UN, INGOs or national CSOs, which may receive funding either from the recipient government or directly from the donor agency. Global decision-making refers to the headquarters of donor agencies in donor countries, the international secretariats of GPEDC and GB, and global representatives of their membership.

The spaces dimension of the power cube refers to where participation and action occur. They can be closed, invited or claimed spaces. In GPEDC and GB, closed spaces are private meetings organised for their senior leadership, such as GPEDC's Steering Committee meetings and GB Facilitation Group meetings. This is where strategic decisions are usually taken, without the full involvement of the broader membership. Opportunities to engage all the members are created by inviting them to regular, non-committal discussions – for example, the Busan Global Partnership

Forum in South Korea or GB Annual Meetings. When these invited spaces are not enough to promote genuine participation or action, the less powerful stakeholders may also claim new spaces. In aid effectiveness, claimed spaces often refer to civil society initiatives, such as the National Reference Groups (NRGs) created by the GB's local actors constituency in around a dozen recipient countries (NEAR, 2024:1). Section 5.1.3 describes NRGs in detail.

For the purposes of my conceptual framework, the forms of power represent the most interesting and least known dimension of power. They refer to how power manifests itself, which is through visible, hidden and invisible forms. Visible power is based on the formal mechanisms through which accountability (both mutual and to aid recipients) is exercised as a manifestation of power. In GPEDC and GB, these mechanisms are known. They include formal meetings, public statements, reporting processes and other pre-agreed accountability measures.

Hidden power, on the other hand, refers to who really sets the agenda for visible decision-making, which is less obvious. In the aid effectiveness community, donors tend to have a strong but often undetected influence over recipients, particularly in bilateral aid negotiations (Wang, 2018:4). Through my conceptual framework, I wish to better understand whether GPEDC and GB enhance or reduce donors' hidden power.

Similarly, invisible power shapes collective and individual beliefs about change. In aid effectiveness, it refers to general assumptions among GPEDC and GB stakeholders about the relevance of their aid effectiveness commitments to the fast-evolving development and humanitarian landscape. In my conceptual framework, I analyse these beliefs to determine whether they play a role in holding GPEDC and GB donors accountable to their recipients.

Gaventa treats the levels, spaces and forms of power as constantly interrelating. For the sake of my conceptual framework, however, I have mainly focused on the last dimension. I have not given the same level of consideration to the levels and spaces of power because they are mostly known to GPEDC and GB. For example, both GPEDC and GB are global partnerships so it is to be expected

that their success in holding donors to account will be mostly felt at the global level. Similarly, GPEDC and GB operate in known spaces, such as Grand Bargain's Annual Meetings, which are closed to the public. What is not known – and seems to play a major role – is whether donors' visible, hidden and invisible power within GPEDC and GB support or undermine the ability of these two multi-stakeholder partnerships to offset donors' greater power over aid recipients.

The power cube in Figure 7 is therefore meant to recall the constant interplay among the three dimensions of power, with a special focus on its visible, hidden and invisible forms. As explained above, in bilateral aid relations, power dynamics between donor and recipient are often skewed in donor's favour due to aid dependence (Whitfield and Fraser, 2010:348). I treat these dynamics as a constant assumption in my conceptual framework because they always exist, to varying degrees. The aid effectiveness community is no exception. In addition to their financial leverage, donors are not legally bound to honour the aid effectiveness commitments they have agreed. Their accountability to aid recipients is entirely voluntary.

In consideration of the power asymmetry between donors and recipients, I have integrated a second theoretical construct by Faul (2016). She looks at whether the establishment of multistakeholder partnerships, such as GPEDC, mitigates this asymmetry by promoting the concept of 'partnership' over 'donorship'. According to Faul, partnerships should in theory foster a dynamic of reciprocity between stakeholders and 'flatness', or peer-to-peer relations. I have therefore relied on this theoretical assumption to consider GPEDC and GB two multi-stakeholder partnerships counterbalancing donors' greater influence over recipients in bilateral aid negotiations. From this perspective, GPEDC and GB help keep the two sides of an imaginary power scale – the bilateral and multistakeholder relations in aid effectiveness – in dynamic balance. Within GPEDC, the main mitigating factor is the principle of transparency and mutual accountability reiterated in Busan, according to which

> mutual accountability and accountability to the intended beneficiaries of our co-operation, as well as to our respective citizens, organisations, constituents and shareholders, is critical to delivering results.

<div align="right">(OECD, 2011:3)</div>

Within GB, the main moderating factor is the 'quid pro quo' principle, that is a 'spirit of reciprocity as both sides commit to contributing their share' (Grand Bargain, no date b). There is a common set of additional elements which are designed to rebalance the donor-recipient power differential and support donor accountability in both partnerships. They include the publication of GPEDC's progress reports and GB's Annual Independent Reports, which are an opportunity for collective reflection and public scrutiny; GPEDC's country reports and GB's self-reporting process, which focus more on individual stakeholder performance; peer pressure to fulfil aid effectiveness commitments, either through leadership by example or private negotiations; and multi-stakeholder policy dialogue, both at the global and country level, to advance the aid effectiveness agenda based on monitoring findings. Taken together, these moderating factors within GPEDC and/or GB should contribute to counteract donors' influence over recipients in bilateral aid negotiations.

Faul's research, however, questions traditional assumptions that multi-stakeholder partnerships are flat and not hierarchical. Using Social Network Analysis (SNA) to investigate how relationships between different actors change in multi-stakeholder partnerships in the education sector, she reaches the conclusion that these partnerships do not necessarily reduce but may amplify power asymmetries to the advantage of the more powerful actors, especially donors (2016:193). Through SNA, Faul shows how informal networks can heavily influence the balance of power within multi-stakeholder partnerships for two reasons. First, when a partnership member enters a formal network, they usually prefer to link to well-connected members (2016:187). Second, they naturally gravitate towards similar members due to what Faul calls '*homophily* and *proximity bias*' (2016:188, McPherson et al., 2001). As a result, multi-stakeholder partnerships tend to reinforce existing power hierarchies as more powerful members quickly become the center of attention and do not need to reciprocate. Less influential members of multi-stakeholder partnerships, such as aid

recipient government and agencies, may be considered equal to donor governments in the formal governance structure of those partnerships; in fact, they cannot exert a greater influence on donors than in their pre-existing relationships with them. To remedy the unintended consequences of the hidden power of informal networks in multi-stakeholder partnerships, Faul recommends the more influential actors make a deliberate effort to 'rewire' their relationships with less powerful members. This step will in turn help them overcome their preferential, homophily and proximity biases (2016:194).

While Faul's recommendations for the way forward are certainly worth noting, what I find most relevant to my conceptual framework is her finding about the underestimated power of informal networks in multi-stakeholder partnerships. Faul points to the importance of comparing the formal design of these partnerships with informal network practices by their members. Failing to do so would leave any discrepancy between formal and informal networks *hidden* (2016:193). I have therefore compared this finding with Gaventa's description of the different forms of power (visible, hidden and invisible), which builds on Luke's assertion that "power is at its most effective when least observable" (Lukes, 2004:1). I have also considered the close relationship between power, knowledge and narrative (Foucault, 1995:29; Clegg, 1993; Gaventa, 2003:3). The similarity in Faul and Gaventa's theories has led me to focus my conceptual framework on the different forms of power within GPEDC and GB, and how they may or may not contribute to strengthening the mitigating effect of these two multi-stakeholder partnerships on donors' higher influence over aid recipients.

In summary, my conceptual framework defines donor accountability within GPEDC and GB as the combination of three major factors: the dynamic interplay between these partnerships and bilateral donor-recipient relations; key moderating factors designed to reduce donors' influence in the partnerships; and visible, hidden and invisible forms of donor power affecting those partnerships. I argue these combined factors determine if and how donors are accountable to aid recipients for their development and humanitarian aid effectiveness commitments. Taken together, the

relationships illustrated in this conceptual framework can help us better understand my research questions.

Conclusion

In conclusion, in the last two decades, aid effectiveness literature has noted a remarkable shift from donor-centric to recipient-focused approaches to accountability for the quality of donor assistance. Due to a combination of limited progress on donors' commitments, unclear responsibilities in multi-stakeholder humanitarian and development policy processes and increased complexity of the aid effectiveness debate, donors have gradually been held less accountable to aid recipients since the 2010s. Correspondingly, in the last decade there has been a paucity of academic literature on the issue of donors' accountability for their humanitarian and development aid effectiveness commitments to recipient governments and populations affected by humanitarian emergencies. I have drawn on key concepts of accountability, power and aid explored by aid effectiveness literature to better understand my research questions. In doing so, I have relied on theories by De Renzio (2006b), Faul (2016), Gaventa (2006) and McGee (2013) to build the conceptual framework of this thesis.

The following section describes the methodology I have used to fill the research gaps identified in this literature review and address my research questions. To do so, I will explain my methodological approaches to the research topic in four papers I have either written or co-written and in the additional primary research I have carried out. Considered together, this body of work starts to address the aid effectiveness challenges described in this literature review and points towards possible solutions to improve donor accountability to recipients.

Chapter 3. Methodology

Introduction

This chapter describes the methodology used to address the research questions of this thesis. It explains the steps I have taken to learn if donor governments have become more accountable to aid recipients for the effectiveness and efficiency of their aid. To do so, my research compares and contrasts the Global Partnership for Effective Development Co-operation (GPEDC) and the Grand Bargain (GB) as two relevant multistakeholder initiatives. In particular, my study aims to answer three analytical questions:

a) Have GB and GPEDC led to higher accountability of donor governments to aid recipients?

b) To what extent did the original design of GB and GPEDC result in gaps in donor accountability to aid recipients?

c) How can GB and GPEDC be improved to address donor accountability to aid recipients?

In reply to these questions, Section 3.1 presents the methodology used for the publications included in Chapter 4. It shows how these works follow a logical sequence and then summarises the methods chosen to collect and analyse data in each paper. Section 3.2 explains how I have designed my new primary research based on a mixed methodological approach and mainly qualitative methods (Laws et al., 2003:137; Lichtman, 2011:209; Ruane, 2016:33). Section 3.3 describes the ethical considerations addressed in the publications and new primary research. Section 3.4 summarises research limitations.

3.1.   Methodology used for the published works

In this section, I will explain the methodologies used for the publications selected for this thesis. These papers were written as part of my professional contribution to aid effectiveness discussions. As such, they follow a different format to what would normally be expected in an academic paper. They do not always provide details on the specific methodology I used at the time to achieve my

research objectives. Therefore, the following sub-sections will include a more detailed discussion of the methodology chosen for each paper, to better address the requirements of a PhD thesis. They will also provide more information on the specific methods and data collection and analysis tools used.

The papers are presented in chronological order, reflecting the evolution of my thinking on the issue of donor accountability to recipients over the years. They address this topic from different perspectives, including from a donor angle, to analyse the implications of higher accountability for aid effectiveness policy and/or programming.

On a methodological level, the four papers described below share a mixed approach (Laws et al., 2003:271-282) based on largely qualitative methods, such as document analysis (Kekeya, 2016:92) and participant observation (Jorgensen, 1989; Ruane, 2016:213-214). They all triangulate the information collected with quantitative data (Kielmann et al., 2012:12-17; Laws et al., 2013:142-144). I believe this mixed approach is the most appropriate to reflect my contribution to knowledge as a humanitarian and development expert in search of evidence-based solutions to aid effectiveness challenges.

The sections below detail the methodology, specific research methods and data collection and analysis tools used in each published work.

3.1.1. *Busan in a Nutshell: What Next for the Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation?* (Bena, 2012)

Busan in a Nutshell builds on my exposure to, and collection and analysis of, first-hand material, such as subsequent drafts of the outcome document of the Busan Partnership for Effective Development Co-operation (OECD, 2011b) and personal notes from technical discussions held by the OECD-DAC Working Party on Aid Effectiveness and its sub-working groups.

Specifically, I built on my document analysis of the zero draft of the outcome document with other key policy documents, such as the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness and the Accra Agenda for Action, to spot changes in language, commitments, timelines for delivering those commitments and any glaring omissions or additions that would impact on donor accountability to aid recipients (Bowen, 2009:30). I repeated the same process with each subsequent iteration of the Busan outcome document, which I compared to previous drafts, as well as to the Paris and Accra agreements, to follow the evolution of the language that ultimately featured in the final version of the Busan outcome document.

To complement this iterative document analysis (Kekeya, 2016:92), I drew on more recent data gathered from my bilateral meetings with key aid effectiveness stakeholders, including representatives from donor governments, after the Busan conference. Besides my advocacy purposes, my meetings with donors were an opportunity to seek clarification on their position on key aid effectiveness commitments, understand if donors were going to uphold them through the GPEDC monitoring framework being negotiated or if they were going to change them. I then triangulated this knowledge with information collected by other civil society actors and coalitions which were also advocating for a strong monitoring framework for GPEDC at the time. This triangulation often provided a richer picture of what was happening (Kielmann et al., 2012:16; Laws et al., 2013:142-144).

After this preliminary phase, I shared the evidence gathered for internal discussion with Oxfam colleagues, including data analysts and other aid experts. I also cross-checked the information with the most recent quantitative ODA data and surveys produced by the OECD-DAC Secretariat and other key stakeholders, such as Concord's AidWatch reports. I then held extensive consultations with my colleagues to review the evidence from both internal and external sources. Together, we determined whether the data was pointing to a pattern in stakeholder behaviour, mostly on the grounds that data sources were consistent with past behaviour and validated each other (Laws et al. 2003:14). We also considered broader factors that might impact the negotiations on GPEDC's monitoring

framework, such as peer pressure from specific donors, power dynamics between OECD-DAC members and South-South Cooperation providers and broader geopolitical considerations. Based on these discussions, I reached an internal agreement with my colleagues on the most likely outcome which donors and other constituencies would support by the end of OECD-DAC negotiations on GPEDC's monitoring framework. The final step, given the advocacy nature of the paper, was for me to build on this forecast analysis to formulate action-driven recommendations to GPEDC's key stakeholders, including on accountability to aid recipients.

3.1.2. *The Outcome of the Second High-Level Meeting of the Global Partnership for Effective Development Co-operation and Why It Matters* **(Bena and Tomlinson, 2017)**

I followed a similar process to collect and analyse data for *The Outcome of the Second High-Level Meeting of the Global Partnership for Effective Development Co-operation and Why It Matters*. The main difference, compared to *Busan in a Nutshell*, is that I wrote this paper in my personal capacity, rather than on behalf of an organisation, as I was a development and aid effectiveness consultant at the time. The paper draws on my direct participation in drafting the outcome document of the second GPEDC High-Level Meeting in Nairobi in November 2016. It provides a detailed account of the Nairobi meeting, describing its highlights as well as stakeholders' expectations and level of stakeholder participation. It draws on information collected using the methods described above to analyse the implications of the meeting outcome for the future of the effectiveness of development cooperation. Information was collected through formal and informal preparatory discussions with key stakeholders, especially members of the OECD-DAC Secretariat, donor governments and the Civil Society Organisation Partnership for Development Effectiveness (CPDE), a global civil society platform which advocates for effective development cooperation. Together with Aidwatch Canada's Executive Director, Brian Tomlinson, I also drafted language on the need to preserve civil society space and core aid effectiveness commitments, which eventually featured in paragraphs 18 and 36 of the Nairobi outcome document (GPEDC, 2016).

After the Nairobi conference, I held a number of debriefing conversations with Tomlinson to reflect on what the meeting had accomplished, including on donor accountability for aid effectiveness. This thematic approach supplemented the comparative document analysis I had made to follow the evolution of donor commitments from Paris to Accra to Busan to Mexico City to Nairobi (Bowen, 2009:30). In drawing these comparisons, I considered the issue of accountability in the broader context of donor governments' endorsement of the Financing for Development agenda (UN, 2015a) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) the previous year (UN, 2015b). Through a participant observation lens (Jorgensen, 1989:23), I designed the paper as a mid-term assessment of GPEDC's work against the backdrop of a rapidly evolving global development landscape. Further conversations with Tomlinson on my direct interaction with donors before, during and after Nairobi provided valuable insights on the likely changes in donor behaviour which we might observe in the following months in light of macro-political shifts at the time, such as Brexit. I relied on this additional material to nuance my conclusions on the future of development cooperation, and of effective development cooperation in particular.

3.1.3. *A Win-Win: Multi-year flexible funding is better for people and better value for donors (Bena et al., 2020)*

A Win-Win relies on a mixed method approach to demonstrate the added value of implementing humanitarian projects financed by multi-year flexible grants. By 'multi-year', I refer to projects lasting at least 24 months from the date of the original funding agreement. By 'flexible', I mean funding that is not, or is only partly, earmarked to a specific activity or location, in line with GB's definitions (Grand Bargain, no date c).

I designed the paper as a contribution to both quantitative and qualitative research by structuring it into two distinct sections. The first half of the paper and its annexes compare and contrast quantitative evidence of the efficiency gains of predictable and flexible funding drawing on data from two IRC Somalia country programmes implementing similar activities – in this case, cash transfers – but with different funding modalities. The former is a four-

year programme funded by the UK's then Department for International Development (DFID) running from September 2018 to March 2022, building on a previous four-year phase. The latter is a six-month programme funded by Swedish development agency Sida from November 2019 to May 2020. I closely collaborated with IRC's Best Use of Resources team led by Caitlin Tulloch to design, collect and analyse data using a cost effectiveness method called the Systematic Cost Analysis tool (SCAN, which was developed by a consortium of NGOs and is now called Dioptra). In short, Dioptra allows humanitarian and development agencies to calculate the full cost per output of programme activities and compare results to pre-agreed benchmarks (Dioptra, no date).

Findings from this comparative analysis provide preliminary indications of the quantifiable cost of short-term vs. long-term assistance and demonstrate the significant efficiency gains of multi-year funding. Building on this evidence, I conducted my own scoping analysis to understand how much funding major bilateral donors could reasonably allocate to higher-quality, multi-year assistance. To do this analysis, I considered past donor concessions on other relevant issues, for example the percentage of humanitarian funding donors had agreed to unearmark to make their aid more flexible (30%). I used those concessions as a precedent to formulate the paper's final policy recommendations, asking donors to make a similar effort to what they had done on flexible funding to increase both flexible and multi-year funding.

The second half of the paper is a qualitative analysis of three IRC interventions benefitting from multi-year flexible funding: two multi-sector emergency response programmes in the Central African Republic (CAR) and Cameroon supported by Sida and one youth livelihoods programme funded by Mastercard Foundation in Côte d'Ivoire. In consultation with my then colleagues Daphne Jayasinghe and Lauren Post, I chose to present these programmes as a series of case studies to illustrate the benefits of predictable and flexible humanitarian funding through compelling examples (Swanborn, 2010:113; Yin, 2009:3-4). Based on the evidence of the positive impact of this type of funding on human lives, I concluded that it

was better for aid recipients than short-term restricted funding, besides being more cost effective.

We therefore selected those case studies that we thought were the most concrete exemplars of effective multi-year flexible funding, particularly in the context of protracted humanitarian crises (Yin, 2009:3-4). Data availability and ease of access to aid recipients were two other major selection criteria as all case studies relied on representatives from population groups assisted by the IRC (Laws et al., 2013:188; Rapley, 2014:49). A fourth important factor was to choose IRC programmes of an adequate length of time, e.g. at least 24 months, in line with the Grand Bargain's definition of multi-year funding (Belcher and Rieger, 2024:9).

For the first two cases from CAR and Cameroon, we chose to highlight IRC activities funded by Sida's Programme-Based Approach (PBA) to illustrate the long-term positive impacts of this funding tool on community relations, gender-based violence (GBV) prevention and response and staff retention, among other beneficial results. Based on focus group discussions designed by IRC technical experts and client feedback collected by IRC country teams, Jayasinghe compiled the data with support from the research organisation Development Initiatives (DI). I then held several discussions with Jayasinghe, Post and DI researchers to analyse the findings by looking for commonalities between the CAR and Cameroon programmes which could be reasonably attributed to the predictable and flexible quality of the grants provided. The next step was to reach an internal agreement on the most compelling findings to highlight in the report. DI staff followed up by summarising them and Jayasinghe finalised this section to further showcase the qualitative benefits of multi-year flexible funding to people and donors.

The third case study was selected on the basis of similar criteria, with a difference in perspective. I wanted to show how multi-year flexible funding leads to positive outcomes regardless of whether it is provided by public or private donors, such as philanthropic

foundations. This is why, in consultation with Jayasinghe, I selected an IRC livelihoods programme funded by Mastercard Foundation in Côte d'Ivoire. Data collection and analysis followed the same steps as in the former two case studies, the only difference being that we did not compare the research findings with a fourth case study to keep the report to a manageable size. Also, I wanted to concentrate on public donors, e.g. governments, rather than private institutions.

3.1.4. *Focus on the Frontlines: How the Grand Bargain can deliver on its promise to improve humanitarian aid* (Bena, 2021)

Focus on the Frontlines builds on my direct exposure to, and participant observation of, five years of GB work, from 2016 to 2021. More than the previous two papers, this one relies on my recollection of GB stakeholders' behaviour since the establishment of the initiative, drawing on data from personal notes and reflections over the years. I chose this approach because I reckoned I had accumulated enough experience and knowledge of the GB by 2021 to be in a position to assess its broader trajectory, particularly on donor accountability to aid recipients and localisation.

To validate the data used for my arguments, I combined participant observation (Jorgensen, 1989:22) with a summary of relevant information gathered through the GB self-reporting process, both by IRC and other GB signatories, as well as with quantitative approaches using data from the UN OCHA's Financial Tracking Service (FTS) platform (Kielmann et al., 2012:47). I analysed this evidence through the lens of accountability to people on the frontlines, primarily populations affected by humanitarian crises, but also local and national organisations, to look for tangible progress made by GB on priority aid reforms in quality funding and localisation. I also triangulated the evidence with information gathered from bilateral interaction with donor representatives, exchanges with other NGOs and direct observation of donors' interventions in GB discussions. Subsequently, I discussed the data collected in a series of extensive internal consultations with IRC colleagues, particularly those working on humanitarian programmes and localisation. My objective was to identify

any trends or changes in aid funding from donors to implementing aid agencies. I wanted to cross-check the evidence for my argument in favour of stronger accountability to local actors (Kielmann et al., 2012:57).

To further substantiate the kind of progress needed to improve GB accountability towards aid recipients, I carried out a deeper analysis of the evidence on two priority aid reforms for the IRC: increased funding for gender-based violence (GBV) prevention and response and improved global cash coordination. An additional reason for selecting these two reform areas as examples was because they required relatively less contentious changes in policy and practice from donors than other reforms, while leading to more visible returns on donors' investment. For the former reform (increased funding for GBV prevention and response), I looked at FTS figures collected by IRC gender experts to see if they were consistent with donor commitments to increase funding. In particular, I focused on GBV prevention and response programmes implemented by women-led and women's rights organisations, and identified any major gaps. For the latter reform (improved global cash coordination), I drew on data collected by IRC technical experts in Colombia, Ecuador and Ethiopia, as well as surveys carried out by the Cash Learning Partnership (CALP, 2023a) to highlight any inconsistencies between global efforts on cash coordination, including by GB signatories, and feedback on country-level cash coordination from aid implementers.

In terms of data collection and analysis, I have coded all four publications using the NVivo software. By doing so, I have categorised relevant and recurring themes emerging from my writing (Saldaña, 2021). I have also been able to identify unexpected elements by connecting these themes with my reflections on the new primary research and my body of work as a whole (Kielmann et al., 2012:65). Coding has been helpful in providing a more solid structure to my thinking.

3.2.   Research design for and approach to the new primary data

This section explains the research design and approach I have chosen for my new primary data. It also provides a detailed description of the main methods, as well as the data collection and analysis tools I have used.

My findings are the result of inductive research building on bottom-up approaches to data (Kielmann et al., 2012:66; Ruane, 2016:35). They explore accountability themes that have been long studied in aid effectiveness literature while allowing for new perspectives to emerge organically. The rationale for choosing this type of research has been to amplify unheard voices on the topic of donor accountability to aid recipients, particularly those from Southern practitioners and people receiving humanitarian and development assistance from implementing agencies, such as NGOs. By drawing on feedback from NGO country programmes and colleagues working on aid policy and practice, I wanted to highlight their main priorities in promoting donor accountability for aid effectiveness commitments. In some cases, being open to consider these priorities has led me to identify new underlying research themes or connect seemingly disparate ones in ways I did not expect but which consistently answered my research questions.

A second priority in designing my new research has been to focus on the donor community as a research target (Bhattacherjee, 2012:9). This strategy does not follow most of the current academic and policy literature on aid effectiveness, which tends to concentrate on the performance of aid implementers and aid recipients (see Section 2.2.2.2). As I did in choosing an inductive research style, my research has taken a bottom-up approach to accountability for aid effectiveness and drawn the attention of academia back to donor behaviour. By treating OECD/DAC donor governments as the research target, this study aims to provide a more balanced view on who is accountable to whom for how aid is used: not only implementing agencies and population groups receiving assistance but also providers who made aid effectiveness promises to their recipients in the first place (De Renzio, 2006b and 2016).

In terms of my research approach, as in the case of my published works, I have relied on mixed methods based on largely qualitative techniques, with frequent triangulation with quantitative data (Kielmann et al., 2012:16; Laws et al., 2013:142-144). The main difference from what I did previously has been in the choice of qualitative methods, which can be summarised as key informant interviews, document analysis and autoethnography. The following section looks at each of these methods and related data collection and analysis tools in detail.

3.2.1. Methods used for the new primary research

3.2.1.1.   Key Informant Interviews

Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) have been my main research method. To contextualise my study, I have carried out semi-structured interviews with 30 key informants from the humanitarian and development community. Selecting these respondents has required a purposeful sampling strategy (Patton, 2002:230) based on a combination of criteria (Laws et al., 2013:188; Rapley, 2014:49). To start, I chose professionals who were deeply familiar with either GB or GPEDC or both. In fact, I could identify only five informants who knew both GPEDC and GB; of these, only two were deeply knowledgeable or 'information-rich' (Patton, 2002:242) about both initiatives. Out of this group, I selected those informants who were accessible, that is, those who were interested and available to discuss my research topic within a reasonable period (throughout most of 2024). This second criterion severely limited the possibility to interview donor representatives as most of those I contacted did not feel comfortable discussing my research topic (see the following section). Finally, out of the informants left, I selected those who would provide the most representative views from the humanitarian and development community (Gobo, 2004:405). Overall, this sampling strategy led me to include informants from civil society, donor and recipient governments, relevant intergovernmental organisations and academia. Table 3 lists the 30 key informants I have interviewed for this thesis.

Table 3. Key Informant Interviews – list of interlocutors

Code	Role	Institution	Region
Respondent A	Adjunct Professor	Graduate Institute	Southern Africa
Respondent B	Team Lead	Intergovernmental Organisation (1)*	Global, based in Europe
Respondent C	Coordinator	Donor Government	Europe
Respondent D	Dean	Graduate School	North America
Respondent E	Senior Leader	International Non-Governmental Organisation	Europe
Respondent F	Senior Lecturer	Graduate School	Latin America
Respondent G	Programme Director	Think Tank	Europe
Respondent H	Executive Director and Senior Lecturer	International Network	Global, based in Europe
Respondent I	Team Lead	Intergovernmental Organisation (1)*	Global, based in Europe
Respondent J	Adjunct Lecturer	US University	North America
Respondent K	Executive Director	Foundation	East Africa
Respondent L	Executive Director	International Network	Africa
Respondent M	Senior Principal	Consulting Firm	Europe
Respondent N	Senior Lecturer	Law School	Asia-Pacific

Code	Role	Institution	Region
Respondent O	Executive Director	International Non-Governmental Organisation	North America
Respondent P	Senior Advisor	Donor/Recipient Government	Latin America
Respondent Q	Senior Director	International Non-Governmental Organisation	Global, based in East Africa
Respondent R	Director	International Network	Global, based in East Africa
Respondent S	Founder	International Non-Governmental Organisation	Global, based in Europe
Respondent T	Head of Research	Think Tank	Global, based in Europe
Respondent U	Director	International Non-Governmental Organisation	Global, based in Europe
Respondent V	Executive Director	International Network	Global, based in Europe
Respondent W	Founder and Leader	Foundation	Asia-Pacific/Global
Respondent X	CEO	International Non-Governmental Organisation	South Asia
Respondent Y	Head of Office	Recipient Government	Central Africa
Respondent Z	Lead	Intergovernmental Organisation	Global, based in North America
Respondent AA	Head of Unit	Donor Government (2)*	Europe
Respondent AB	Senior Advisor	Donor Government (2)*	Europe
Respondent AC	Director of Strategy	Recipient Government	West Africa

Code	Role	Institution	Region
Respondent AD	Senior Advisor	Intergovernmental Organisation	Global, based in Europe

*The same number indicates that informants work for the same institution.

The interviews revolved around the main analytical questions underpinning this thesis, allowing the informant to elaborate on other topics of their choice (see Annex V). Two interviews were also carried out with international law specialists to request their legal opinion on the accountability of governments as primary duty-bearers in non-binding international agreements. Specifically, I was interested in better understanding what tools are available to uphold donor commitments in global multi-stakeholder initiatives, broadly speaking.

As I did for my publications, I have coded the data from these interviews using NVivo software. This has allowed me to identify recurring themes, as well as new ideas emerging from informant feedback (Kielmann et al., 2012:65-66). Through coding, I have been able to verify that the size of my interviewee sample was adequate to address my research questions as many overlapping themes quickly emerged from key informants' feedback. In reply to my analytical questions, most informants kept pointing to similar issues. My sampling strategy was therefore consistent with my objective to achieve saturation in the data collection process through depth rather than breadth of the findings (Miles and Huberman, 1994; Rapley, 2014:60). In addition, coding the KIIs has complemented the coding of my published works, highlighting overlapping themes related to my research topic. This combination of past and new data has led me to identify major thematic categories among those I had originally determined (Kielmann et al., 2012:67; Laws et al., 2003:210). In some cases, the combined data has required either questioning or refining the categories, deepening my critical analysis of the evidence gathered. I have also found it useful to alternate coding with a periodic review of individual KIIs in their integrity to let the informants' voices speak uninterrupted and in context (Linneberg and Korsgaard, 2019:270). Over time, the

resulting insights would start pointing towards key priority themes, which have laid the groundwork for interpreting the research findings presented in Chapter 5.

3.2.1.2. Autoethnography

By autoethnography, I mean writing about a given topic from my personal perspective (Adams et al., 2014:50). Specifically, I have studied donor accountability through the lens of my professional experience and personal reflections on my past and new research. Adopting an autoethnographic approach has allowed me to analyse my insider knowledge of aid effectiveness policy and practice in light of the academic literature, particularly the theoretical frameworks underpinning multi-stakeholder initiatives, such as GPEDC and GB (see Section 2.2.1 for an explanation of the implicit theories of change in GPEDC and GB). I have also used autoethnography to triangulate the theories underpinning my conceptual understanding of the research questions (Livesey and Runsen, 2018:51).

Another reason for choosing autoethnography as a research method has been to make my research accessible to multiple audiences (Adams et al., 2014:50; Ellis et al., 2011:274). Through autoethnography, I have been able to identify commonalities between GPEDC and GB which have not yet appeared in the literature but have consistently surfaced in my experience advocating for aid effectiveness. Reflecting on my professional contribution to knowledge has been a way to share my understanding of donor behaviour in multistakeholder initiatives such as GPEDC and GB. In doing so, I have also analysed the experience of key informants, most of them humanitarian and/or development practitioners like me, to value their insights as a body of additional collective knowledge worth illustrating (Jones, 2008:234). My research objective in choosing autoethnography has been to present an alternative framework that helps bridge the gap between theory and practice of donor accountability to aid recipients.

I have relied on autoethnography by proceeding in two steps. First, I have provided an account of my participation in relevant policymaking processes from 2007 to date. In particular, I have reflected on my discussions with NGO colleagues on accountability for aid effectiveness, both within and

beyond the organisation with which I was working at the time the papers included in Chapter Four were published. I have also drawn on my personal notes and reflections on the research topic throughout my career; my frequent interactions with donor representatives in my role as either OECD official, independent consultant or NGO representative; my informal interviews with aid practitioners from the Global South for my personal blog *Kiliza* (see an example of a blog post in Annex VII); and my experience as a trainer in aid and development cooperation policy and practice at several professional graduate schools in Rome, Milan, Pisa and Siena, Italy since the early 2000s. This personal account of my professional journey has allowed me to capture findings that would not be otherwise available through more traditional research methods (Adams et al., 2017:4).

Second, I have critiqued my publications through an autoethnographic lens. This step implied reviewing each paper to reflect on whether my thinking had changed since its publication in light of my ongoing work on aid effectiveness and, if so, how. By writing in an autoethnographic style, I have also been able to assess my positionality at the time each paper was published (Kielmann et al., 2012:50). For example, *Busan in a Nutshell* mostly addresses the issue of donor accountability on a global level, while *Focus on the Frontlines* foregrounds the primary role of local actors in monitoring donor performance. Although they focus on two different partnerships, these papers reflect the evolution of my thinking against the backdrop of broader changes in aid effectiveness discourse over a decade (Chang, 2008:26). Finally, using an autoethnographic method has allowed me to add a layer of reflexivity to my works, which has provided a more nuanced description of my research topic (Poulos, 2021:3).

3.2.1.3.   Document analysis

The third research method I have used for the new primary research has been document analysis. I have relied on this method extensively, following a process similar to what I did for my publications. In particular, I have reviewed relevant GPEDC and GB data, such as their founding texts, outcome documents, annual/self-reports, statements, updates and related literature (Bowen, 2009:29). The objective of my research has been to foreground the evolution of donor language, commitments and timelines for delivering those commitments from one year to the next.

I have also identified any omissions in, or additions to, the data that would impact on donor accountability to aid recipients (Bowen, 2009:30).

Moreover, document analysis has complemented new primary data collected and analysed through the other research methods, KIIs and autoethnography. Since GPEDC and GB documents tend to be quite formal in nature, their analysis has compensated for the more subjective information gathered through the other channels, reducing potential subjectivity bias (Morgan, 2022:65).

Document analysis has also been an essential pre-requisite to carry out the comparative analysis of donor accountability to aid recipients between GPEDC and GB. Analysing how documents from these two initiatives describe similar issues – for example, aid transparency – from different perspectives has helped me gain a deeper understanding of the language, tone and meaning of the original donor commitments within each alliance.

3.2.1.4.   Quantitative methods used in the new research

To triangulate my qualitative research findings, I have partly relied on quantitative methods through a mixed methods approach (Creswell, 2021). Similar to what I did in the selected publications, I have cross-checked the information gathered through experience, observation and autoethnographic reflection with relevant quantitative data, including statistical analyses of trends in Overseas Development Assistance (ODA), calculations based on OECD/DAC, FTS and IATI figures, statistical comparisons and indicator data. Special attention has gone to analysing the quantitative findings from recent GPEDC Progress reports (GPEDC, 2019a, 2019b) and GB Annual Independent Reports (Metcalfe et al., 2021, 2022, 2023). The objective in this case has been to see if they were consistent with what donors were saying in their statements, interventions and KIIs and, if not, investigate why. Ultimately, quantitative data from these reports has been helpful in addressing my research questions by pointing to areas where donors have either met or not met pre-agreed performance targets (Kielmann et al., 2012: 12, 16).

In addition, I have used a quantitative approach to base my argument in favour of a significant increase in cash assistance as a possible alternative to the current state of donor accountability to recipients in the aid system (see Section 5.2.2). Drawing on a considerable body of quantitative evidence (Tappis and Doocy, 2018; Bastagli et al., 2019; Bena et al., 2020; Betts, 2021; CALP, 2023b), I have highlighted the demonstrated efficiency gains of increasing the volume of cash transfers and the higher accountability of tracking cash transactions. I have then compared and contrasted this data with current levels of cash transfers funded by donors to show a contradictory pattern in donor behaviour. Namely, donors' hesitation to scale up cash assistance is not based on quantitative evidence but on other factors, which my research has explored using the qualitative methods described above.

3.3.   Ethical considerations

In this section, I outline how I have adhered to ethical standards in my published works and new research.

Regarding my published works, my co-authored report *A Win-Win* was written while I was working for the IRC. It includes case studies from Cameroon, Central African Republic and Côte d'Ivoire which summarise feedback from specific population groups receiving humanitarian assistance in those countries. This information was collected with the help of IRC's country programme staff, following the organisation's data protection and confidentiality protocol.

Regarding my new research, I secured ethical clearance from the University of Reading to conduct semi-structured interviews with key informants. Participants were selected based on their expert knowledge of either the GPEDC or the GB, as explained in Section 3.2.1.1. Each interviewee was informed about the research scope and how their data would be collected, managed and stored. They were also offered the possibility to retain anonymity and confidentiality. In cases where I decided to quote a passage from an interview, I contacted the informant again to secure their written permission to quote. All interviewees gave their informed consent prior to the interview. Annex V includes the interview request template which I shared with informants. One interviewee,

Dr. Wale Osofisan, agreed to be quoted explicitly in recognition of his important contribution to some of the ideas developed in this thesis, particularly in Section 5.2.2.1. Some interviewees expressed an interest to follow my research, in which case I kept them posted on my thesis development.

In terms of my positionality, the thesis provides an opportunity to reflect on my research topic based on my lived and professional experience as a senior humanitarian and development practitioner (Kielmann et al., 2012). While the publications selected for my thesis largely reflect my perspectives as an activist on behalf of the non-governmental organisations with which I was working at the time, they are based on an evidence-based approach to advocacy. In addition, I have complemented the evidence base with wide consultations with my peers, both within and outside the organisation with which I was working at the time of writing.

My new research takes a more neutral perspective. In particular, I draw on recollections of my direct interactions with the donor community as a member of GPEDC's Secretariat (Joint OECD-UNDP Support Team, 2013-2015) and then as a coordinator of GB's Caucus on Quality Funding (March-July 2022). In both roles, I had to act as a neutral broker mediating requests from different constituencies for the purpose of building consensus around collective solutions to common aid effectiveness challenges. This mediation role has allowed me to build more trusted relationships with donor representatives and gain a deeper understanding of donors' constraints in fulfilling their commitments to aid recipients.

Finally, to clarify any potential conflict of interest, I am no longer affiliated with GPEDC nor with the GB. At the time of writing, I am sometimes contracted as an independent consultant to offer my expert advice to non-governmental organisations which are either GB or GPEDC stakeholders or both.

3.4.   Research limitations

The research presented in this thesis draws on the views of a wide range of stakeholders, including donor representatives. As described in this chapter, donors' perspectives are limited to those individuals who have agreed to speak with me upon condition of anonymity. Despite my repeated attempts to contact other representatives from donor governments who either have been or are current members of GPEDC and GB, there has been lukewarm response to interview requests. This behaviour is understandable given the potential for research on donor accountability to produce uncomfortable findings or for the interviewee to speak unauthorised. Those who accepted to be interviewed largely supported my reflections on my professional interactions with donor governments over the course of my career.

Going forward, it would be important to carry out a stand-alone, systematic review of donors' thinking on their own accountability to aid recipients. The views of donors analysed in this chapter, for example, do not distinguish between individual and organisational perspectives on accountability. Their informal nature does not necessarily reflect the considerations taken into account by their government in deciding whether to follow up on its aid effectiveness commitments. At the same time, it remains an open question whether a formal review of donor views on accountability to recipients would lead donor representatives to express their perspectives with a similar degree of authenticity.

On a related note, another research limitation lies in the selection of key informants for the interviews. In fact, it has been challenging to secure interviews even from former colleagues for reasons that remain unclear. In many cases, the response was delayed due to busy schedules. In other cases, however, there may have also been some reticence from interviewees to discuss potentially sensitive issues about donor (and other stakeholder) behaviour in international assistance. Most informants granted the interview either because they already knew me personally or because they were introduced to me by a trusted colleague. Beyond the ethical clearance considerations discussed in the previous section, the degree of trust between the interviewees and

me has been a critical factor in selecting and accessing key informants and may have influenced what they said during individual interviews.

Finally, a substantive limitation of my research has been the fungible nature of development aid. OECD's definition of ODA specifies that it targets the 'economic development and welfare of developing countries' (OECD, 2024). As such, it refers to governments, not people, as the official recipient of development aid. In some cases, recipient governments may be allowed to use the ODA received for other purposes than what they agreed with the donor, for example in case of an emergency or because their development priorities have changed. They may also allocate their own domestic resources to compensate for the diverted donor funding. Aid fungibility therefore makes it challenging to assess donor accountability to specific target populations in receiving countries.

Conclusion

The methodology of this thesis is based on a mixed approach, relying on mainly qualitative methods, such as direct observation, document analysis and participation in relevant GPEDC and GB decision-making processes. Quantitative methods, including statistical analysis of ODA trends, have been used to triangulate my findings. The design of my new research has largely centred around bottom-up approaches to the issue of donor accountability in aid effectiveness, building on insights from 30 key informant interviews. In addition, I have critiqued my publications and new primary data through an autoethnographic lens. This method has helped nuance my findings and made information available to a wider audience than closed policy circles. I have also drawn on my reflections on donor accountability within other multi-stakeholder initiatives which I have closely followed over the years, such as the GCR. The objective of my comparison was to understand if my research findings can be applied to a more specific group of aid recipients, such as refugees and their host communities. This study has adhered to ethical standards in protecting the rights of research participants. Research limitations include challenges in reaching key informants, especially donor representatives, and tracking donor accountability to populations receiving development aid.

The following chapter represents the core section of this thesis. It includes the four publications I have either written or co-written about GPEDC and GB which are most relevant to the topic of aid effectiveness and the challenge of donor accountability to recipients.

Chapter 4

Published works

Alice collecting some of her ground nut crop, Copperbelt, Zambia (2006). © Emma Walsh/Oxfam

BUSAN IN A NUTSHELL

What next for the Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation?

The Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation, established in Busan, South Korea in 2011, set the international standard on the principles of effective aid and good development to which all development actors should subscribe. These principles include: country leadership and ownership of development strategies; a focus on results that matter to the poor in developing countries; inclusive partnerships among development actors based on mutual trust; and transparency and accountability to one another.

All development stakeholders – including traditional donors and emerging providers – must respect and uphold these key principles by fulfilling the promises they made at Busan. For this to happen, the Global Partnership will need to rely on strong vision, high-level political engagement and a robust but flexible global accountability mechanism.

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MILESTONES OF EFFECTIVE AID AND DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION

For decades, global development discussions predominantly revolved around the volume of aid given and received. But the 2002 Monterrey International Conference on Financing for Development broadened the focus of discussions to include the *quality* of the cooperation provided as a key determinant of progress. Both donors and recipients realized they needed to improve how aid was delivered to make it useful for beneficiaries. Oxfam has been actively involved in this debate, pushing for higher quality standards and aid that works for the people who need it most.[1]

In the years that followed, three High Level Fora on Aid Effectiveness were convened by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD): in Rome (2003), in Paris (2005) and Accra (2008). Each forum marked a step forward. In Rome, donor and recipient countries were asked, for the first time, to focus their discussions exclusively on aid quality, with the result that they agreed to harmonize donor practices for improved performance.[2] However, this approach left the essential contribution of recipient countries to aid effectiveness out of the equation and raised concerns that even harmonized approaches might undermine country ownership.

The Paris forum acknowledged the need to include recipient governments in an ongoing dialogue on how to improve aid and shift the focus of the debate from effective donorship to effective partnership. Developing countries were invited to join the negotiating table on par with their cooperation providers.[3] The *Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness*[4] committed signatories to respect and implement five basic principles: harmonization of donor policies and practices; alignment to national development strategies; mutual accountability; a focus on measuring and delivering results for people; and ownership of development cooperation.

But, beyond making a list of good intentions, Paris also produced a clear scorecard to hold development partners accountable for what they were promising: a set of 12 indicators to measure progress in a number of crucial areas, such as the predictability of aid flows to developing country governments; the use of developing countries' financial and administrative systems; and the transfer of technical capacity to local staff. Each indicator included targets and a deadline to achieve them by 2010. Partners also agreed to monitor their own progress towards the governance commitments they made. Aid effectiveness was finally gaining momentum in the global development scene.

The Accra Agenda for Action,[5] agreed at the Accra forum in 2008, further refined the commitments agreed in Paris and engaged other key

development stakeholders, like civil society organizations (CSOs) and the private sector. It went a step further in crucial areas like medium-term predictability of aid, the use of country systems, transparency, gender-equality, and conditionality. For the first time, Accra recognized CSOs as development actors in their own right, even though they still could not access the negotiating table, and acknowledged their efforts in addressing the quality of their own performance. In turn, CSOs committed to translate these efforts into a set of principles and guidelines which would improve their own effectiveness in delivering cooperation services and promoting development. In Accra, donors and partner countries were also asked to create better conditions for CSOs to operate more efficiently on the ground and to reach more people in need of assistance.

Despite the ambitious agenda agreed in Paris and Accra, tangible results were slow to come. In survey after survey, results seemed harder to find on the donor side, often due to a lack of political will;[6] developing countries seemed to be performing relatively better than their provider counterparts.

Meanwhile, the development landscape was changing rapidly. Outside of the traditional Western aid model, where decisions over the direction and purpose of aid were from the North to the South, developing countries were starting to experience the impact of years of cooperation with advanced Southern nations, such as China, India and Brazil. 'South–South cooperation' had remained largely unknown to OECD members, yet it was gaining in scale and influence at an unprecedented pace in a growing number of developing regions. Without the participation of Southern donors, discussions on the quality of development cooperation would soon become either outdated or irrelevant.

Likewise, some governments and observers, including CSOs, argued that the scope of the debate needed broadening from 'aid effectiveness' to 'development effectiveness', in order to capture how different factors at play in any given country – aid, but also foreign direct investment, trade regulations, debt relief, labour laws, etc. – affected each other and whether they actually fostered progress once taken together. Development effectiveness better reflected the goal of 'policy coherence for development', which both donors and recipients had been discussing for years.[7]

Addressing these issues and taking stock of the progress made over the last decade dominated the fourth and final High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness (also known as HLF4), held in Busan, South Korea in late 2011. The results of the Paris surveys and final evaluation were clear: disappointingly little progress had been made. Only one of the agreed 13 targets had been achieved: the way technical cooperation was coordinated – how donors worked together on the ground. On the whole, it was confirmed that recipient countries had performed better than donors on mutual commitments;[8] they had tried harder to keep their part of the deal. CSOs had also kept their promise. By organizing themselves through the BetterAid platform and the Open Forum for CSO Development Effectiveness, they had held national and regional

consultations and arrived in Busan with an agreed set of Principles and an International Framework for CSO development effectiveness.[9] At this point, some advocates and partner countries began to publicly question whether cooperation providers were really serious about fulfilling their Paris and Accra commitments.[10] There was a need to revitalize the process and renew trust among all parties involved.

The HLF4 in Busan delivered on several of these challenges. It renewed the most critical commitments donors had made in Paris and Accra and focused attention on the need to keep their political engagement high. It broadened the scope of the talks by giving negotiating status to a diverse range of development stakeholders, including Southern providers, CSOs (represented by the BetterAid network), parliamentarians, and the private sector. It promoted fundamental development drivers, such as human rights, democratic ownership of development plans and activities, gender equality, and effective institutions. It recognized that the set of indicators developed in Paris had driven positive policy change and ensured accountability, but needed to be revised. Most importantly, the Busan forum created a new venue to carry the aid effectiveness conversation forward: the Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation, supported not just by the OECD, but also by the full UN system, especially the UN Development Programme (UNDP) and the UN Development Cooperation Forum (UNDCF).

Busan also promoted a number of voluntary initiatives called 'Building Blocks' with the aim of sharing best practices and showcasing successful examples of effective development under the leadership of developing countries. Eight Building Blocks were launched at HLF4;[11] since then some have advanced more rapidly than others. However, they do not officially report to the Global Partnership and their future remains unclear.

4

WHAT WAS PROMISED IN BUSAN?

At the HLF4, traditional and new development stakeholders agreed to restructure development cooperation around four basic principles:

1. Ownership of development priorities – recognizing that developing countries must design and drive their own development;

2. Focus on results – aiming at concrete outcomes that eradicate poverty, reduce inequality and ensure that the necessary resources and capacity are available to take these steps forward;

3. Inclusive partnerships – promoting mutual learning and trust among different development actors;

4. Transparency and accountability to each other – building on transparent ways of working to improve service delivery and clarify mutual responsibilities.[12]

The focus on ownership, results and accountability is directly derived from the Paris principles, while inclusive partnerships and transparency represent a new phase in the development cooperation debate. Each stakeholder agreed to turn these shared principles into specific actions according to a set of 'differential commitments'. Specifically, donors who had endorsed the Paris and Accra agreements renewed their pledge to implement them in full, while Southern providers – some of them still receiving aid from OECD/DAC[13] members – were willing to adhere to new commitments on a voluntary basis. Busan, therefore, created a two-tier approach to development cooperation: one for traditional donors with a so-called 'unfinished aid agenda'[14] and another for emerging donors to be implemented on a discretionary basis. This was a less than ideal compromise to engage emerging donors without losing a decade of aid effectiveness work.[15] At the same time, it was clear that not all South–South cooperation providers would move at the same speed and that some of them might be more proactive than others.

The outcomes from the Busan forum also sanctioned a 'global light, country-focused' approach whereby development cooperation would be based on the needs and priorities of developing countries and would be supported by a lean global structure (the Global Partnership) and monitoring framework. While this shift was introduced to reduce cumbersome global bureaucracies, it also allowed donors to renegotiate the terms of their own accountability, despite the fact that most developing countries were in favour of keeping the existing Paris framework to continue driving long-term policy change.

In terms of specific commitments, the final Busan declaration[16] made good progress on transparency, calling for the adoption of a common, open standard for the publication of aid data, which builds on the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI), among other agreements. The final declaration also affirmed that donors must use the financial and administrative systems of developing countries as the default mechanism for aid delivery. In addition, it committed providers to use country-led

roadmaps to deliver development results; welcomed the recently agreed peace- and state-building goals in fragile or conflict-affected countries;[17] called for the integration of gender equality into national development strategies and for policies to be informed by sex-disaggregated data; supported the role of national parliaments and local governments in ensuring democratic ownership through the provision of adequate resources and action plans; and confirmed governments' commitment to creating a favourable, enabling environment for CSOs as independent development actors, in line with international rights agreements.

In contrast, little progress was made in other areas, such as reducing the burdens imposed on aid recipients by a lack of predictability in medium-term aid and the proliferation of aid channels. Here, development stakeholders only agreed to produce a set of guidelines to reduce the fragmentation of multilateral funding by the end of 2012.[18] They committed to make greater use of coordination processes led by developing countries by 2013. No further steps were made on the use of 'untied' aid,[19] beyond a commitment to make progress with no specific deadline attached.

There were two major issues which could not be resolved in Busan: the governance of the new Global Partnership and a specific framework that would allow commitments made in Busan to be monitored. The deadline for finalizing these discussions was set as June 2012, with multi-stakeholder negotiations, led by the OECD, starting soon after Busan.[20] Four functions were identified for the Global Partnership:

1. Maintaining and strengthening political momentum for more effective development cooperation;
2. Ensuring accountability for implementing the Busan commitments;
3. Facilitating knowledge exchange and sharing lessons learned;
4. Supporting implementation of the Busan commitments at country level.

To guarantee an agile management of these functions, negotiators agreed the Global Partnership would rely on a Steering Committee made up of 18 constituency representatives. Of these, three would be co-Chairs representing cooperation providers, providers who are also still recipients (mostly Southern donors), and recipient governments. In the spirit of diversity, CSOs would also get a seat alongside donors, developing countries, parliamentarians, and the private sector. This step confirmed the landmark inclusion of non-government stakeholders as peer members of the partnership, as already envisaged in Busan.[21]

Agreeing a global monitoring framework proved challenging, but a shortlist of ten indicators for measuring progress on results-based frameworks was established: the presence of a CSO-enabling environment; the role of the private sector in development; transparency; aid predictability; parliamentary scrutiny of aid budgets; mutual accountability; gender equality; quality and use of country systems; and untied aid. Each area had specific targets to be monitored on an ongoing basis, with periodic progress reports and a more comprehensive review scheduled for late 2015/early 2016 to fit within

the broader international discussions on the future of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The table below summarizes the main HLF4 commitments, as measured by the newly agreed indicators.

HLF4 commitments and related global indicators

	Commitment	Indicator
1	Development cooperation will be focused on **results** that meet developing countries' priorities	Extent of use of country results frameworks by cooperation providers (specific criteria to be finalized)
2	**Civil society** will operate within an environment which maximises its engagement in and contribution to development	Enabling Environment Index
3	Engagement and contribution of the **private sector** to development	The measure for this commitment has yet to be identified
4	**Transparency**: information on development cooperation will be made publicly available	Measure the state of implementation of the common standard by cooperation providers
5	Development cooperation will be made more **predictable**	Annual: proportion of aid disbursed within the fiscal year within which it was scheduled by cooperation providers; Medium-term: proportion of aid covered by indicative forward spending plans provided at the country level
6	Aid will be listed in budgets which are subject to **parliamentary scrutiny**	Percentage of aid scheduled for disbursement that is recorded in the annual budgets approved by the legislatures of developing countries
7	**Mutual accountability** among development cooperation actors will be strengthened through inclusive reviews	Percentage of countries that undertake inclusive mutual assessments of progress in implementing agreed commitments
8	**Gender equality** and women's empowerment will be incorporated into development plans	Percentage of countries with systems that track and make public allocations for gender equality and women's empowerment
9	Effective institutions: developing **countries' systems** will be strengthened and used	(a) Quality of developing country public financial management (PFM) systems; and (b) Use of country PFM and procurement systems
10	Aid will be **untied**	Percentage of aid that is fully untied

Based on OECD sources (July 2012)

Governance and monitoring proposals were finally approved at the end of June 2012 together with a common, open standard for transparency. Some of the endorsed indicators still require fine-tuning, which will happen by the end of 2012.[22] Meanwhile, non-government stakeholders in the Global Partnership have raised concerns that the Steering Committee membership is too weighted towards governments, undermining the multi-stakeholder character of the Global Partnership. The strong emphasis given to the role of emerging donors and the private sector, despite their modest interest in the discussion, also raises doubts regarding the 'equal' negotiating status granted to the other members. It is expected the Steering Committee will consider this issue at its first meeting in autumn 2012.

WHAT SHOULD HAPPEN NEXT?

Priority issues for discussion at the first meeting of the Steering Committee should be:

a) Providing strategic direction to the joint support team on refining the global monitoring framework;

b) Proposing an agenda for the first ministerial-level meeting in 2013;

c) Suggesting a roadmap and pointing to the analysis needed to address the main challenges awaiting the Global Partnership over the next few years.

The OECD and UNDP should ensure that the joint support team is in place to carry out its secretariat functions efficiently. In the long run, it will be crucial to clarify the specific roles and responsibilities of the OECD and UNDP in ensuring proper accountability at country and global level.

Fine-tuning the global monitoring framework by the end of 2012 is an urgent priority and a primary challenge for the Global Partnership whose credibility will depend on how much development stakeholders are held accountable for implementing their Busan commitments. Research shows that global monitoring standards heavily influence the negotiation of country-level accountability frameworks and have a big impact on the performance of development stakeholders in-country.[23] The Steering Committee has a strategic role to play in ensuring that the set of indicators that was endorsed in June is applied to traditional donors and gradually extended to other HLF4 stakeholders.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In finalizing the global monitoring framework Oxfam recommends that the Steering Committee:

• Rely on inclusive frameworks that deliver the results which matter most to the poor, rather than to their donors (Indicator 1);

• Take into account the different social, economic, cultural, political and legal factors at play in creating a CSO-enabling environment (Indicator 2);[24]

• Consider strategies and policies that promote sustainable enterprises and high-quality jobs for the poorest parts of the population (Indicator 3). Oxfam recommends engaging in a conversation with representatives from the domestic private sector and trade unions at country level to gather their insights;

• Support the implementation of a common, open transparency standard by ensuring that cooperation providers meet an intermediate target of publishing aid data by December 2013 (Indicator 4);

8

- Assess gender results, not only in terms of how developing countries measure associated budget allocations, but also how well they integrate women's rights across their national development strategies (Indicator 8).

The Steering Committee must propose a concrete plan for periodic progress reports and reviews of global indicators and methodology, including the possibility of extending the monitoring to other crucial areas, such as aid fragmentation and programme-based approaches.[25]

For their part, Southern providers and the private sector:

- Should either respect the new global monitoring framework or take concrete steps to show how they plan to monitor their own performance within a reasonable timeframe. They should build on the foundations of the agreements made in Paris and Accra.

- Must live up to the challenge of putting an effective accountability mechanism in place as development actors, at both a global and country level. The Building Blocks on South-South Cooperation and Public-Private Partnerships could provide valuable guidelines and lessons learned, but only if there are clear reporting mechanisms between those initiatives and the Global Partnership, and if these guidelines are in line with the principles of ownership, results-focused development, inclusive partnership, transparency, and accountability, as endorsed in Busan.

Another key challenge will be to maintain the high-level political engagement required to keep the focus on development effectiveness. To do so, the Steering Committee must reach out to its constituencies and make sure that they participate fully in future work. The co-Chairs should ensure that all voices within such a diverse membership are heard. By doing this the Global Partnership will represent a truly innovative way of improving development cooperation, through inclusive dialogue and exchange. This step must include listening to the concerns of CSOs, as well as integrating the views of Southern providers and the private sector, without backtracking on a decade of aid effectiveness work.

The Steering Committee must show the real added value of the Global Partnership to the development cooperation landscape. This will mean identifying links with other key international processes where there is an opportunity for the Global Partnership to make a difference and avoid duplicating efforts. For example, the Global Partnership should feed into the discussions on the post-2015 MDGs and the Sustainable Development Goals, to push for a broader definition of the eighth MDG on the Global Partnership for Development that includes qualitative, as well as quantitative, targets.[26]

For civil society a challenge in the coming months will be to ensure that it fully engages in the Steering Committee through a new representative body called the CSO Partnership for Development Effectiveness, which is currently being created through collaboration between BetterAid and the Open Forum for CSO Development Effectiveness. The CSO Partnership will contribute to strengthening the voices of citizens and civil society within the Global Partnership.

CONCLUSION

The Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation, agreed at the HLF4 in Busan, marks a new chapter in the history of international cooperation, shifting the focus from aid effectiveness to the broader concept of development effectiveness. By reaching out to a diverse range of development stakeholders – Northern and Southern donor governments, the private sector, CSOs, parliamentarians, local authorities, etc. – Busan has provided a more realistic framework to improve the way cooperation is implemented on the ground and how it works with other development drivers. Ensuring that every Busan stakeholder is held accountable for its commitments will be essential to determining the success of the Global Partnership, starting at the global level to build robust country-level accountability mechanisms. Core goals for the Global Partnership in the years ahead must be to finalize solid global monitoring tools, maintain political momentum, and identify the added value of its future work both for development cooperation and, fundamentally, for the billions of people living in poverty and injustice around the world.

NOTES

[1] These key messages can be found in two of Oxfam's most recent and significant works on development cooperation, Oxfam (2010) '21st Century Aid: Recognising success and tackling failure', Briefing Paper 137, Oxford: Oxfam, http://www.oxfam.org/en/policy/21st-century-aid; and Oxfam (2011), 'The 'Right Results': Making sure the results agenda remains committed to poverty eradication', Briefing Paper 155, Oxford: Oxfam, http://www.oxfam.org/en/right-results

[2] OECD (2003) *Rome Declaration on Harmonisation*, Paris: OECD, http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/54/50/31451637.pdf

[3] 'Cooperation providers' include donors who provide traditional financial and technical aid for development, as well as developing countries that provide knowledge, skills, expertise and resources to other developing countries so they can meet their development goals.

[4] OECD (2005), 'Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness', Paris: OECD, http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/11/41/34428351.pdf

[5] OECD (2008), 'Accra Agenda for Action', Paris: OECD, http://www.oecd.org/dac/aideffectiveness/41202012.pdf

[6] More information on the survey results can be found in the following documents:

OECD (2011), 'Aid Effectiveness 2005–10: Progress in implementing the Paris Declaration', Paris: OECD Publishing, http://www.oecd.org/dac/aideffectiveness/48742718.pdf

OECD (2008) '2008 Survey on Monitoring the Paris Declaration: Making Aid More Effective by 2010', Paris: OECD Publishing, http://www.oecd.org/development/aideffectiveness/41202121.pdf

OECD (2007) '2006 Survey on Monitoring the Paris Declaration: Overview of the Results', Paris: OECD Publishing, http://www.oecd.org/dac/aideffectiveness/39112140.pdf

[7] For example, for African countries, development effectiveness encompasses aid effectiveness, as well as South–South cooperation and capacity building policies.

[8] See, for example, the overview of findings in OECD (2011), *op. cit.*, p. 17.

[9] Open Forum (2010), 'The Istanbul Principles for CSO Development Effectiveness', Open Forum for CSO Development Effectiveness, Istanbul, http://www.cso-effectiveness.org/IMG/pdf/final_istanbul_cso_development_effectiveness_principles_footnote_december_2010-2.pdf

Open Forum (2011), 'The Siem Reap CSO Consensus on the International Framework for CSO Development Effectiveness', Open Forum for CSO Development Effectiveness, Siam Reap, http://www.cso-effectiveness.org/IMG/pdf/international_framework_open_forum.pdf

This internal consultation process was instrumental in granting CSOs their negotiating status at the HLF4 in Busan.

[10] For more information on the mood amongst CSOs at the time, see 'Civil Society Statement to HLF4', 28 November 2011, paragraphs 1, 3 and 4, www.betteraid.org/en/betteraid-policy/betteraid-publications/statements/524-civil-society-statement-to-the-fourth-high-level-forum-on-aid-effectiveness.html

[11] The full list of Building Blocks includes: Conflict and Fragility; South-South Cooperation; the Private Sector; Climate Finance; Transparency; Effective Institutions; Results and Mutual Accountability; Managing Diversity and Reducing Fragmentation. See http://www.aideffectiveness.org/busanhlf4/en/topics/building-blocks.html

[12] For further details on what was agreed at HLF4, see the Outcome Document of the Forum, http://www.oecd.org/dac/aideffectiveness/49650173.pdf

[13] DAC stands for Development Assistance Committee, a group of 24 OECD member donors including Austria, Australia, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, the EU, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Japan, South Korea, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, the UK, and the US. See http://www.oecd.org/document/1/0,3746,en_2649_33721_46662849_1_1_1_1,00.html

[14] AUC/NEPAD (2011) 'The Addis Ababa Statement on Development Effectiveness', 3rd Africa Regional Meeting on Development, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 28-30 September 2011, http://www.nepad.org/system/files/THE%20ADDIS%20ABABA%20STATEMENT%20ON%20DEVELOPMENT%20EFFECTIVENESS-1%20.pdf

[15] Interestingly, some emerging donors like China had endorsed the Paris and Accra agreements as aid recipients.

[16] OECD (2011) 'Busan Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation', Busan: OECD, http://www.aideffectiveness.org/busanhlf4/images/stories/hlf4/OUTCOME_DOCUMENT_-_FINAL_EN.pdf

[17] 'A New Deal for Engagement with Fragile States' (2011) International Dialogue on Peacebuilding and Statebuilding, Paris, http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/35/50/49151944.pdf

Members of the International Dialogue commit to a) use the peacebuilding and statebuilding Goals; b) focus on new ways of engaging with fragile states, including by supporting inclusive and participatory political dialogue; and c) build mutual trust through aid and improved resource management. For more information, see: 'A New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States', http://www.oecd.org/international%20dialogue/anewdealforengagementinfragilestates.htm

[18] Funding, or aid, fragmentation refers to a common pattern by which an excessive number of donors provides relatively small amounts of aid. Each donor tends to follow its own procedures and priorities, often targeting the same countries, which are not always able to cope with multiple reporting deadlines and requirements.

[19] Aid that is not conditional on the equipment or services being directly provided by the donor's country.

[20] CSOs continued to actively contribute to the post-Busan discussions as official, independent negotiators. They were represented by the co-Chairs of BetterAid.

[21] The Steering Committee would meet every 6-12 months (or more often if necessary), while the full membership of the Global Partnership would convene every 18 to 24 months at ministerial level. To support the day-to-day functioning of the Global Partnership, the OECD and UNDP would form a 'joint support team' providing lean secretariat functions – that is, without creating a whole new structure which would go against the global light, country focused approach embraced in Busan.

[22] Specifically, Indicator 1 on results-based frameworks; Indicator 2 on CSO enabling environment; Indicator 3 on the role of the private sector; Indicator 4 on transparency; and Indicator 8 on gender equality.

[23] M. Martin and R. Watts (2012), 'Monitoring Implementation of the Busan Partnership Agreement: Why "Global Light" and "Country-Focussed" Must Work Together Effectively', London: UK Aid Network, http://www.ukan.org.uk/fileadmin/user_upload/monitoring-the-busan-agreement-april-18-2012_1_.pdf

[24] The global civil society network CIVICUS is providing technical support in finalizing this indicator, based on its own Civil Society Index (CSI). For more information see https://www.civicus.org/what-we-do-126/cross-cutting-projects/csi

[25] Programme-based approaches (PBAs) are a way of providing cooperation through coordinated support for a local development program or national development strategy. The official definition of PBAs in included in the Paris Declaration.

[26] The eighth MDG agreed by the UN in 2000 aims to develop a Global Partnership for Development by 2015. It includes six targets: 1) Develop further an open, rule-based, predictable, non-discriminatory trading and financial system 2) Address the special needs of least developed countries 3) Address the special needs of landlocked countries and small island developing states 4) Deal comprehensively with developing countries' debt 5) In cooperation with pharmaceutical companies, provide access to affordable, essential drugs in developing countries 6) In cooperation with the private sector, make available benefits of new technologies, especially ICTs. For more information see http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/global.shtml

12

OXFAM

Oxfam is an international confederation of 17 organizations networked together in 92 countries, as part of a global movement for change, to build a future free from the injustice of poverty:
Oxfam America (www.oxfamamerica.org)
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Oxfam-in-Belgium (www.oxfamsol.be)
Oxfam Canada (www.oxfam.ca)
Oxfam France (www.oxfamfrance.org)
Oxfam Germany (www.oxfam.de)
Oxfam GB (www.oxfam.org.uk)
Oxfam Hong Kong (www.oxfam.org.hk)
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The outcome of the 2nd High Level Meeting of the Global Partnership for Effective Development Co-operation and why it matters

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The [Global Partnership for Effective Development Co-operation](#) (here just the Global Partnership) held its second High-Level Meeting in Nairobi, Kenya on 30 November - 1 December 2016. Dozens of preparatory gatherings and side events complemented a programme focused on the contribution of development co-operation to Agenda 2030.[1] This paper provides an assessment of what the meeting accomplished, what challenges emerged and how the development co-operation community can tackle them.

WHAT THE MEETING ACCOMPLISHED

Inclusiveness at work

Compared to previous similar conferences, participation in this High-Level Meeting was massive – about 4,600 people from 158 countries and all the main constituencies, from Kenya's President Kenyatta to representatives from youths, migrants and women farmers' associations, from governments to trade unions to parliamentarians. This level of diversity allowed for a healthy mix of views that spurred some frank conversations and challenging questions, particularly at the side events.

The Global Partnership is a uniquely inclusive global initiative in which non-state actors play a direct and full role, alongside governments, in its governance and outcomes. The fact that such a diverse policy-making community is able not just to hold complex discussions about development co-operation, poverty and inequality, but also agree on a [final outcome document](#) shows the potential of the Global Partnership model, where all relevant constituencies come together on equal footing. While it may take years before this kind of governance is even considered in the broader context of Agenda 2030 implementation, the Global Partnership meeting in Nairobi effectively demonstrated inclusiveness at work, in a process that should become the norm for other development fora.

Stronger linkages with Agenda 2030

Another major accomplishment coming out of Nairobi is a deeper understanding of how the Global Partnership can contribute to implementing Agenda 2030. Put simply, development co-operation alone cannot achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, but it can help ensure no-one is left behind.[2]

Development assistance, from a growing diversity of providing countries, is a resource that can be fully devoted to achieving the SDGs. Rhetoric apart, the Nairobi meeting highlighted how development co-operation will continue to be essential for any developing country to escape poverty and reduce inequality, even when other kinds of development resources come into play. This clarification is important as it allows the Global Partnership to retain a focus within Agenda 2030 and strive for greater impact in favour of those populations that need help the most.

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[1] Agenda 2030 refers to the seventeen Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) approved by the United Nations in September 2015 and set to expire in 2030.

[2] See para. 13 of the Nairobi outcome document. You can find an excellent detailed analysis of the outcome document by Aidwatch Canada [here](#).

2

Recognising the importance of monitoring the quality of development co-operation

Another distinctive trait of the Global Partnership that came out strongly, both in the outcome document and at the Nairobi meeting itself, is its role in monitoring the quality of development co-operation against commitments for reform made in Busan (2011), Mexico City (2014) and now Nairobi (2016) by countries and actors that identify with the Global Partnership. Through a set of ten indicators, the Global Partnership measures progress on traditional aid, like aid predictability or the use of developing country procurement systems, as well as progress on other important dimensions of development co-operation, such as tracking budget allocations to promote gender equality and an enabling environment for civil society organisations.

After two rounds of monitoring since Busan in 2011, reiterating the importance of investing in this work was no small feat. The Global Partnership's monitoring framework is one the few tools available to hold each other to account in development co-operation today. Despite multiple calls in the lead up to the High-Level Meeting to downplay accountability in favour of less committal 'learning exchanges', the monitoring framework received widespread support in Nairobi, where it was the topic of a dedicated, full-day workshop. A revised framework was recognised in the outcome document as a "unique instrument for mutual accountability," which will contribute directly to the monitoring of the means to achieve the SDGs in the coming years.[3]

A few concrete opportunities to improve effectiveness

Nairobi marked a victory for those developing countries and civil society organisations denouncing the lack of continued progress on the so-called 'unfinished business' – the unfulfilled aid effectiveness commitments from previous High Level political Fora in Paris (2005) and Accra (2008), which some traditional donors were keen to dismiss. As essential elements of the principle of country ownership, these commitments relate to the use of country systems by aid providers, improved transparency in aid transactions, and the untying of aid, among others. Last-minute negotiations led to an agreement to "develop time-bound action plans"[4] that would put a target date back on many of those commitments. It was a concrete step forward to save an agenda that is still considered important by traditional aid recipients.

After a hard-fought battle, civil society organisations also succeeded in defending past Global Partnership pledges to support an 'enabling environment' in which CSOs can operate. At a time when restrictions against organised civil society have reached record-high levels around the world,[5] a commitment in the outcome document to maximise civic space is an accomplishment in itself. In the lead-up to the Meeting, CSOs faced resistance from a number of developing country governments to remove these commitments from the Nairobi outcome document. Civil society went even farther in Nairobi and managed to achieve a new forward-looking commitment to "reverse the trend of shrinking of civic space wherever it is taking

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[3] See in particular para. 5 and 30-32 of the Nairobi outcome document.
[4] See para. 35.
[5] See for example CSO Partnership for Development Effectiveness, *GPEDC Indicator Two. Civil society operates in an environment that maximizes its engagement in and contribution to development. An assessment of evidence*, June 2016.

3

place."[6] It will fall largely on civil society to make sure these promises turn into action, but the final text turned out to be a lot better than feared.

In addition, the Nairobi meeting marked progress on the governance of the Global Partnership. While non-state actors have played a major role on its Steering Committee, the Partnership has been led by three Ministers as Co-Chairs (currently Germany, Bangladesh and Uganda). However, for the first time the Global Partnership will now formally consider appointing a 'non-executive Co-Chair' representing civil society organisations, trade unions, local authorities, parliamentarians, philanthropic organisations and business. These constituencies have been asked to put together a concrete proposal in the coming months on how they envisage working together[7] – quite a challenge given the differences among some of these actors. Adding a non-executive Co-Chair is nonetheless a rare opportunity for stakeholders other than governments to shape the development co-operation agenda from a position of leadership. It is a clear sign that the time has come to bring the principles of inclusiveness at the top of the alliance too. It remains to be seen how non-executive stakeholders will plan to work in collaboration with the other Co-Chairs, where there may be political differences, to maximise the impact of the Global Partnership in the coming years.

EMERGING CHALLENGES

Few Ministers in sight

The most glaring, and worrying, shortcoming of the second High-Level Meeting was the low number of high-level Ministers from donor countries attending. Only three Ministers came from Ireland, the Netherlands and Sweden. Other donor delegations were led by lower-ranking officials. Unlike in Busan in 2011 and Mexico City in 2014, the UN Secretary-General did not participate.

As delegates, we heard two basic reasons for this trend: 1) Despite rhetorical identification with the SDGs, the Global Partnership does not make strong enough a case to attract political decision-makers; and 2) In the context of the need for diverse funding sources for the SDGs, the Global Partnership's focus on development cooperation is losing relevance in the international development arena. These factors seem to have been mutually reinforcing, both of them drawing from a Global Partnership narrative that is still perceived as too vague and too rooted in an aid paradigm (despite the acknowledged continued importance of traditional aid for achieving the SDGs). Not surprisingly, media coverage of the meeting was also very low.

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[6] See para. 18.
[7] See para. 22 ff. of Annex 1 to the Nairobi outcome document.

4

Minimal representation from the BRICS

Global Partnership skeptics have been quick to notice the absence of high-level representatives from BRICS countries (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) in Nairobi[8]. Historically, these countries have raised concerns about the legitimacy of the Global Partnership, which is not a UN forum, although it brings together 161 countries and 56 organisations that identify with the principles for effective development co-operation, and is supported jointly by the UN Development Programme (UNDP) and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). Other institutions from the South, such as the Network of Southern Think Tanks, claim the Global Partnership reflects an outdated world order that cannot fully capture the complexity of South-South Co-operation in today's development discourse.

Lots of commitments without a date

Out of the 23-page final outcome document there is **only one commitment with an explicit deadline** attached: Reducing the transaction cost of migrant remittances to less than three percent and ensuring that no remittance corridor requires charges higher than five per cent by 2030.[9] In the absence of other clear targets, or even agreed plans for implementation in areas where a time-specific target may be problematic, operationalising what is already a voluntary agreement will be left to subjective interpretation.

A robust monitoring framework, implemented at global and country level, can assist in promoting attention to important areas in the global commitments, but in itself, no monitoring framework can substitute for the political will to work together to develop new approaches and practices consistent with the principles for effective development co-operation.

The obvious question that comes to mind is whether the absence of explicit deadlines and/or plans for implementation was deliberate. Perhaps it was the result of constituencies sitting on the fence, waiting for someone else to start, but also the complexity of defining what various commitments mean in the practice of development co-operation. How does one, for example, give a time-specific target for required "behaviour change" by development stakeholders who have agreed to achieve country ownership? In other areas, such as tied aid, time-bound targets are more possible. We are missing a long-overdue conversation around these important implementation issues.

What role for the private sector in future development co-operation?

The outcome document also features ambiguous statements that potentially undermine the original purpose of development co-operation, particularly when it comes to private finance. One such example is the mention that Official Development Assistance can be used to "unlock additional finance" to support

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[8] According to the German Development Institute Russia attended the Nairobi meeting. See related article here. According to other sources, the BRICS were represented by lower-ranking government officials and other stakeholder groups, particularly at the side events on South-South Co-operation.

[9] See para. 40 of the outcome document. This commitment was originally made at the third International Conference on Financing for Development in 2015 (see para. 54 of the Addis Ababa Action Agenda).

5

initiatives for private sector development and infrastructure.[10] It is no secret that donors are struggling to find additional resources to fund public goods, and that they are increasingly turning to using development co-operation funds as a lever that can generate private funding.

In promoting such leveraging, the Nairobi outcome document uncritically suggests that the incentive of the profit motive for private sector initiatives will result in leaving no-one behind in the achievement of the SDGs,[11] despite a wealth of evidence to the contrary. Unlike other stakeholders in development, the private sector is never called upon to address the development impact of these initiatives on the reduction of poverty and inequalities. However, subsequent paragraphs do reference important accountability frameworks for the business sector, in terms of transparency about its operations, and "giving respect to freedom of association and collective bargaining, and engaging in social dialogue."[12]

What these commitments mean for the accountability of the business sector remains unclear at best. The renewed mandate of the Global Partnership raises concerns when it says that current effectiveness commitments, which include those relating to transparency and accountability, "relate mainly to public partners."[13] This statement contradicts the shared principles of effective development co-operation – country ownership, focus on development results, transparency and mutual accountability – on which the Global Partnership has been founded. It suggests that, in practice, business needs not be transparent or accountable.

Translating global commitments to country and institutional practices

The perennial challenge of the Global Partnership – and its predecessor, the pre-Busan Working Party on Aid Effectiveness - has been how to ensure that global commitments in a voluntary process not only lead to changes in development co-operation practices at the country level, but also contribute to the ultimate goal of eradicating poverty, reducing inequalities and advancing the rights of those affected by poverty, particularly women and girls. Unfortunately in several critical areas for country ownership, the Second Progress Report, prepared for the High Level Meeting, indicated that progress has been very limited since the Busan agreement in 2011 (e.g. predictability of aid flows, use of country systems or untying aid).

Without specific opportunities for donors, recipient governments and non-state actors to participate in institutionalised spaces for dialogue at country level on the ways that more effective development co-operation can support the priorities of a given country, implementation may just remain an empty word. These fora need to be closely integrated into country-level inclusive strategies for implementing the SDG country priorities.

Yet, despite rhetorical emphasis on the centrality of the SDGs for the future of the Global Partnership, the section of the outcome document on transparency and accountability only calls on recipient countries to "update existing arrangements for mutual accountability at country level," but with no accompanying commitments by donors to effectively engage with these fora.[14] Some ten years after the Paris Declaration, the Second Progress Report points out that less than half of the 80 countries participating in

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[10] See para. 23 of the outcome document.
[11] See para 61.
[12] See paras 81, 79a and 79b.
[13] See para. 11 of Annex 1 to the outcome document.
[14] See paras 71-81, in particular para. 75(g).

6

the monitoring exercise implemented mutual reviews to track progress.[15]

Accountability is not only an issue for governments. As an inclusive partnership, non-state actors are equally called to be accountable and transparent. As noted above, such commitments for the private sector as a development actor are rather weakly expressed, with worrying implications for the future of development co-operation. CSOs were also challenged in the negotiations for the outcome document to describe in greater detail their commitments to improve their effectiveness as development actors, drawing from the eight Istanbul Principles for CSO Development Effectiveness.[16] The fact that CSO commitments are now spelled out in this outcome document may require greater attention by CSOs in documenting progress in all of these areas in future monitoring rounds, not just on accountability mechanisms, as was the case in the second monitoring round in 2016.

WHAT THE DEVELOPMENT CO-OPERATION COMMUNITY CAN DO NOW

Bringing more clarity

There are several ways the Global Partnership can deliver after the Nairobi meeting, despite some of the challenges above. In the five years since its inception, the Global Partnership has developed a promising monitoring framework, to be refined this year. The Partnership has produced a credible Theory of Change, which is one of its best contributions to global development discussions and deserves much more attention. There is an agreement to carry out periodical evaluations of its work. These steps are essential to bring more clarity about what the Global Partnership has accomplished over the past five years. Importantly, they will inform what more the Partnership can do to promote behaviour and policy change in development co-operation in the context of Agenda 2030.

In the coming months it will be critical that there be more explicit agreement on a basic set of parameters and common understanding among Global Partnership stakeholders – What is meant by development co-operation? Is effective development co-operation the same as development effectiveness? If not, how do they differ and support each other? This is a crucial discussion that has been long overdue, causing a fair amount of confusion on the scope and level of ambition of the Global Partnership.[17] Working towards some common understanding on these questions among the Co-Chairs and in the Steering Committee would be time well spent. Such understanding will improve the monitoring framework but the result might also help shed some light on contentious issues, such as when and how development co-operation funds might be used to generate private investments for achieving specific SDGs.

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[15] *Ibid.*, p. 115 ff.
[16] See paras 49, 57, 67, and 80.
[17] On the definition of 'development effectiveness' see also Duncan Green's blog post of 25 November 2016 here.

7

Effective co-operation also means effective communication

The low turnout of Ministers from provider countries in Nairobi is an alarm bell that political interest in the Global Partnership may be waning. A more convincing narrative for the Global Partnership taking account current realities in global politics, including significant changes in particular donor countries such as the United States and the UK, will be essential going forward. A strong vision builds on a clear understanding of the role, scope and specific commitments – where the Global Partnership can contribute, and where it is not well positioned. A message that even busy politicians can quickly grasp, rooted in well-presented evidence of development co-operation's importance for our shared national interests.

The principles for effective development co-operation need to guide the practice, but the Partnership also needs to bring the communicators into the policy discussion from the start, instead of just asking them to repackage someone else's thoughts. Skilled communicators and policymakers should not be afraid to challenge each other more often to unpack complex messages together for the benefit of a broader audience. An exclusive aid effectiveness narrative may no longer reflect today's complex development co-operation world, yet we can draw useful lessons from it to forge deeper and more effective messages on development co-operation.

Strategy, not just tactics

The Nairobi outcome document succeeded in providing a convincing vision of what the Global Partnership can do in the context of Agenda 2030. In many ways, the Partnership is in a stronger position than ever before, despite some of the challenges. Now is the time to turn the vision and commitments agreed in Nairobi into concrete action, but how?

Besides the steps described above, the Steering Committee should devise a concerted strategy around three main pillars:

1. **Agreeing on the scope, plans and timeline for implementing the commitments** shared by the overall Global Partnership community, as well as the pledges made by individual constituencies;

2. **Identifying options for structured dialogue with key development stakeholder groups**, reaching out to upper middle-income countries – including the BRICS, if they are willing – and facilitating consultation among recipient governments, perhaps through a mechanism similar to the pre-Busan Partner Country Caucus;

3. **Using the findings from the second Progress Report to guide future action, particularly in strengthened mutual accountability fora at country level**. Recipient governments should lead regular and meaningful dialogue with all development stakeholders on the monitoring findings (and development co-operation more broadly) in country. The outcomes of these discussions should feed into the national planning, follow-up and review mechanisms for SDG implementation.

Crucially, given the potential turmoil in global politics and its impact on development co-operation in the coming year, the Steering Committee needs to take a strategic, longer-term approach if it wants to see

8

real impact on development outcomes in the coming years. Implementing commitments requires action plans, or else the Global Partnership may lose credibility in the international development arena. Engaging upper middle income countries cannot just be a priority six months before High-Level Meetings. The monitoring framework should be used on an ongoing basis, not just around High-Level Meetings, and adapted to the nature of South-South Co-operation with input from countries such as Mexico, which contributed to the work of the Monitoring Advisory Group. There is an urgent need to **shift from efficient tactics to effective strategies**.

Conclusions

The global community is facing a year that may bring great uncertainty to multilateral efforts for development co-operation and the fight against climate change. In 2017, the new US administration, the Brexit negotiations, the outcomes of impending elections in Europe, and potential changing roles for China in global affairs will all bring heightened concern for the future of development co-operation.

The Global Partnership, as documented in the second Progress Report, has started to deliver in some areas after years of ambiguity. Its inclusive governance model, country-level support and accountability through effective monitoring, and its relevance to the SDG agenda, make a convincing case for its added value. These achievements now need to be sustained in the face of likely assaults on the values of multilateralism and international solidarity. It is all the more important for the Partnership to embrace clarity, vision, and strategy as its best allies going forward.

Focusing on those at risk of being left behind, those who have experienced the consequences of growing inequality from current paths to development, demands new thinking on the future of development assistance. But it also requires greater attention to the underlying reasons for persistent lack of progress in some areas important for meaningful country ownership. The Nairobi High Level Meeting reminds the global community that development co-operation has a clear job to do: focusing on the most vulnerable. And that can be done most effectively when state and non-state actors come together to work through constructive solutions. Now is the time for all those who adhere to the Global Partnership's principles, norms and commitments to step up their action, and step forward.

9

A WIN-WIN:

Multi-year flexible funding is better for people and better value for donors

CONTENTS

ACRONYMS

CAR	Central African Republic	**MYF**	Multi-Year Financing
DFID	United Kingdom Department for International Development	**NGO**	Non-Governmental Organisation
DI	Development Initiatives	**PBA**	Programme-Based Approach
ECHO	European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations	**RRM**	Rapid Response Mechanism
GBV	Gender Based Violence	**SCAN**	Systematic Cost Analysis
IDP	Internally Displaced Person	**UNHCR**	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
IRC	International Rescue Committee		

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Multi-year and flexible humanitarian funding supports better outcomes and delivers efficiencies. Evidence of the benefits of multi-year flexible funding has steadily grown in recent years; numerous studies - published by think tanks, humanitarian organisations and UN Agencies, and commissioned by donors - point to effectiveness and efficiency gains in programme quality.[1] Bilateral donors have also raised their multi-year contributions, in part thanks to the Grand Bargain commitment to increase multi-year humanitarian planning and funding, but the needle has not moved far enough.[2] As the COVID-19 pandemic threatens to increase the cost of humanitarian response and shrink aid budgets, the case for better value for money is more relevant than ever.

Why then is the vast majority of humanitarian programming still short-term? The picture is incomplete due to lack of data, particularly on what happens after funding has reached UN agencies, which receive more than half of all humanitarian financing.[3] What is known is that even as bilateral donors increase multi-year commitments, most implementing partners, including NGOs, national and local organisations, have seen little increase in the multi-year amounts they receive, as the latest Grand Bargain annual independent report confirmed.[4] Until UN agencies cascade multi-year and flexible funding to frontline responders, the full potential of multi-year flexible funding will not be realised.

This report by International Rescue Committee (IRC), with support from Development Initiatives (DI), builds on the already strong evidence base for multi-year flexible funding. A comparative analysis of two cash programmes in Somalia funded by DFID and Sida, which draws on data collected using the Systematic Cost Analysis (SCAN) tool developed by IRC with Save the Children and Mercy Corps, provides preliminary indications of quantifiable cost efficiency gains of multi-year funding. And three case studies—two multi-sector programmes in the Central African Republic (CAR) and Cameroon supported through Sida's Programme-Based Approach (PBA) and a youth livelihoods programme in Côte d'Ivoire funded by the Mastercard Foundation—reveal the qualitative benefits of multi-year, flexible financing.

In particular, five key findings emerge:

1. **Multi-year funding can lead to notable cost-efficiency gains**. For example, comparing similar short-term and long-term cash transfer programmes in Somalia showed that while the short-term programme incurred $0.67 in delivery costs for every $1 transferred to clients, the longer-term programme costs only $0.37 to transfer the same amount—a saving of 44 percent.

2. **Multi-year funding can make programme delivery more effective**. Evidence from IRC programs in Côte D'Ivoire, CAR, and Cameroon reaffirm a range of potential benefits of multi-year funding, including improved programme design, time to start-up in new locations effectively, and greater staff retention. These efficiency gains ultimately improve programme effectiveness, with more time to deepen trust with local partners and communities— essential to strengthening partnerships and realising the ambition of localising aid.

3. **Cross-cutting issues, such as gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, benefit from multi-year financing**. The multi-year nature of the PRO-Jeunes programme has been critical to achieving gender norms changes, which are necessary for women to access non-traditional employment sectors safely. Predictable and flexible financing can also support the addition of gender transformative interventions that build on the core programme, such as engaging men in IRC's Gender-Based Violence (GBV) programming in Cameroon.

4. **Gains from multi-year funding are highest when they benefit from flexibility as well**. When agencies secure longer-term funding *and* enjoy sufficient flexibility within funding arrangements, they can respond quickly to changing circumstances and emerging needs. This model is more efficient than under shorter-term, less flexible funding where agencies must re-negotiate donor agreements or apply for new funds.

5. **Effective multi-year programming requires investments of time and resources to establish means of working, shifting organisational practices and culture, and building trust with public donors and private funding partners**. In-country staff require dedicated resources and time to transition to a more adaptive, long-term approach.

There is no excuse to delay aid reform any further. To better serve our clients, particularly in light of the deepening needs produced by the COVID-19 crisis, the humanitarian community must do better—and faster.

Key recommendations for donors and UN agencies are therefore to:

1. **Agree to set a target at this year's annual Grand Bargain meeting for more multi-year flexible funding to frontline responders and joint problem-solve between donors and UN agencies to overcome political and technical barriers to effective pass-through mechanisms by the five-year Grand Bargain anniversary in 2021;**

2. **Provide more accurate and timely data on the multi-year, flexible funding cascading to frontline implementers; and**

3. **Pilot innovative approaches on multi-year, flexible funding and take them to scale.**

INTRODUCTION

Conflicts last on average 37 years and refugee crises last on average a decade,[5] requiring long-term financing to support protracted needs. Yet for too long, humanitarian financing has remained short-term (6-12 month grants). In addition, the vast majority of humanitarian financing has been earmarked, making it difficult for implementers to adapt their programmes as crises evolve.[6]

Donors have made uneven progress towards disbursing more multi-year and flexible humanitarian financing over the past four years. As a positive step, more than half of Grand Bargain signatories reported activities towards Core Commitment 7.1a (*Signatories increase multiyear collaborative and flexible planning and multi-year funding. Aid organisations ensure that the same terms of multi-year funding agreements are applied with their implementing partners*) in 2019. Of this, 69 percent of donors scored "good" or "excellent" on progress—a significant increase from 30 percent of signatories in 2017.[7] However, while some donors, such as Germany, ECHO, DFID and Sida, have made significant improvements in providing multi-year financing to UN and NGO partners, most UN intermediaries have fallen short on their commitment, passing on multi-year funding they receive in shorter-term disbursements to NGOs. And overall, there is room for improvement on flows of multi-year funding to first-line responders and on tracking these flows more transparently.[8]

Some UN Agencies and bilateral donors have continued to request further evidence of the effectiveness and efficiency gains from multi-year funding in humanitarian contexts—even though they already agreed to increase their multi-year flexible financing through the Grand Bargain in 2016.

The evidence base is still growing, but there is already substantial evidence that demonstrates the benefits of multi-year and flexible humanitarian financing. Bilateral donors, UN Agencies, and NGOs have all contributed to this evidence base.[9] Research to date shows multi-year financing can increase the effectiveness of programmes in humanitarian settings, as well as drive cost-savings. Case studies–including those captured here–have suggested that flexible, multi-year financing can enable:

▌ Strategic planning aimed at achieving outcomes, not just outputs;[10]

▌ Improved relations with local actors and humanitarian access;[11]

▌ Early and rapid response, and shifting of resources as needs evolve;[12]

▌ Cost savings through staff retention, improved planning and reduced administrative burdens;[13]

▌ More robust exit strategies and sustainable programming.[14]

Beyond limited evidence against multi-year financing, other challenges are preventing donors and UN Agencies from implementing multi-year financing – in particular, bureaucratic impediments. For example, UNHCR claims its own financial rules prevent it from disbursing multi-year financing.[15] In addition, there is a lack of incentives for donors to make reforms that would enable multi-year, flexible financing, as well as countervailing pressures on aid budgets and on donors for increased domestic aid visibility and accountability. Without stronger incentives and enforcement measures, accountability to the Grand Bargain has proven insufficient.

The COVID-19 pandemic makes the case for multi-year, flexible financing more relevant than ever. Longer-term, flexible financing for ongoing humanitarian crises better enables humanitarian responders to adapt their programmes to support the health crisis response. Further, the pandemic will require multi-year financing to support the long-term consequences of COVID-19 in humanitarian situations–which now confront a double emergency.

ABOUT THIS REPORT

This report contributes to the evidence base supporting multi-year and flexible financing as part of the Grand Bargain process. It directly responds to donors' demand for more and better evidence that multi-year, flexible financing can be more effective and efficient than short-term grants, and identifies where and how different elements of predictability and flexibility in funding can enable effectiveness and efficiency gains. Key findings draw on case studies of International Rescue Committee (IRC) programmes in Côte d'Ivoire, CAR, and Cameroon to illustrate the effectiveness gains of multi-year, flexible financing and on two IRC cash programmes in Somalia to demonstrate the efficiency gains of multi-year, flexible funding.

Annex I presents key elements of the IRC cash programmes analysed in the report. Annex II provides additional background information and data used for the analysis of these programmes.

This report is produced by IRC with support from Development Initiatives (DI).

KEY FINDINGS

Five key findings emerge from the two case studies and SCAN analysis.

1. Multi-year funding can lead to notable cost-efficiency gains.

Comparing similar short-term and long-term cash transfer programmes in Somalia showed that longer-term funding led to significantly more cost-efficient delivery of assistance. While the short-term programme incurred $0.67 in delivery costs for every $1 transferred to clients, the longer-term programme costs only $0.37 to transfer the same amount–a saving of 44 percent.

2. Multi-year funding can enable improved programme design and make programme delivery more effective.

Evidence from IRC programmes in Côte D'Ivoire, CAR and Cameroon reaffirm a range of potential benefits that multi-year funding can enable. These include:

- *improved programme design* enabled through initial one-year process of collaborative and evidence-based programme design as part of long-term strategy

- *time to conduct effective start-up activities in new locations*

- *improved programme effectiveness through learning and programme adaptation*, with enhanced benefits where multi-year funding is also flexible to allow for quick and easy re-prioritisation of shifts in programme focus

- *particular benefits for certain types of inherently long-term programs*, where outcomes are achieved incrementally over time, such as livelihoods programmes, or where programmes require procurement and investment in infrastructure

- *greater staff retention*, reducing administrative costs of recruitment, and improving programme efficiency and effectiveness through learning and retained programme knowledge

- *deepened relationships* with clients and other stakeholders, which allow affected populations more time to recover from the crisis and regain control over their lives

- *building institutional relationships with communities and other stakeholders*, deepening local trust of the IRC and its programmes necessary foundations for effective programming and ultimate delivery of programmes to local partners

- *deeper and ongoing access* to areas of humanitarian intervention thanks to higher and better engagement with local actors.

3. Cross-cutting issues, such as gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, benefit from multi-year financing.

Shifting behaviors and social norms tends to happen over time, not overnight. The multi-year nature of the PRO-Jeunes programme has been critical to achieving norms changes, which are necessary for women to safely access non-traditional employment sectors, such as in the cotton value chain. In this case, the longer-term financing enabled IRC to support transforming gender norms by engaging positive female role models active in the cotton value chain to encourage communities to allow young women farmers to participate in a male dominated sector.

Predictable and flexible financing can also support the addition of gender transformative interventions that build on the core programme. In Cameroon, for instance, IRC was able to add aspects to its core Gender Based Violence (GBV) programming, such as engaging men in accountability practices and providing tailored empowerment programming for adolescent girls.

4. Gains from multi-year funding are highest when they benefit from flexibility as well.

Confirming existing evidence, multi-year and flexible funding combined can enable rapid response and adaptation to changing humanitarian needs.[16] Where longer term funding is secured *and* there is sufficient flexibility within funding arrangements, agencies can respond quickly to changing circumstances and emerging needs. In CAR and Cameroon, multi-year funding provided by Sida combined with the Programme Based Approach, allowed for significant programme flexibility, with funding softly earmarked to outcome areas or locations in line with the country Strategic Action Plans. This enabled IRC to adjust programming to meet needs as they evolved during a crisis. This is a more efficient, quicker process than under shorter term, less flexible funding where re-negotiating donor agreements or applying for new funds would be necessary.

5. Effective multi-year programming requires investments of time and resources to establish ways of working, shift organisational practices and culture and build trusted relationships with public donors and private funding partners.

Multi-year financing provides a level of stability and predictability, and flexibility provides room to adapt programmes to meet changing needs. However, in-country staff require dedicated resources and time to transition to a more adaptive, long-term approach through which the greatest benefits can be drawn from multi-year and flexible funding. At the same time, establishing a close, trusting relationship with donors and partners can be a foundation for longer-term, more flexible and administratively light funding. Such close relationships can also enable added benefits through close and active involvement of public donors and private funding partners in programme design.

RECOMMENDATIONS

These findings represent further evidence that increasing flexible multi-year funding is one of the best ways to get lasting outcomes for affected populations and value for money for humanitarian donors. While producing additional supporting research is helpful, it needs to be matched by change in donor practice.

To improve the quality of humanitarian financing and ensure that more multi-year, flexible financing is available to implementers, donors and UN agencies should take the following actions:

1. **Agree to set a target at this year's annual Grand Bargain meeting for more multi-year flexible funding to frontline responders and joint problem-solve between donors and UN agencies to overcome political and technical barriers to effective pass-through mechanisms by the five-year Grand Bargain anniversary in 2021.**

   As the five-year anniversary of the Grand Bargain approaches, donors and UN agencies must match the technical work on multi-year, flexible funding with a high-level agreement – including through Executive Boards – to unblock existing bottlenecks that hamper effective pass-through of this funding to frontline implementers. The agreement must lead to a one-year plan to increase multi-year flexible funding to frontline implementers and ensure the funding is passed through to them by a set target by 2021. Now more than ever, the response to the COVID-19 pandemic is highlighting the urgent need for this quality funding.

2. **Provide more accurate data on the multi-year, flexible funding cascading to frontline implementers.**

   Regularly publishing more granular data to existing platforms (OCHA's Financial Tracking Service) and standards (IATI) on the multi-year, flexible funding going to partners on the ground is a matter of transparency. Donors and UN agencies in particular should discuss how to join efforts to ensure their stronger accountability for where multi-year and flexible funding goes - and how fast. For this data to be useful, it should be published and updated as regularly as possible, for example on a quarterly basis.

3. **Pilot innovative approaches on multi-year, flexible funding and take them to scale.**

   Initiatives to test new or different ways to channel more multi-year, flexible funding to the ground remain isolated. While some progress has been made, and there are now a growing number of funding arrangements that evidence the value of different properties of predictability and flexibility,[17] there needs to be more sustained efforts to learn from and build upon these approaches and an agreement to take them to scale when they succeed. For the Grand Bargain to produce the transformational changes it set out to do in 2016, signatories should prioritise this discussion now, starting with the annual meeting in June 2020.

CASE STUDIES

DEMONSTRATING THE EFFICIENCIES OF MYF

With the growing scale of humanitarian needs, efficiency is a key priority for donors and implementing agencies. Beyond merely cutting overheads, achieving efficiency requires reaching the most people with the most assistance for every dollar of resources at our disposal. Cost-efficiency analysis is a method for measuring the ratio of what a programme costs to the outputs it achieves. The IRC, Save the Children and Mercy Corps have developed a Systematic Cost Analysis (SCAN) tool to ensure that analyses are rigorous and consistent across our programmes. For cash transfer programmes, the standard is to measure the delivery costs—including things like targeting processes, transfer fees, post-distribution monitoring, and project and country management—necessary for every dollar which clients receive.[18]

A comparative analysis of short- and long-term cash transfer programmes in Somalia

The humanitarian situation in Somalia is complex, intertwined with drought, floods, clan conflict, and a protracted war between Al Shabaab and the allied forces of the Federal Government of Somalia, assisted by the African Union Mission in Somalia. In 2018, about 5.4 million people in Somalia faced acute food insecurity (IPC Phases 2 and 3). In 2019, heavy rains in southern Somalia caused flash floods which damaged crops, arable land, household assets, roads, and other critical infrastructure. Beletweyne, a town in the Hiiraan region, was the most affected area; approximately 45,500 households were displaced, facing food insecurity and inadequate access to clean water, hygiene and sanitation services, and basic healthcare. In 2020, large swarms of locusts further threatened the country's fragile food security situation.

To illustrate the greater efficiency possible with multi-year funding sources, the IRC conducted a comparative cost-efficiency analysis of two IRC cash transfer programmes in Somalia: one long-term, and one short-term. The former is part of *Building Resilient Communities in Somalia* (BRCiS 2), funded by the UK Department for International Development (DFID) in Dhusamareb, Galkacyo, Burtinle and Galdogob from September 2018 to March 2022. The latter is part of *Lifesaving emergency response to the health and economic needs of people in the flood-affected areas of Beletweyne, Hiiraan province*, funded by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) from November 2019 to May 2020. The Sida award covers a period of six months while the DFID award covers a period of 43 months, building on a previous four-year phase. The key characteristics of the two respective funding agreements and programmes are summarised in Box 1 and Annex 1.

A comparative analysis of these programmes showed that **the longer-term funding led to significantly more cost-efficient delivery of assistance**. While the short-term programme incurred $0.67 in delivery costs for every $1 transferred to clients, the longer-term programme cost only $0.37 to transfer the same amount—a difference of 44 percent (see Figure 1).

BOX 1. Details of the DFID and Sida Grants

IRC is implementing a multisectoral programme funded by the UK Department for International Development (DFID), *Building Resilient Communities in Somalia* (BRCiS 2). This was a multi-phase project that began in 2013; the second and current phase began in 2018 for a period of three and a half years, therefore benefitting from long-term engagement with the communities and a stable source of funding from the donor. The cash transfer programme that this report analyzes was implemented between July 2019 and March 2020. BRCiS 2's allocation was $9,597,720 for 43 months. Within the long-term BRCiS project, three main sources of flexibility allowed for changes according to context: (1) budget flexibility allowed programme managers to adapt their programmes based on feedback from early warning systems; (2) within the main BRCiS grant budget , the consortium had set aside contingency budget lines called "Crisis Modifier" which could be activated in the event of emergencies—in this case the drought crisis in 2019; (3) those Crisis Modifier budget lines were found to be insufficient, so DFID provided additional top-up emergency funding to support the same households with more cash transfers during the drought crisis.

To respond to floods in southern Somalia, IRC also implemented the project *Lifesaving emergency response to the health and economic needs of people in the flood-affected areas of Beletweyne, Hiiraan province* from November 2019 to May 2020, funded by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida). Sida's total allocation to this programme was $521,485 for 6 months. This project was funded through Sida's Rapid Response Mechanism (RRM), an emergency response mechanism which enables 'a needs-based and fast humanitarian response immediately after a severe sudden onset humanitarian crisis or after a severe deterioration of an ongoing crisis.' The RRM is an important tool for Sida's humanitarian partners to launch a rapid response, access funding for crises where other funding may not be available, and respond when donor restrictions on existing secured funding don't enable a response. Such awards are usually disbursed quickly after a crisis hits, but allow some flexibility to change activities and budget lines (this project included a budget realignment in December 2019 to account for an exchange rate gain).

The shorter, Sida-funded project is part of their Rapid Response Mechanism (RRM) funding stream, which specifically targets severe sudden onset or severe deterioration of ongoing crises to provide a fast and needs-based humanitarian response. The multi-year funding was part of a large consortium project which allowed longer-term engagement with communities and relied on an existing financial relationship with the donor which could be used to channel assistance without additional paperwork or reporting. Within this long-term, large, and flexible project, IRC could reach more households and respond to the crisis quickly and efficiently instead of having to initiate new proposals every few months.

More generally, scale is one of the key factors which drives the cost-efficiency of humanitarian response in many sectors. Short-term programs can enable rapid response, particularly where flexible, multi-year funding is not available. At the same time, while the RRM mechanism remains a valuable funding tool, it is found that short-term programs can face significant difficulties in securing funding, identifying clients, and distributing aid to large numbers of people within their limited funding windows.

While these cost analyses provide the first quantitative evidence on the greater efficiency of long-term funding and programming, they come with some caveats. As with any comparative analysis, it is almost impossible to find two completely identical programmes to compare that only differ in the aspect of interest—in this case, the timeframe of funding. Thus there is a chance that other factors partly drive the observed cost differences, such as the needs of the target populations or the availability of mobile money platforms.
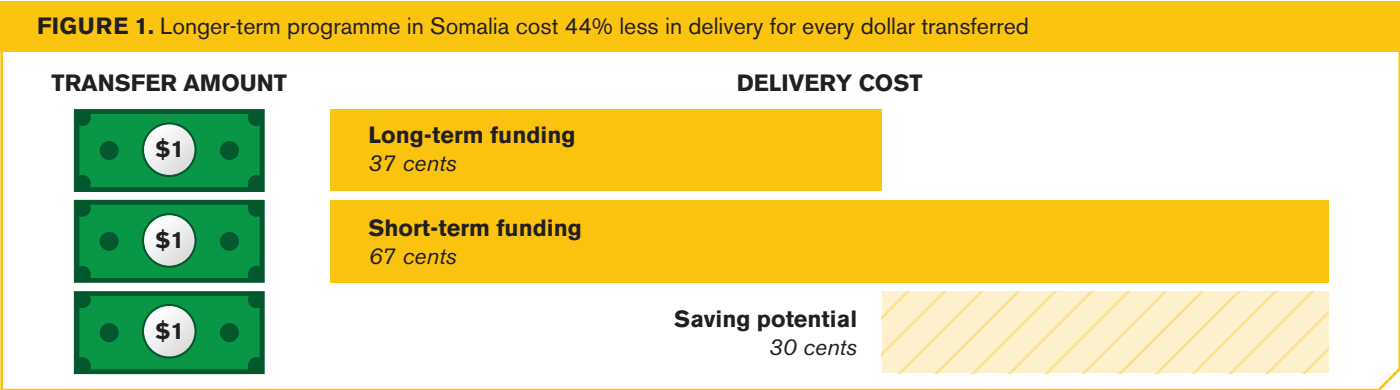
A sensitivity analysis showed that the slightly different transfer amounts per household did not drive the differences in cost-efficiency between the short- and long-term programmes. After adjusting the transfer amount for the short-term project to be equal to the average transfer amount with long-term project ($85 per household per transfer instead of $65 per household per transfer), the cost-transfer ratio for the multi-year project would still be 27 percent lower than for the short-term project ($0.51 versus $0.37).

Another reason to be confident in this evidence is that it clarifies some of the mechanisms through which longer-term programmes can increase efficiency: stronger relationships with beneficiary communities and investments in longer-term infrastructure for wider programme delivery.

Aside from effectiveness gains, longer-term funding enables deeper relationships with target communities which are also important for delivering efficient humanitarian assistance. Beyond the two cash programmes in Somalia analysed here, there are other relevant IRC examples of service delivery that demonstrate the added value of a longer-term investment in community engagement. In the case of sensitive service provision such as GBV case management or contraception, long-lasting relationships with beneficiary communities are crucial to wide take-up of these services. Comparative cost-effectiveness studies of family planning programmes have regularly shown that longer lasting—but more invasive—contraceptive methods such as IUDs are significantly more cost-effective than short-acting methods such as condoms. But delivering these longer-lasting methods requires a longstanding presence and deep trust with community members—feats which are difficult to achieve with short-term staff and presence:

> *In order to achieve such large scale, the program funded not only medical and outreach staff, but also rehabilitation of health facilities' rooms and extensive staff training. Additionally, the majority of clients in [this program] accepted long-acting methods, the provision of which requires more training and support than short-acting methods….Not only were many individuals reached, but these individuals were able to choose long-acting methods of contraception because of the available facilities and staff.[19]*

Multi-year funding also enables investments in longer-lasting infrastructure which make larger scale service provision possible. When providing sanitation services to displaced populations, for instance, implementers have the choice of constructing simpler pit latrines or more complicated yet more durable concrete structures. The latter require more materials and trained staff to construct but they remain usable for many times the life of a less durable structure. An IRC study of eight latrine construction programmes in refugee camps in Ethiopia showed that programmes which were able to serve more people for a longer period of time, typically through the construction of larger blocks of durable latrines, reached nearly twenty times as many people per dollar spent as the smallest-scale programmes (see Figure 2).[20]

FIGURE 1. Longer-term programme in Somalia cost 44% less in delivery for every dollar transferred

TRANSFER AMOUNT **DELIVERY COST**

$1 **Long-term funding** 37 cents

$1 **Short-term funding** 67 cents

$1 **Saving potential** 30 cents

NOTES: Cost analysis was performed according to IRC's standard methodology, using the SCAN Tool.[21]

FIGURE 2. Larger and durable latrines reach nearly 20 times as many people per dollar spent in Ethiopia
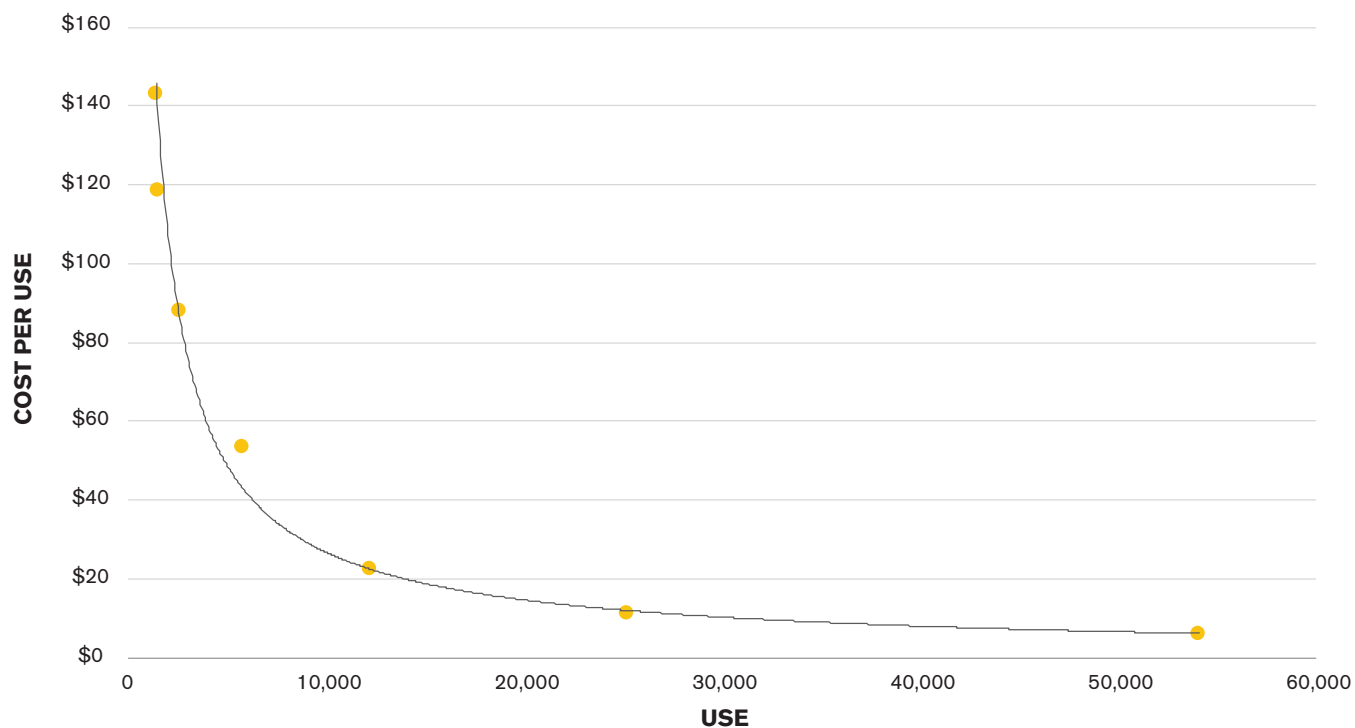
DEMONSTRATING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF MYF

Implementing Sida's Humanitarian Framework Agreement and Programme-Based Approach in Cameroon and Central African Republic

Context and programme

Central African Republic (CAR) and Cameroon are among a number of African countries currently facing a protracted humanitarian crisis. CAR has seen persistent instability since 2013, when an alliance of armed groups overran the capital. The IRC began working in CAR in December 2006, following an eruption of violence that forced thousands to flee their homes. Military-political crises have continued over the past few years. Although the government and 14 armed groups signed a peace deal in February 2019, it has only been partially observed and conflict continues to drive displacement and food security.[22] Today, armed groups effectively control more than two-thirds of the country. CAR is home to 600,000 IDPs and has driven 600,000 to neighboring countries—including Cameroon.[23]

Until relatively recently, Cameroon had avoided the instability and violence that other countries in the central African region have experienced. However, three distinct humanitarian crises render the country increasingly vulnerable: an armed conflict in the Northwest and Southwest, militancy in the Far North, and an influx of refugees from neighboring CAR as well as from Nigeria. Since 2014, brutal war in Cameroon's Far North region has devastated local communities and driven over a quarter of a million people from their homes, resulting in 2.1 million people in need of humanitarian aid. In 2016, escalated insecurity in the Northwest and Southwest regions—with clashes between non-state armed groups and the country's defense and security forces—contributed to massive internal displacement and resulted in another 1.3 million people in need of aid in these two regions.

In both CAR and Cameroon, the IRC has recently received multi-year financing from the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida). Funding is allocated through Sida's Humanitarian Framework Agreement (HFA)—a multi-year agreement that allows select NGOs to secure funding for short- and long-term life-saving interventions. While most of the allocations through the HFA are granted on an annual basis, IRC secured a multi-year award for some countries, including CAR and Cameroon; in fact, IRC's projects in these countries were among the first multi-year allocations provided by Sida through the HFA. IRC secured the multi-year financing primarily based on the existence of multi-year Humanitarian Response Plans at the country level. In addition to being multi-year, the funds are applied through a funding modality called the Programme-Based Approach (PBA). The PBA allows the financing to be softly earmarked, meaning the funds are allocated for a specific country strategy but not a specific project.[24] There is also budget and programmatic flexibility to shift interventions within and across strategic outcomes in order to adapt to changing contexts and needs.

Through the multi-year PBA grants, the IRC benefits from a significant degree of strategic planning and flexibility to implement humanitarian interventions that are responsive to the evolving context and needs of the people it serves (see Box 2). As discussed below, multi-year, flexible financing has enabled IRC to respond to crises in CAR and Cameroon in ways that strictly earmarked and short-term financing simply would not have allowed.

BOX 2. Sida PBA Grant Details and IRC-Donor Relations

In CAR, IRC's PBA grant was for two years, covering May 2018 to March 2020. Initial annual allocation was more than $950,000. In Cameroon, IRC's PBA grant was for three years, covering May 2018 to March 2021. Initial annual allocation was nearly $720,000. The Sida allocations in each country represent a little over 10 percent of IRC's overall operating budget.

In both countries, the funding was targeted at achieving outcomes identified in IRC's country-specific Strategic Action Plans and aligned with Sida's Humanitarian Framework Agreement and the country Humanitarian Response Plans. The grant agreements focused on achieving economic well-being and safety outcomes in CAR and in Cameroon.

At the proposal stage, IRC has to provide top-line information, such as outcome indicators and global country budget forecasts, and Sida does not request details on those indicators or a detailed budget. The PBA allows for funding to be softly earmarked to the IRC's own country Strategic Action Plan (SAP), either in parts or as a whole. Once approved, IRC maintains total budget flexibility and can make changes to the sub-outcomes, activities, locations, and target populations without requiring Sida's approval so long as interventions remain aligned with the SAP and the country Humanitarian Response Plan, to ensure interventions address the most acute needs. IRC prepares an annual report to Sida, which outlines any changes made to the programme, and key achievements per outcomes, rather than a list of activities. No detailed financial report is required, although there is an external audit.

Sida's Humanitarian Framework Agreement with the IRC is critical. It sets the basis for a trustful partnership which made the PBA grants possible. Joint IRC-Sida focal points manage this relationship, along with dialogue between the PBA lead at Sida and IRC about challenges and lessons learned.

Flexible, multi-year funding enabled IRC to be first responders in an emergency

Multi-year, flexible financing has allowed the IRC to respond faster and reach the most vulnerable in emergency situations. In CAR and Cameroon, IRC could quickly respond to emergency needs without any major budget or grant agreement changes. In 2018, conflict between armed groups in the commune of Mbrès reignited tensions that led to inter-community violence and displacement to the commune of Mala and its axes. In response, IRC teams extended their protection activities to Mala and Simandélé, supporting 243 newly displaced households with basic life-saving support, followed by recovery interventions; local leaders testified that IRC was the first organisation to respond to the crisis. IRC was able to quickly extend its project because it had already secured enough funding to cover the smaller-scale emergency; the grant agreement was not earmarked for specific locations or sectors; and the interventions were aligned with the overall strategic outcomes of the country Humanitarian Response Plan. In Cameroon, the IRC initiated a rapid response in February 2019 to meet the pressing needs of crisis-affected people in Goura, which had seen the arrival of 35,000 Nigerian refugees. PBA funding enabled the IRC to respond immediately and distribute 50 WASH kits while it awaited approval for additional financing to support the response. The IRC subsequently rehabilitated water points for Goura IDP camp.

Multi-year funding allowed for a sustained and phased programmatic approach, beyond initial emergency response

Multi-year financing has supported a phased programmatic approach, supporting longer-term outcomes that one year of programming does not traditionally achieve. In CAR, IRC was able to continue to work with and support women-led Community-Based Organisations (CBOs) that were supported in the first year of the project to achieve longer-term outcomes. In Year 1, the CBOs had received cash for the income-generating activities and in Year 2, the CBOs were able to build their own shop.

Looking ahead, they intend to set-up new income-generating activities. Similarly, in the Far North of Cameroon, the programme was first able to deliver basic needs and cash, followed by supporting income generating activities and Village Savings and Loans Associations (VSLAs). This process takes time; a lack of programmatic phasing, threatens the achievement of outcomes and risks a return to negative coping strategies to meet basic needs.

In addition, multi-year financing allowed the IRC to introduce additional aspects to its programme in Cameroon over time. Building on its core Gender-Based Violence (GBV) programming, IRC was able to add a gender transformative aspect to the programme, Engaging Men in Accountability Practices, as well as tailored empowerment programming for adolescent girls in humanitarian crises, Girl Shine. IRC was able to effectively plan for adding these aspects to the core programme because the financing was already guaranteed through the multi-year allocation and they had the freedom to adjust their planning and resources.

Multi-year funding arrangement provides time necessary to build trust with communities and other stakeholders through sustained programming

Multi-year financing has enabled IRC to build relationships with communities and other stakeholders, deepening local trust of the IRC and its programmes. Effective programming requires cultivating relationships with a range of local and national actors over time. In CAR, multi-year financing enabled IRC to provide emergency assistance and humanitarian recovery response beyond the peak of the crisis. IRC's continued presence during these phases of crisis and recovery helped increase community acceptance and participation in programmes. Similarly, in Cameroon, the IRC's programming over two years in some of the same localities in Mayo Sava and Logone-et-Chari has contributed to greater links and trust with the community. For example, IRC's community-based protection programming in the Far North has, over time, moved from a heavy training component to lighter follow-up on action plans because trust has been built between IRC and the protection committees IRC helped establish.

Protection committees have assumed increasing autonomy as they lead in identifying and mobilizing support to address emergency needs and protection risks.

Flexible and sustained funding has enabled the IRC to gain and maintain access to new areas, such as Southwest Cameroon, where access must be negotiated with local actors. **The multi-year financing provides IRC with sufficient time to conduct the activities necessary to enter new areas, such as stakeholder mapping, building trust with security actors, and building staff capacity for humanitarian negotiations**. Single-year funding would have necessitated separate start-up costs as well as a two to three months delay in programming to hire and train staff.

Flexibility of funding enables programme adaptations and improved outcomes

The application of multi-year financing combined with the PBA model, which allows for significant programme flexibility, has enabled IRC to adjust programming to meet evolving needs during a crisis. For example, just over a year into the programme in Cameroon, new needs emerged in the Southwest. IRC was able to pivot and extend its programming to the Southwest without having to secure approvals from Sida. In Cameroon, the IRC also added small-scale interventions to respond to new needs over time, such as constructing a solar-powered water network system and a WASH sensitisation in response to a cholera outbreak. Moreover, needs of some targeted populations shifted throughout implementation as IDPs settled in communities rather than separately in camps. Instead of constructing 25 latrines and showers in camps, IRC seamlessly shifted its approach to support construction of 200 family latrines, ensuring families could meet their sanitation needs safely and protect themselves from sanitation and hygiene-related diseases. Under a typical short-term, less flexible financing arrangement, this process would not have been as swift. IRC would have had to gain approval from the donor to change the project, or potentially apply for new financing to support the effort.

In addition, because the PBA supports the realisation of strategic outcomes and is less focused on specific outputs, financing through the mechanism can better support integrated and multi-sectoral interventions. In Cameroon, IRC has experienced a shift in integration through referrals across teams. For example, Women's Protection and Empowerment staff are referring legal assistance for GBV cases to Protection and Rule of Law staff; Economic Recovery and Development staff are referring civil documentation cases to Protection and Rule of Law staff; and Women's Empowerment and Protection staff are referring support for income generation activities for survivors of GBV to Economic Recovery and Development staff.

Efficiencies and capacity building through staff retention and reduced administrative burdens

In both CAR and Cameroon, **staff retention over the years of the project has created cost-efficiencies and enabled staff capacity building**. In CAR, some staff who were hired to work as part of the first year of the project were kept on to implement activities in the second year of the programme. These experienced staff have been able to build on lessons they learned in their first year and apply them to the new intervention areas in the second year.

IRC's experience in Cameroon has been similar. If the grant had been just one year and required applying for a second year to continue the program, the IRC would very likely have had to close out the programme for two to three months to hire and train new staff.

In addition to efficiencies from staff retention, multi-year flexible financing also reduces administrative costs and burdens typically experienced with short-term, earmarked grants. **The multi-year nature of the financing removes the need to apply for no cost extensions, and the flexibility of the grant allows for programme adaptations without donor approval**. Take IRC's financing from Sida overall as an example. Across IRC's 14 humanitarian projects and programmes and nine Rapid Response Mechanism projects funded by Sida in 2018, a total of 15 projects requested amendments requiring Sida approval to adjust interventions to the evolving needs and context. However, none of the PBA programmes submitted a request, as these countries were empowered to adjust their strategy of intervention and adapt to new emergencies without having to seek approval from Sida. This significantly saves staff time which can then be dedicated to other priorities like implementing the programme.

Challenges with implementing the multi-year PBA financing

While multi-year and flexible financing provides stability, predictability, and room to adapt programmes to meet changing needs, it requires dedicated resources and time for country staff to transition to a more adaptive, long-term approach. This can prove challenging in a fast-paced environment, with acute needs and little time to completely shift organisational culture and habits. Although IRC has traditionally planned programmes based on long-term outcomes, it was less familiar with how to work with flexible financing. IRC therefore had to build its adaptive management capacity by supporting staff to develop a different set of planning, budgeting and decision-making processes. IRC has increased its support and coaching for the country programmes through a part-time dedicated adviser and in-country design and implementation workshops to ensure that it capitalises on the benefits of multi-year and flexible financing.

CASE 2.
PRO-Jeunes Youth Livelihoods Programme in Cote d'Ivoire

The PRO-Jeunes youth livelihoods programme is a five-year IRC project supported by the Mastercard Foundation, with $8.4 million committed over the duration of the project from 2016 to 2022 (see Box 3 for more details). Built on a close and trusting relationship with the partner, funding is both multi-year and flexible, which has enabled detailed, reflective programme design, review and adaptation over time. This is particularly well-suited to the needs of a livelihoods programme, which must support the evolving needs of clients in light of market realities.

The Mastercard Foundation multi-year partnership offered the opportunity to design a holistic livelihoods programme that benefits from private sector and civil society partnerships and technology to achieve long-term labour market integration. The programme can take a genuinely client centred approach by including skills training and services to support marginalised and vulnerable youth. Having a well-designed programme like this in place, that can continue to build livelihoods remotely and sustainably while expanding evidence, is more important now than ever as COVID-19 triggers economic downturn and increases vulnerability.

Context and programme

Côte d'Ivoire has experienced protracted instability and economic insecurity for over 20 years. Although there has been some growth and recovery over the last decade, poverty rates remain high. Challenges in education and employment constrain progress. Only 35.5 percent of children have completed lower secondary education with disparities in education between girls and boys (the secondary completion rate for girls is 42.7 percent and boys 55.5 percent) and 36 percent of young people between 15 to 35 years of age are unemployed.[25]

> **BOX 3.** IRC and Mastercard Foundation PRO-Jeunes Partnership Details
>
> IRC's PRO-Jeunes partnership with the Mastercard Foundation is for five years, covering November 2016 to June 2022. Initial total allocation is $8.4 million, equally split across the five years of the project.
>
> IRC has flexibility to make major realignments to the budget and outcomes with the Mastercard Foundation on an annual basis, allowing for rapid adjustments in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.
>
> The funding is targeted at achieving economic outcomes for marginalised youth and after two and a half years of project implementation, Mastercard Foundation has allowed IRC to increase the age range for participation in the project to 30 years old, which has remarkably expanded the programme's reach and inclusion of vulnerable clients.

Through our partnership with Mastercard Foundation, the IRC has co-designed a programme that responds to these challenges and, following a successful pilot, it is yielding positive economic outcomes for marginalised youth in Côte d'Ivoire. The PRO-Jeunes programme targets vulnerable, economically and socially marginalised youth between the ages of 15 and 30 in rural and urban Côte d'Ivoire. IRC works through vocational training centres, youth and women's organisations to recruit 10,000 youth, at least 60 percent of whom are women. The training includes a combination of technical vocational training, business skills training and social and emotional skills to build self-esteem, confidence and agency— particularly empowering for women entrepreneurs.

Multi-year funding principles of partnership and evidence-based, innovative co-creation

Prior to establishing this livelihoods programme, the IRC largely delivered short-term, emergency food security and voucher programmes to meet basic needs in Côte d'Ivoire, financed through one-year emergency funding. Following the 2010 conflict, IRC Côte d'Ivoire established its first multi-year livelihoods programme in 2014. This project helped identify the potential for more sustainable programming that local stakeholders could eventually adopt and replicate. In 2016, drawing on this experience, IRC partnered with the Mastercard Foundation in a funding arrangement rooted in co-creation, partnership, and learning and evidence generation. **The multi-year funding arrangement included a one-year process of collaborative and evidence-based programme design, local partnership establishment, and joint field visits to identify areas for groundbreaking piloting and innovation**. This cro-creation process was central to the agreement and met the shared objectives of both IRC and the Mastercard Foundation.

This true partnership engagement has continued throughout project implementation with regular visits from Mastercard Foundation staff. These visits have elicited fruitful discussion on adaptations to further improve programme delivery, continuous liaison support to potential partners and additional funding sources, as well as flexibility to account for context changes—most recently resulting from movement limitations due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Long-term livelihood programming essential to youth opportunities in rural agricultural

Livelihoods programmes like PRO-Jeunes must be implemented over several years to establish productive partnerships that yield results. **A multi-year partnership is therefore a key criteria for success**. For example, IRC partners with cotton sourcing company Olam/SECO in the rural Tchologo region to work with young agriculturalists over the course of four years and integrate them into the company's cotton supply chain. Olam facilitates access to their producer communities and works with IRC to negotiate improved youth access to productive land. In addition, Olam supports youth participants over the course of one to two production cycles with technical training and access to quality inputs on a credit basis, followed by ongoing support through farmers' groups and markets. In parallel, the IRC provides comprehensive business and socio-emotional skill training, mentorship, and support around business plan development.

This partnership has given youth entrepreneurs transferable skills for long-term economic opportunities and the experience to establish their own agricultural businesses. The programme also works to transform gender norms by engaging positive female role models active in the cotton value chain to encourage communities to allow young women farmers' participation in the male-dominated cotton value chain. The programme's longer duration is paramount to achieving related behavioral and social norms changes that are prerequisite for women to access non-traditional sectors and jobs safely, thereby contributing to gender equality outcomes.

Multi-year funding to leverage technology solutions and enable progress over time

Technology through e-learning and information sharing via mobile phones can expand the reach and retention of trainees. **In contexts with limited infrastructure and low digital literacy, multi-year funding provides the necessary time to procure and establish infrastructure**. The IRC was able to establish an e-learning training format in both urban and peri-urban settings allowing youth to learn largely at their own pace so as to accommodate their different responsibilities while their coaches can continually assess progress and adjust their support to each individual.

Learning, adapting and improving over time and pivot to continue programming during COVID-19

The multi-year approach has allowed IRC to learn, adapt, refine and improve programme delivery over time. For example, the e-learning content has been adapted based on feedback from youth and partners: more women could be recruited through new partnerships with local youth and women's organisations and established interpersonal networks, while the age criteria for targeting was increased to 30 and under to align better with local standards.

Long-term partnership allowed for investment in an e-learning platform which has proved invaluable in light of COVID-19-related movement restrictions in some parts of Côte d'Ivoire. The programme is using an almost uninterrupted delivery of training supplemented by WhatsApp, Facebook live and YouTube videos. The peer-to-peer learning and support provides motivation and vital emotional support for isolated youth.

Multi-year partnerships enable assessment, learning and adaptation of approaches

The multi-year PRO-Jeunes programme provides an opportunity to assess the most productive combination of training and services, particularly in areas of programming with a limited humanitarian evidence base, and adapt programming in a way impossible through shorter-term funding. IRC is taking this opportunity to partner with the World Bank's Gender Innovation Lab (GIL) to explore the impact of integrating intra- and inter-personal socio-emotional and mindfulness skills learning into youth training on their individual and economic outcomes. Initial evidence points to these skills improving self-esteem and yielding higher economic returns, especially for women entrepreneurs. A Randomised Control Trial (RCT) as part of the multi-year programme allows IRC and GIL to identify the specific types of 'soft skills' programming that can enhance both women's economic opportunities and broader gender equality outcomes, thereby improving the PRO-Jeunes programme while also contributing to sector-wide evidence and learning.

Programme efficiencies and long-term localisation through networking and retention

Multi-year funding can instil confidence in the programme and help with uninterrupted continuity and staff retention during a project. The core team delivering PRO-Jeunes has been in place since its start-up phase, which has helped with the project start-up including establishing offices in new locations for IRC programmes without incurring additional, unanticipated recruitment costs. The long-term relationships and partnerships the team has developed are also key to the programme's continuity and sustainability. To successfully hand over delivery of the programme to local partners, it is vital to build trust over time and transfer learning through local partnerships. This approach is an example of programming that bridges crisis and development responses towards longer-term development.

Multi-year programming yields positive outcomes

Outcomes for the 825 youth enrolled in the pilot phase of PRO-Jeunes are positive and already show promising results. Those participating saw an average 28 percent increase in income and average monthly expenditure doubled from baseline to endline. 60 percent of those completing the 'Learn2Earn' training are now in part- or full-time employment.

CONCLUSION

The findings presented in this report are consistent with and build on pre-existing evidence that multi-year, flexible funding produces better outcomes, both in terms of effectiveness and efficiency of the aid provided. Longer time frames allow, among others, for improved programme design, deeper engagement with affected communities and tangible gains in the living conditions of target populations, including women and girls. The case studies included in this report highlight that multi-year, flexible funding can have particular benefits for inherently longer-term interventions, such as livelihoods programmes, and in complex, evolving and protracted crises. Compared to short-term projects, multi-year funding can produce significant cost savings and higher value for money overall.

Of particular interest are the mutually reinforcing benefits of predictability and flexibility combined, provided through multi-year and softly or unearmarked funding, as well as the benefits of additional elements of grant arrangements that enable flexibility and adaptability. More time to implement activities, together with the ability to re-allocate the funding in response to shifts in programme focus or based on learning within programs, means that the humanitarian intervention can respond, and respond better, to actual needs as they evolve. This is an overarching finding to keep in mind as the humanitarian sector is striving to adapt to the fast-pacing spread of the COVID-19 pandemic in humanitarian settings.

While more research can further unpack the dividends paid by multi-year, flexible funding, evidence alone will not be enough to encourage a significant increase in the use of this financing mechanism, especially in support of frontline responders. What is still missing is a high-level, political dialogue on how to remove existing barriers to increasing multi-year, flexible funding and what opportunities it can offer for stronger synergies with other systemic aid reform priorities, such as localisation and transparency.

As donors, UN agencies and aid organisations intensify their efforts to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic, scaling up the use of additional, fast, multi-year and flexible funding on the ground must become a top priority to realise the promise of the Grand Bargain in the year ahead: delivering more effective and more efficient humanitarian aid.

Key elements of the IRC cash programmes funded by DFID and Sida in Somalia

	Long-term funding: Building Resilient Communities in Somalia (BRCiS 2)	Short-term funding: Lifesaving emergency response to the health and economic needs of people in the flood-affected areas of Beletweyne, Hiraan province
Grant period	43 months	6 months
Total costs of cash transfer activities	$1,059,334	$208,733
Cost-transfer ratio	$0.37	$0.67
Number of households	2316 HHs in 4 locations (some HHs received up to 6 transfers)	640 HHs in 1 location (HHs received 3 transfers)
Transfer amount per month	$70-85/HH/transfer (depending on location)	$65/HH/transfer
Total amount of cash transferred	$771,060	$124,800
Duration of cash distribution	Jul-2019 to Dec-2019 and Mar-2020	Jan-2020 to Mar-2020
Location(s), client(s), transfer(s)	▪ Dhusamareb: 132 HHs received 6 transfers of $85/HH/transfer. ▪ Dhusamareb: 168 HHs received 5 transfers of $85/HH/transfer. ▪ Dhusamareb: 400 HHs received 2 transfers of $85/HH/transfer. ▪ Galkacyo: 746 HHs received 5 transfers of $70/HH/transfer. ▪ Burtinle: 478 HHs received 6 transfers of $70/HH/transfer. ▪ Burtinle: 192 HHs received 3 transfers of $70/HH/transfer. ▪ Galdogob: 296 HHs received 3 transfers of $70/HH/transfer. All HHs received 1 transfer per month.	▪ Beletweyne: 640 HHs received 3 transfers of $65/HH/transfer. All HHs received 1 transfer per month.

Data used for the Systematic Cost Analysis (SCAN) of IRC's cash programmes in Somalia

Project Name: Lifesaving emergency response to the health and economic needs of people in the flood-affected areas of Beletweyne, Hiraan province

Start Date:	November 2019	**End Date:**		May 2020
Value of Cash Transferred:	$124,800	**Total Cost of Cash Transfer Activity:**		$208,733

Direct Project Costs: *Costs that are only closely linked to programme activities that can be related to one or some specific projects.*				
Cost Category	**Cost Item**	**% to Activity** **What % used for cash transfers?**	**Category Total**	**% of Total Amount**
Materials & Activities			$132,530.75	63.49%
	Multipurpose cash transfer	100%		
	PDM surveys and endline survey	100%		
	Transfer costs	100%		
	Beneficiary registration	100%		
National Staff			$14,816.64	7.10%
	Resilience Manager	100%		
	Livelihoods Coordinator	100%		
	Livelihoods Officer	100%		
	Livelihoods Assistant	100%		
	Pension and gratuity	100%		
	Health Insurance	100%		
	Life Insurance	100%		
Travel & Transport			$3,722.39	1.78%
	Beneficiary registration	100%		
	Local Travel	100%		
	Per diem	100%		
International Staff			$2,661.91	1.28%
	ERD Technical Advisor	100%		
	ERD Technical Unit Fringe	100%		
Direct Shared Costs: Costs that are linked to programme activities that cannot be easily related to specific projects. These costs are shared among all projects in a specific office, usually (but not always) for the running and management of operations.				
Cost Category			**Category Total**	**% of Total Amount**
National Staff			$21,093.69	10.11%
Office Expenses			$10,074.55	4.83%
International Staff			$6,367.48	3.05%
Travel & Transport			$3,799.85	1.82%
Materials & Activities			$6.47	0.003%
Assets & Equipment			$3.41	0.002%
Indirect Costs: Costs that support headquarters operations and overall management.				
Cost Category			**Category Total**	**% of Total Amount**
Indirect Cost Recovery			$13,655.85	6.54%

Project Name: Building Resilient Communities in Somalia (BRCiS 2)

Start Date: July 2019   **End Date:** March 2020

Value of Cash Transferred: $771,060   **Total Cost of Cash Transfer Activity:** $1,059,334

Direct Project Costs: *Costs that are only closely linked to programme activities that can be related to one or some specific projects.*				
Cost Category	**Cost Item**	**% to Activity** **What % used for cash transfers?**	**Category Total**	**% of Total Amount**
Materials & Activities			**$803,929.01**	**75.89%**
	MPCT- Burtinle	100%		
	MPCT- Galkacyo	100%		
	MPCT- Dhusamareb	100%		
	Bank Fees	100%		
	Meetings	100%		
	Post-Distribution	100%		
	Vehicle IRF Verification	100%		
	Monitoring	100%		
	MPCT for Vulnerable drought (DH)	100%		
	Transfer fees (DH)	100%		
	Beneficiary registration (DH)	100%		
	Post-Distribution Monitoring (DH)	100%		
	MPCT for Vulnerable drought (GA)	100%		
	Transfer fees (GA)	100%		
	Beneficiary registration (GA)	100%		
	Post-Distribution Monitoring (GA)	100%		
	MPCT for Vulnerable drought (GW)	100%		
	Transfer fees (GW)	100%		
	Beneficiary registration (GW)	100%		
	Post-Distribution Monitoring (GW)	100%		
National Staff			**$71,629.51**	**6.76%**
	Livelihoods Coordinator (GW)	100%		
	Livelihoods Officer (DH)	100%		
	Community Development Officer (GA)	100%		
	Senior Livelihoods Officer (GW)	100%		
	Women Econ. Empowerment Officer (GA)	100%		
	Livelihoods Officer (GW)	100%		
	Senior Livelihoods Officer (DH)	100%		
	Fringe Benefits (GA)	100%		
	Fringe Benefits (GW)	100%		
	Fringe Benefits (DH)	100%		
	Senior Livelihood Officer (DH)	80%		
	Livelihood Officer (DH)	90%		
	Livelihood Assistant (DH)	90%		
	Resilience Manager (GA)	50%		
	Senior Livelihood Officer (GA)	80%		
	Livelihood Officer (GA)	90%		
	Community Development Officer (GA)	60%		

			Category Total	% of Total Amount
	Women Econ. Empowerment Officer (GA)	50%		
	Senior Livelihood Officer (MQ)	80%		
	Senior Livelihood Officer (DH) Benefits	80%		
	Livelihood Officer (DH) Benefits	90%		
	Livelihood Assistant (DH) Benefits	90%		
	Senior Livelihood Officer (GA) Benefits	80%		
	Livelihood Officer (GA) Benefits	90%		
	Community Dev. Officer (GA) Benefits	60%		
	Resilience Manager (GA) Benefits	50%		
	Women Econ. Empowerment Officer (GA) Benefits	50%		
	Livelihood Coordinator (GW) Benefits	35%		
	Sr. Livelihood Officer (GW) Benefits	80%		
	Sr. Livelihood Officer (MQ) Benefits	80%		
Travel & Transport			$10,344.79	0.98%
	Travel - Accommodation (DH)	100%		
	Travel - Accommodation (GA)	100%		
	Travel - Accommodation (GW)	100%		
	Travel - Accommodation (MQ)	100%		
	Travel - Accommodation (NB)	100%		
	Travel - Per Diem - ERD (DH)	100%		
	Travel - Per Diem - ERD (GA)	100%		
	Travel - Per Diem - ERD (GW)	100%		
	Vehicle Operations (GA)	100%		
	Technical Advisors ERD	100%		
	Per diem	63%		
	Local travel	63%		
	Technical assistance travel	63%		
	Technical assistance travel	25%		
International Staff			$13,059.45	1.23%
	Technical Advisors	100%		
	US Expat Benefits	100%		
	ERD Technical Unit	25%		
	Technical Unit Fringe	25%		

Direct Shared Costs: Costs that are linked to programme activities that cannot be easily related to specific projects. These costs are shared among all projects in a specific office, usually (but not always) for the running and management of operations.

Cost Category	Category Total	% of Total Amount
National Staff	$64,811.12	6.12%
Office Expenses	$17,128.83	1.62%
Travel & Transport	$10,503.36	0.99%
International Staff	$7,532.60	0.71%
Materials & Activities	$8.60	0.001%
Assets & Equipment	$1.53	0.0001%

Indirect Costs: Costs that support headquarters operations and overall management.

Cost Category	Category Total	% of Total Amount
Indirect Cost Recovery	$60,385.12	5.70%

NOTES

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IMAGES:

FRONT: *A woman with her daughter in Man, Côte d'Ivoire.* | A. Wade/IRC 2010

PAGE 6: *A Somali woman, now a volunteer for the IRC, fled her home in the Bay Region in Somalia when she was 14 years old due to fighting and security. She and her family walked for five days and then drove for two before arriving in Mogadishu.* | K. Ryan/IRC 2019

PAGE 9: *A woman participates in a focus group discussion led by IRC protection staff in Ndomete, Central African Republic.* | D. Belluz/IRC 2016

PAGE 10: IRC Central African Republic

PAGE 12: IRC Cameroon

PAGE 14: Lancement formation PRO-Jeunes

PAGE 15: *Three Peuhl families occupy a vacant municipal building in Ndim, Ouham Pende, CAR.* | D. Belluz/IRC 2015

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FOCUS ON
THE FRONTLINES:

How the Grand Bargain can
deliver on its promise to
improve humanitarian aid

CONTENTS

ACRONYMS

AAP	Accountability to Affected Populations	**IASC**	Inter-Agency Standing Committee
CaLP	Cash Learning Partnership	**IATI**	International Aid Transparency Initiative
CBPF	Country-Based Pooled Fund	**ICCG**	Inter-cluster Coordination Group
CERF	Central Emergency Response Fund	**IOM**	International Organisation for Migration
CWG	Cash Working Group	**IRC**	International Rescue Committee
DfID	(former) UK Department for International Development, replaced by the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO)	**NGO**	Non-governmental Organisation
		OCHA	UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo	**SCAN**	Systematic Cost Analysis, now Dioptra
FTS	Financial Tracking Service	**SIDA**	Swedish International Development Agency
GB	Grand Bargain	**UN**	United Nations
GBV	Gender-based Violence	**UNHCR**	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
GHD	Good Humanitarian Donorship	**UNICEF**	United Nations Children's Fund
GHRP	Global Humanitarian Response Plan	**USD**	United States Dollar
IAHE	Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation		

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this paper is to share IRC's vision for the future of the Grand Bargain based on our experience on the ground and engagement with this forum. The paper is meant to contribute to current discussions on the 'Grand Bargain 2.0' as envisaged in the recent proposal by the Facilitation Group.[1]

There are now 235.4 million people in need of humanitarian assistance – **a 40% rise from 2020 levels due to the triple threat of COVID-19, conflict, and climate change**. As reported in IRC's 2021 Emergency Watchlist, 85% of global humanitarian needs are concentrated in 20 countries that are home to just 10% of the world's population. Consequently, they are the countries driving global displacement and the largest increases in humanitarian needs, accounting for 88% of all internal displacement and 84% of all refugees in 2019.[2] The short-term nature of financing in these contexts has failed to recognise the protracted nature of crises, and the need to move vulnerable populations from humanitarian aid dependency to development progress and self-reliance. **Last year 22 of the 25 Humanitarian Response Plans were for humanitarian crises lasting five years or more**.[3] Three of these countries – Sudan, Somalia and the DRC – have had humanitarian plans and appeals for at least 22 years. Despite these trends and the ever-louder calls to operate within the humanitarian-development nexus, the length of our humanitarian grants from UN agencies continues to average roughly one year. As we move to a "new normal" of protracted crises after COVID-19, **there must also be a new normal in humanitarian response that better matches growing needs with adequate resources**. It is high time the international community implemented evidence-based reforms to the multilateral system that replace short-term fixes with a longer-term focus on improved outcomes for the people we serve, improving the coordination, quality and rapid distribution of aid while investing in local resilience. Driving home these reforms has never been more important.

The IRC has engaged with the Grand Bargain since its establishment, both at the technical and Sherpa level. As a signatory, we have made the most progress in transparency, cash-based programming, and reduced management costs. **We believe reforming aid is possible with renewed high-level political engagement and fewer priorities, focused on critical levers for expanding the reach, scale, and responsiveness of aid**. While the COVID-19 pandemic is negatively impacting aid budgets and leading many donor governments to refocus on their domestic agendas, it has also shown its potential to catalyze structural aid reforms. We should not lose this new momentum, but rather leverage it for an emboldened Grand Bargain 2.0. With financial flows contributing to the greatest drivers of and barriers to effective humanitarian action, **bilateral and multilateral donors have the strongest role to play in reform**. They must engage at the highest levels to agree on time-bound solutions **based on clear outcomes and evidence**. Aid reform must be focused on a set of core, measurable outcomes across the sector that assess the well-being of affected populations at the global, crisis, country, and organisational level, with interventions informed by a strong, shared evidence base about what works and what does not.

The Grand Bargain is moving to prioritise quality funding and localisation as the most transformative paths to change. Within these two enabling priorities, we suggest particular areas of focus. With regard to funding, the **volume** of aid – both direct and passed-through funding – to frontline implementers must increase. It must be **flexible and multi-year** and it must reach frontline implementers **faster**. By 'frontline implementers' we mean those actors who are best placed to intervene on the frontlines of humanitarian action, be they local civil society, international NGOs or a partnership of the two. Improving quality funding also implies focusing on related challenges, such as scaling the coordination of humanitarian cash and incorporating cost-effectiveness tools and assessments that strike the best balance between costs and outcomes for people in need.

Regarding localisation (or decolonisation, as some prefer to call it)[4], the IRC believes that the distribution of power needs to change in the humanitarian sector. **We support a more equitable distribution of power to the benefit of the people we serve**. We say this as a matter of principle, because it is right and just, but also because we believe it will make the work of the humanitarian sector more effective, impactful, and sustainable. We recognise that **local actors closest to crises are the main agents** of response and recovery and that we work best when we are guided by local actors on what value we can add to existing capacities and systems. IRC sees partnership as a commitment to **sharing of expertise**, in addition to sharing of power and resources. Organisations like IRC have expertise and experience. Similarly, the people we serve and the organisations with whom we partner have expertise and experience. Our vision of partnership brings these groups together to secure more effective humanitarian action. To us, localising aid also means **centering people** affected by crisis – particularly women, girls and other marginalised groups – in the design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of programmes, by listening and responding to feedback.

The Grand Bargain must reinvigorate its commitments in support of local actors and ensure they receive more donor funding and can thus play a more influential role in global decision-making. Internally, IRC is putting in place ambitious reforms to fulfill our Grand Bargain commitments. Among such reforms, we have committed to **increase our resources to local actors by half in 2021** (compared to 2020) to jumpstart progress; continue to build principled partnerships that share power and resources with local actors, **half of whom will be women led/focused; recommit to channel 25% of our funding to local and national responders by the end of 2024; and support efforts to reach a common definition and methodology for calculating that percentage**. Ultimately, we see ourselves – and international NGOs more broadly – as sharing power for people affected by crisis to influence, participate in, and lead the programmes, organisations, and systems that achieve better outcomes for their communities.

Underpinning these reforms is a need for **radical transparency and renewed accountability** in the sector. What we measure ultimately drives action, so the core priorities identified above must be paired with a rigorous and transparent accountability framework that measures progress against these objectives. This requires a two-tier approach.

First, **all actors should report on their humanitarian funding flows** by crisis, country, sector, population, and recipient to the Financial Tracking Service (FTS). They should also report on the volume, quality and speed of funding, as well as on supporting localisation and participation, scaling cash coordination, and increasing evidence-based cost effectiveness. Annex I offers a set of metrics for each of these priority reforms and suggests related targets to be agreed at Principals level in the coming months. Given the proportion of humanitarian assistance they manage, **UN agencies should lead by example** and systematically report on the humanitarian funding flows they cascade down the transaction chain. FTS data should be compatible with what is reported to the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI) and be made publicly available. **IRC is committing to do its part and is strengthening its internal systems to start reporting to FTS by 2024 or earlier**.

Second, the international community must hold itself accountable for results, and better measure progress against **improved outcomes for affected populations**, based on data disaggregated by age and gender. Grand Bargain signatories must prioritise the aid reforms required to achieve those outcomes. The ultimate measure of the success of the Grand Bargain will be **clear targets, an improved financing model and greater accountability** that lead to concrete improvements in the lives of the people we serve.

INTRODUCTION

In 2016, donors, UN agencies, NGOs, and the Red Cross met at the World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul to agree on a Grand Bargain on humanitarian aid. Following the recommendations of the High-Level Panel on Humanitarian Financing,[5] the humanitarian community promised to **achieve up to $1 billion in savings** by adopting 51 commitments on issues like transparency, cash-based programming, and multi-year funding.

Five years on, those efficiency gains are yet to be seen. Since 2016, the number of people in need has increased from 125.3 million to 235.4 million – an 88% increase.[6] Meanwhile, humanitarian assistance has risen from $22.9 billion in 2016 to $24.8 billion in 2020 – an 8.3% increase (See Figure 1).[7] The humanitarian response to COVID-19 has exposed system-wide issues, such as insufficient funds to frontline and community-based responders, slow disbursements to frontline implementers, and neglect of the most vulnerable populations, including an inadequate approach to the shadow gender-based violence (GBV) pandemic. Crises have become more protracted, forcing 77% of the world's refugees to live away from their homes for decades.[8] And yet, we have seen limited advancement in multiyear funding, particularly from UN agencies. **While important technical work has advanced, the Grand Bargain has yet to deliver the structural reforms needed to make humanitarian aid more efficient and more effective**.

In line with IRC's original Grand Bargain commitments, **we have revised many of our policies and practices**. Among our main achievements, we have:

- gone from zero awards published on the IATI platform in 2016 to 95 awards published by 2020;

- set a target to increase our percentage of material support through Cash and Voucher Assistance to 25% and exceeded it in 2018 (27%);

- developed a cost efficiency tool (SCAN/Dioptra), which the Grand Bargain Cash sub-group now recommends as the default approach for the efficiency analysis of basic needs programmes;

- and developed and rolled out our first organisational approach to advancing our commitment to participation and accountability to affected people – Client Responsiveness.

Nevertheless, we know our work is not yet done. The purpose of this paper is to share our vision for the future of the Grand Bargain based on our experience on the ground, engagement with this forum, and renewed commitment to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of our work.

FIGURE 1. Rising needs are outpacing available humanitarian funding

Legend: Funding received (billions of dollars) — People in need (millions) — Dollars/person in need (calculated)
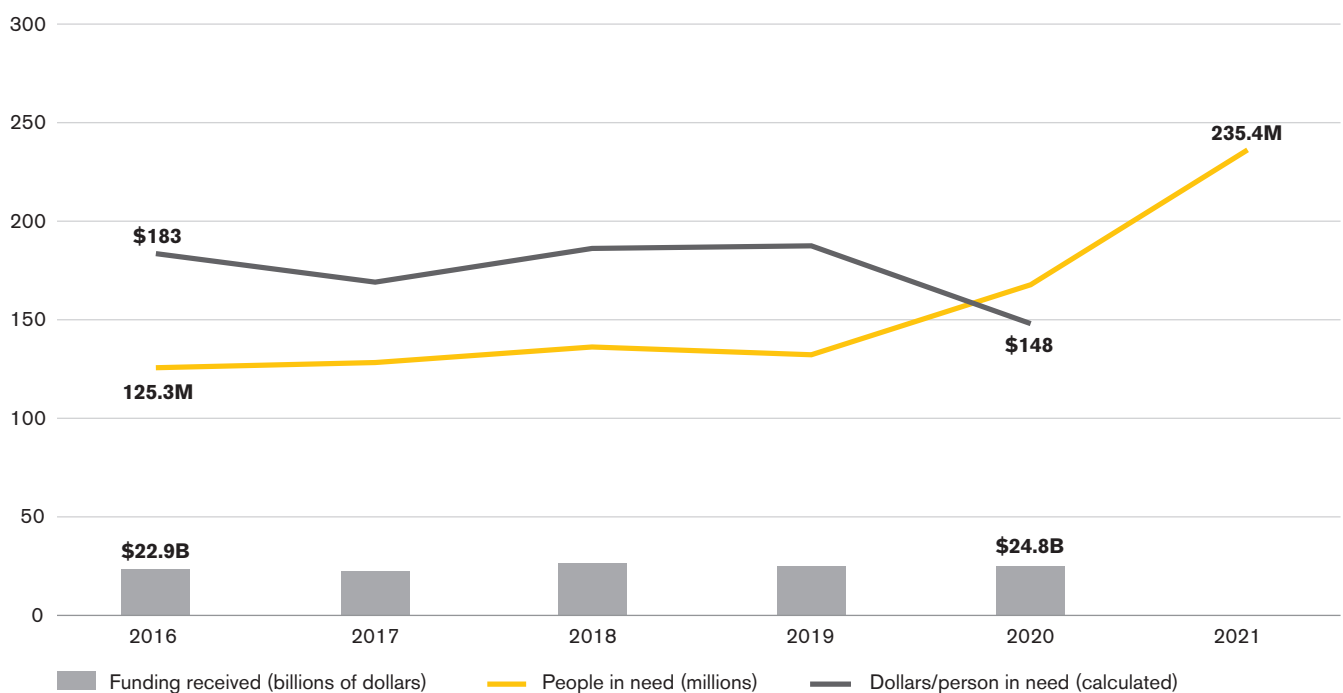
WHY CURRENT PROPOSALS FOR A GB 2.0 ARE FALLING SHORT– AND WHAT WE NEED NOW

34 intergovernmental agencies and international organisations joined the Grand Bargain when it was first established in 2016. Gradually, the number of signatories has increased to 63, but the momentum around the Grand Bargain has been lost. **Without a sustained dialogue among top decision-makers on aid challenges and solutions, the Grand Bargain has quickly evolved into a technical forum**. Increasingly, the focus has been on advancing technical discussions and gathering evidence of what needs to change in the humanitarian aid sector. A lack of political dialogue has turned into a lack of political will to make the tough choices needed to reform the system.[9]

We have now reached a point where more of the same will not bring about long-awaited solutions. It is time to build on all the technical work carried out so far. **It is time to re-establish a more political dialogue with the Grand Bargain's full membership** to ensure that those hard choices turn into action within a set timeframe. The Grand Bargain's Facilitation Group has proposed a leaner governance model, but more clarity is needed to envisage regular senior-level negotiations across different priorities and constituencies, instead of over-focusing on siloed discussions within individual work streams.

COVID-19 has shown how urgent it is for the humanitarian sector to deliver better aid to people in crisis. In an era of shrinking economies and declining aid budgets, we must embrace humanitarian reform more actively than ever before. This means **encouraging technical groups to present the most viable reforms** for consideration by the Sherpas, e.g. a target for cascading quality funding down the transaction chain or the sector-wide adoption of a cash coordination mechanism. It means **facilitating regular discussions between Sherpas** from different constituencies (donors, UN agencies, NGOs, the Red Cross, and an increasing number of local actors) so they can negotiate key changes and agree on a timeline to implement them. **Multilateral and bilateral donors have a primary role to play in driving these reforms under the leadership of the Eminent Person**. They need to sustain their high-level engagement in Grand Bargain negotiations with dedicated teams focused on strategic changes. As the recipients of the vast majority of humanitarian aid, UN agencies likewise have a responsibility to lead by example and improve their practices more rapidly.

Ultimately, the signatories' **Principals must meet and decide** on the most transformative reforms negotiated by their respective Sherpas based on substantive proposals. **Principals must then instruct their own organisations** – including their legal and financial departments – to implement those reforms and track their progress. Financial and legal challenges should not be used as a reason to avoid systemic reforms.

FIGURE 2. A better decision-making process for the Grand Bargain 2.0
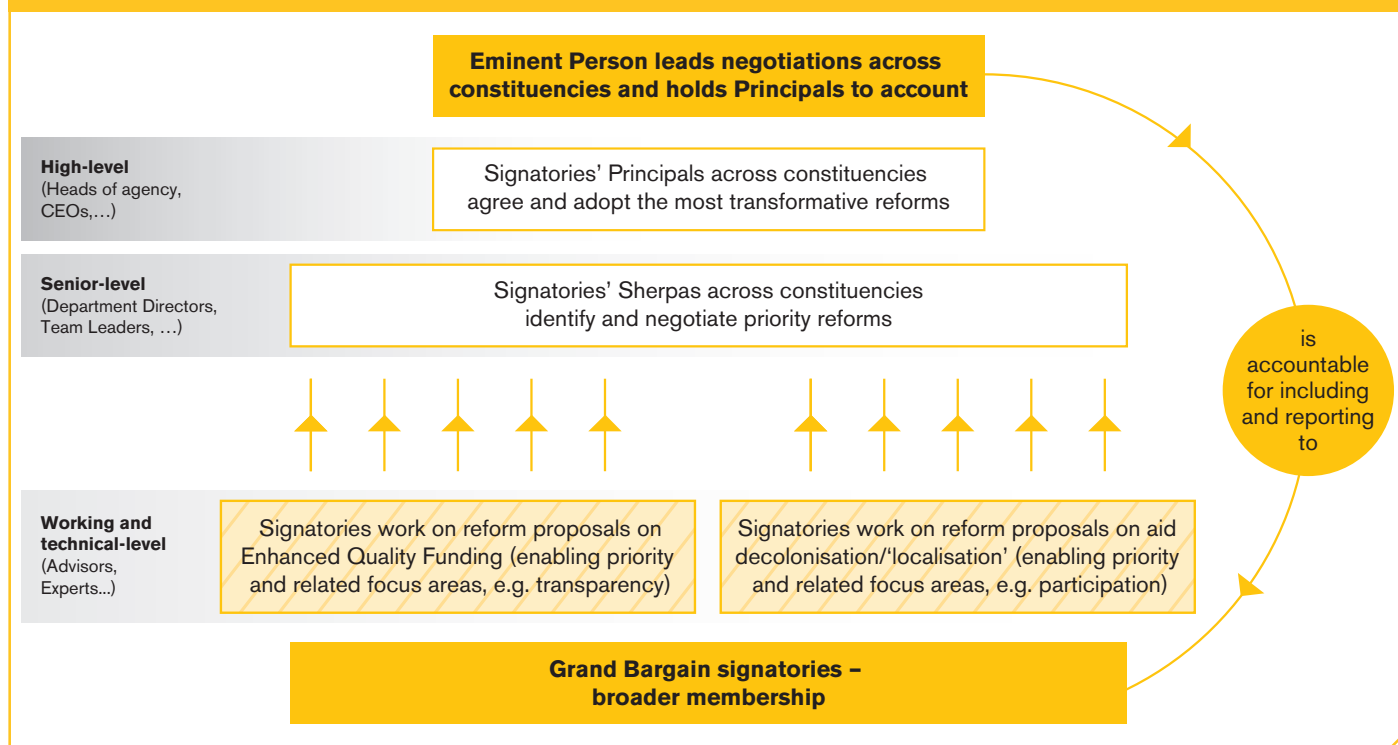
The current vision for a Grand Bargain 2.0 shared by the Facilitation Group represents a major step in the right direction but should be more specific in explaining how the Grand Bargain will function. It should reform its governance structure to engage all signatories in regular senior-level negotiations and high-level political decisions on the most transformative reforms suggested so far, in the spirit of the *quid pro quo* principle. **Principals must fully support the new Eminent Person in securing political buy-in for priority aid reforms**. In turn, the new Eminent Person needs to invest in **leading high-level negotiations, ensuring they are transparent and holding Principals to account** for what they are willing and not willing to do. There needs to be both a better-structured decision-making process and more accountable leadership. Figure 2 illustrates an improved combination of these two elements. The Grand Bargain should also **support greater diversity** through stronger participation of non-traditional donors and the global South, namely locally rooted implementers in country.

KEY PRIORITIES TO FULFILL THE GRAND BARGAIN PROMISE

The Grand Bargain has produced a considerable body of work under its nine work streams. In time, however, it has become clear that not all the work streams carry equal weight. As rightly argued in the Facilitation Group's proposal, some work streams are more consequential than others because they aim at system-level reform (localisation, enhanced quality funding) rather than at tools for improvement of our day-to-day routines (reduced management costs, harmonised reporting). Similarly, some commitments are more transformational in nature, which is why signatories are now required to report only on 11 of the original 51 commitments. If we want to see meaningful improvements in aid, **the Grand Bargain 2.0 must embrace reforms that will channel resources where they are most needed based on clear evidence of what works and what does not. It must also hold signatories to account through rigorous and transparent reporting. This approach will be the clearest driver of change**. In line with the two enabling priorities identified in the Facilitation Group's proposal, the Grand Bargain must then focus on enhancing quality funding and advancing localisation. Under these priorities we identify the following areas of focus: 1) providing more, better-quality and faster funding to frontline implementers; 2) demanding radical transparency on humanitarian financing flows and collective outcomes; 3) taking a more equitable approach to working with local actors and centering crisis-affected people in aid; 4) defining clear global leadership and coordination of humanitarian cash assistance; and 5) supporting cost-effectiveness approaches that allow us to understand the balance between costs and results for people in need. This report will expand on what each of these focus areas entail.

1. MORE, BETTER, AND FASTER FUNDING TO FRONTLINE IMPLEMENTERS

Humanitarian assistance increased from $22.9 billion in 2016 to $24.8 billion in 2020.[10] On average, almost two-thirds of all humanitarian assistance goes to UN agencies, which then cascade a portion of the funding received to their implementing partners. In the case of the COVID-19 Global Humanitarian Response Plan (GHRP), the percentage of donor funding going to UN agencies has gone up to 77%.[11] For frontline implementers like IRC and its partners, including local actors and women-led organisations, this trend meant having to respond to a devastating global humanitarian crisis, with 20% going toward direct NGO funding. These organisations had to frontload their own financial reserves while having to wait for up to eight months before receiving UN funding.[12]

If we want to make the humanitarian system more responsive to today's challenges, our current financing model needs to change in three fundamental ways:

Volume of aid to frontline responders must increase

Even if ODA levels remain stable or shrink, we need to increase the amount of aid going directly to frontline responders **by agreeing on a set percentage or target as our default approach**. Quantity and quality must go hand in hand if we want to see the critical mass that is required to produce transformative results. UN pooled funding mechanisms, such as the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF), Country-Based Pooled Funds (CBPFs) and the new Regionally Hosted Pooled Funds, should be scaled up as an efficient alternative to cascading funding from individual UN agencies to frontline implementers. Making the CERF accessible to NGOs has proven to be critical in supporting GBV prevention and response activities amid the pandemic in West Africa, for example. CERF should continue to be accessible to NGOs and local actors in future crises.[13] Women-led and women's rights organisations should especially benefit from this kind of funding.

In addition to expanding access to UN resources for frontline responders, donors should support **alternative funding approaches and mechanisms** that allow frontline implementers to receive more and better direct funding, while maintaining coordination and management efficiency. For example, in response to the COVID-19 outbreak, IRC has promoted the idea **of establishing a consortium of leading organisations** that can offer the speed, scale, technical expertise, local partnerships, and accountability required to meet emergency needs in three priority sectors – health, cash, and protection.

Quality of aid must improve

Last year, 22 of the 26 Humanitarian Response Plans were for humanitarian crises that had lasted five years or more. Three of those countries – Sudan, Somalia, and the DRC – have had humanitarian plans and appeals for at least 22 years. And yet, despite these trends and growing calls to operate within the humanitarian-development nexus, IRC's humanitarian awards from UN agencies average just one year. The protracted nature of today's conflict and displacement requires longer-term funding, stronger linkages with development and nexus funding mechanisms, and stronger partnerships with frontline organisations. Our research has shown the many benefits of multiyear flexible financing, including predictability and stability for implementing partners, better cross-sectoral responses particularly on gender equality,[14] and greater impact per money spent.[15] A comparative analysis of two IRC cash programs funded by DfID[16] and SIDA[17] in Somalia found that longer-term programming cost 44 percent less in delivery for every dollar transferred (See Figure 3).[18] Within the Grand Bargain, **we need to agree to a cascading target** to pass more quality funding down the transaction chain.

Speed of aid must accelerate

It took over two months for the UN to raise the first $1 billion for the GHRP and another two months for the second $1 billion. COVID-19 has tragically reminded us of the importance of quickly getting aid to the right people at the right time. The shadow GBV pandemic went underfunded for months, despite the rhetorical statements. Supporting anticipatory action in collaboration with partners and local authorities could have made a notable difference.

On a more positive note, IOM's disbursement of CERF funding to NGOs in response to the COVID-19 outbreak in West Africa in 2020 only took a few weeks, proving that faster distribution of aid resources is possible. Going forward, we must agree on more reasonable timeframes to ensure that pledges translate into timely allocations and disbursements. In acute emergencies, that **timeframe should not exceed three months** from the moment donors announce their pledges until funding reaches frontline responders.

FIGURE 3. Longer-term programme in Somalia cost 44% less in delivery for every dollar transferred

TRANSFER AMOUNT · DELIVERY COST

$1 — **Long-term funding** *37 cents*

$1 — **Short-term funding** *67 cents*

$1 — **Saving potential** *30 cents*

BOX 1. A case in point: humanitarian funding for Gender-Based Violence prevention and response

Gender-based violence (GBV) prevention and response is notoriously under-prioritised and underfunded in humanitarian settings. **Between 2016 and 2018,[19] less than 1% of humanitarian funding went to GBV programmes** – despite consistent verbal commitment by most humanitarian donors to GBV prevention and response.[20] According to FTS data, in March 2021 GBV funding only represented **1.29%** of the overall incoming GHRP funding. **All the while, the pandemic has clearly triggered increased violence against women and girls and further limited their access to support services**. The overall amount of investment in GBV and gender equality programming remains opaque, as coding and tracking practices are inconsistent and GBV-related efforts may be included in other broader programmes, such as protection.

The Grand Bargain 2.0 can help prioritise GBV across the humanitarian planning cycle by promoting the following reforms:

▌ **Setting a target for cascading quality funding to frontline implementers** will allow the flexibility needed to adapt GBV programmes to local needs and sudden shocks. At the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, many GBV services in IRC's programmes had to change their delivery methods in response to lockdown restrictions.[21]

▌ **Faster disbursement of funding** will minimize disruptions to life-saving services and ensure the rapid deployment of GBV experts to adequately assess funding needs from the onset of a crisis. Specifically, GBV should be given higher priority in the mechanisms which determine allocations from funding sources such as pooled funding.

▌ **Multi-year funding** will enable the **development of meaningful partnerships with women-led and women's rights' organisations**, delivering GBV services and promoting gender equality.

▌ **Prioritising women's rights and women-led organisations** as part of the 25% localisation commitment will help support the recruitment and training of diverse GBV experts working at all phases of emergencies, ensuring a more context-appropriate response.

▌ **Collaborating with IASC to consistently track GBV allocations and expenditures** across humanitarian donors and implementing organisations will enable the humanitarian system to monitor progress toward the Grand Bargain's commitment to gender equality and GBV. This reform will also benefit other policy processes, such as the Call to Action on Protection from Gender-Based Violence in Emergencies and the Generation Equality Forum.

2. RADICAL TRANSPARENCY ON HUMANITARIAN FINANCING FLOWS AND COLLECTIVE OUTCOMES

Making the humanitarian system more responsive requires far **greater financial transparency** than what we have today. The main online tool to track where the funding goes is OCHA's Financial Tracking Service (FTS). While the tool captures most humanitarian funding flows from donor governments to immediate recipients, it does not provide the same level of visibility on what happens to these flows afterwards. In addition, the Grand Bargain commits to improvements to IATI, not to FTS. As in the case of the GHRP, this means that **we do not know where 80% of the funding has gone past first-level recipients**, like UN agencies. Getting more clarity on the funding cascaded to second-level recipients requires looking into individual UN agency reports, which either use different definitions and formats or do not disclose the amounts of funding cascaded to their partners. In many cases, finding out how much funding trickles down to the ground requires labour-intensive calculations.

UN agencies, which receive the majority of humanitarian assistance, should lead by example and **commit to report the amount and duration** of the funding they pass through to their implementing partners (or second-level recipients), disaggregated to track funding to women-led and women's rights organisations. As FTS administrator, OCHA should also ensure the platform is compatible with other major transparency tools, such as IATI, so that complementary data can be used more efficiently to track humanitarian funding flows. Annex I lists the aid reforms required to achieve these outcomes and can be used to monitor the performance of the Grand Bargain 2.0, in addition to existing indicators. This monitoring framework should lead to analysing data that can be disaggregated **by age and gender of affected populations**.

NGOs, too, do not report how much funding they give to their partners on FTS. This kind of reporting necessitates centralised and standardised data systems that can provide timely, accurate information without running the risk of double counting. However, this kind of effort and the extra resources it requires is rarely recognised by donors as a necessary cost. IRC is nevertheless centralising its data systems to better track the funding it passes through to its partners in 30+ country programmes **to start reporting on these flows by 2024 or earlier**.

Once we can get full financial visibility, we will also be able to **better track progress against the outcomes** for affected populations which these flows are meant to support. The international community must hold itself accountable for aid reforms that support concrete improvements in people's lives, based on data disaggregated by age and gender, a strong evidence base and clear targets. It is what the Grand Bargain needs to measure its true success.

3A. A MORE EQUITABLE APPROACH TO WORKING WITH LOCAL ACTORS, INCLUDING WOMEN'S ORGANISATIONS

The Grand Bargain sets out an ambitious agenda to contextualise humanitarian response, including a commitment to channel at least 25% of humanitarian funding to local and national responders[22]. Nevertheless, **it is unclear what that 25% includes and what progress on 'localisation' has been made to date**. This is in

part due to the lack of financial transparency and common definitions, which makes it hard to understand how much funding goes to local actors. Discussions within the work stream seem to go in a circle, supporting a polarised vision of local versus international actors. Attempts to agree on basic definitions have not been successful.

On a more operational level, a major challenge has been to share more resources with local partners while continuing to meet heavy compliance requirements from donors. For example, amongst IRC's largest UN partners, UNHCR uses the Internal Control Questionnaire to produce a country risk rating, UNICEF uses the Harmonised Approach to Cash Transfers, and OCHA undertakes due diligence and capacity assessments, which are completed internally by OCHA country offices and in some cases by an external agency. The Grand Bargain 2.0 must **hold a more in-depth dialogue about the challenges** frontline responders – both local and international – face. Short-term funding, limited visibility on grant renewals, and extraordinary compliance and risk reduction demands stand in the way of partnerships with local actors. **Donors and UN agencies need to recognise the inherent tension** between expecting greater 'localisation' and demanding more compliance at the same time.

At the IRC, we have strengthened our capacity to be a principled, collaborative partner with local civil society, government and private sector actors, working through a five-year, whole-of-organisation process to develop and roll out the award-winning **Partnership Excellence for Equality and Results System**, with highly positive feedback from partners. Our approach to partnership is based on a comprehensive set of indicators measuring not only the volume of financial resources passed through to partners, but also qualitative dimensions, such as prioritising long-term relationships with local civil society organisations and expanding our ability to support local systems. This is consistent with IRC's broader definition of power-sharing, which extends to engaging clients in decision making and feedback.

While we have improved how we work with partners, we have fallen short of our commitments to increase the quantity of both partnerships and resources provided to them. We have therefore set an ambitious agenda, starting by:

- **increasing the resources we provide to local actors by half in 2021** (compared to 2020) to jump start progress;

- continuing to build strategic partnerships with local actors, **half of whom will be women led**;

- re-affirming our Grand Bargain commitment to channel **25% of our humanitarian funding to local and national responders by the end of 2024**;

- **supporting efforts to reach a common definition and methodology for calculating that percentage**;

- and **strengthening our internal systems to start reporting on our pass-through funding to FTS by 2024 or earlier**.[23]

IRC is committed to supporting this agenda because it aligns with our values and advances our goal of achieving positive and lasting impact for people affected by crisis. **Our evidence suggests** that programme quality, including reach, relevance, impact, and efficiency, improves by partnering with local actors – particularly women's rights organisations working at the sharpest end of crises, such as COVID-19.[24]

The Grand Bargain can make a useful contribution by listening to key constituencies and agreeing on key definitions, such as 'local actors' or 'localisation, which is a term many relevant stakeholders find discriminatory. These concepts should be part of a broader discourse about **maximising power for people and organisations affected by crisis - that is, helping them increase their influence in the humanitarian sector and over decision-making that affects them**. It also means growing their control over resources by increasing funds that flow directly to them, with their having greater discretion over how these funds are used. Finally, it means evolving programme models to increase the agency of the people we serve. Those with social and communal ties to the places where humanitarian agencies work are capable and best placed to be catalytic agents of change that leverage and direct resources to achieve sustainable outcomes.

Aid works best when we achieve this complementarity– and where we are guided by local actors on what value we can add to existing capacities and systems. Local actors bring contextual awareness, adaptability, trusted relationships, and a deeper knowledge of language, socio-cultural norms, and other factors that play a primary role in securing humanitarian access. International NGOs can complement this knowledge with decades of experience from operating in different contexts around the world, a strong evidence base, technical and fundraising expertise, and a solid financial and compliance infrastructure.

The Grand Bargain can support efforts to contextualise aid by **negotiating a more realistic balance between risk-sharing and compliance and by ensuring more adequate and meaningful representation of local actors in relevant decision-making fora**. The IASC's Interim Guidance on Localisation and the COVID-19 Response[25] provide a useful footprint for engaging local actors in decision-making, and after successful testing could be adopted across the aid sector.

3B. A MORE HOLISTIC APPROACH TO CENTERING CRISIS-AFFECTED PEOPLE IN AID PROGRAMMES

We need to acknowledge the **fundamental connection between localisation and participation** of affected populations. We also need to recognise that, regardless of whether we are officially partnering with them, we have a responsibility to the people we serve.

The Grand Bargain's commitment to the 'Participation Revolution' has raised the profile of the accountability to affected populations (AAP) agenda. Donors have increasingly reflected the commitment in their own funding strategies and put pressure on implementing agencies to do the same. While there have been significant advances to align humanitarian response plans with the views of affected people, there has been still little change in practice. Many Grand Bargain indicators on participation are directly relevant only to the mandates of few signatories, which does not lead to sector-wide change.

As individual agencies and as a collective, **we should support the direct participation of people in deciding** the most important needs to address andthe outcomes they seek in their lives, rather than making those decisions on their behalf. Beyond the

use of 'reactive' feedback mechanisms (such as hotlines and suggestions boxes), implementing agencies should systematically consult people to understand their views and opinions through proactive consultation and collaboration. Participation should become a routine part of programme cycle management. It should be based on solid context analysis to ensure the engagement of women, girls, and other marginalised groups, such as people living with disabilities. Encouraging active and sustained participation should provide for diversity of experience and opinion in decisionmaking. An example of good donor practice is the Empowered Aid initiative funded by the US Department of State's Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration. This feminist multi-year study examines the mechanisms for humanitarian aid delivery that women and girls themselves say will work to lessen the risks of sexual exploitation and abuse and GBV.

To facilitate these changes in ways of working, implementing agencies need to become comfortable with **ceding decision-making power directly to the people they serve**, for example by formally including community representatives in programmatic decision-making. Implementing agencies should also create an enabling environment within their organisations to ensure that people can meaningfully participate in and influence the course of the aid provided to them.

4. A DEFINED, PREDICTABLE GLOBAL HUMANITARIAN CASH COORDINATION MECHANISM

The Grand Bargain has made impressive strides in its commitments to increase the use and coordination of cash assistance.[26] However, an area in which **significant gaps remain is a defined, global coordination process with clear leadership, resourcing, and accountability**. 90% of key informants in the Cash Learning Partnership (CaLP)'s 2020 *State of the World's Cash Review*[27] reported that the lack of clarity around cash coordination has had real operational impacts, limiting opportunities for collaboration and for improving the quality and effectiveness of cash and voucher assistance across humanitarian response.[28] The lack of formal, accountable, and resourced cash coordination has led to under-resourced, ad-hoc and informal coordination mechanisms and has undermined gains in the efficiency and effectiveness in the use of cash. IRC has seen challenges in coordination undermine cash assistance in Colombia, Ecuador, and Ethiopia.

The absence of formal and predictable cash coordination has also **limited the space for smaller and national actors to effectively engage in cash coordination**. Only 28% of respondents to a 2018 review[29] confirmed that local and national actors were appropriately engaged in cash coordination. Many of these actors are already equipped to achieve efficiencies of scale, and for those who are not, poor coordination further compromises any chances of achieving scale. There have been several attempts to define a global coordination mechanism during the lifetime of the Grand Bargain with the Good Humanitarian Donorship (GHD) initiative and the NGO community calling on the IASC to decide and issue clear guidance on cash coordination.

With no progress to date, **the Grand Bargain 2.0 presents an opportunity to build on CaLP[30] and the GHD's recommendations[31] that the IASC clearly define the leadership, resourcing, and accountability mechanism for global cash coordination**. In 2018, NGOs developed a common position and recommended that cash coordination should be the responsibility of the Inter-cluster Coordination Group (ICCG).[32] They also recommended that a Cash Working Group (CWG) lead on cash coordination and report directly to the ICCG. The launch of the Grand Bargain 2.0 presents an opportunity for the IASC to issue clear guidance on cash coordination in line with these multiple recommendations. The Collaborative Cash Delivery Network, a network of 14 of the largest international NGOs that operate in every global humanitarian crisis and provide cash programming, is well placed to play a role in supporting national and global level coordination.

The Grand Bargain 2.0 can also **track the implementation of this new mechanism by including an indicator on strategic, predictable cash coordination**. This can help ensure accountability to affected populations, by ensuring appropriate linkages to the humanitarian architecture are in place; clear mandate and responsibilities are defined; links with national response capacity and local actors are formed; and dedicated resources and guidance are developed. As illustrated in the metrics table in Annex I, the Grand Bargain 2.0 can **help track coordination outcomes and outputs**, such as an increase in affected people receiving cash, more agile and cost-efficient cash delivery, and more effective linkages to social protection mechanisms and economic inclusion.

5. A SECTOR-WIDE ADOPTION OF THE MOST PROMISING TOOLS TO MEASURE AND IMPROVE COST-EFFECTIVENESS

One of the highest-level ambitions of the Grand Bargain was to improve the efficiency of the humanitarian system itself, delivering $1 billion in efficiency gains. However, **the Grand Bargain has never adopted a common definition of "efficiency"**, which would have made it possible to measure progress or consider the contribution of different reforms towards this goal. The objective of efficiency was delegated to an individual work stream focused on "reducing management costs," thus turning a cross-cutting objective into a siloed issue.

The workstream quickly became UN-centric, developing ideas and approaches that were relevant only for UN agencies. Despite IRC's efforts to raise this issue, the situation has not improved. Since then, **IRC and our partners in the Systematic Cost Analysis (SCAN, recently re-branded as Dioptra) Consortium** have tried to engage UN agencies in our work on improving efficiency, but with limited success.

In addition, the workstream considers efficiency only from the perspective of costs and does not try to incorporate any measurement of the balance of costs and results. This raises the possibility that we are cutting costs, but in a way that also reduces the results we deliver. It cannot be assumed that money is fungible and necessarily goes to frontline services when it gets cut from management functions. In IRC's work, we have analysed programmes with high "management" costs, which cost very little per person served or per outcome achieved because those

management costs were necessary to achieve scale. For example, a UK-funded primary health programme in Jordan, when analysed with the Dioptra tool, costs an average of 16 USD per primary health consultation, including the cost of patient prescriptions. Support costs—including HR, Supply Chains, and Finance —accounts for more than 40%of the total cost, but it is precisely the large-scale recruitment of medical personnel and procurement of medicines that enabled the program to achieve low cost per consultation.

It is critical to measure the balance between costs and results to ensure that we are truly delivering the most to people in need. Given the Grand Bargain's singular emphasis on measuring costs and the inherent challenges in delegating cross-cutting "efficiency" to a subset of the Grand Bargain, IRC does not support continuing the work of the reduced management costs work stream. Rather, we recommend that the Grand Bargain 2.0 consider using evidence-based tools such as Dioptra and Norwegian Refugee Council's Money Where it Counts protocol to strategically assess costs against results to be gained by rolling out further reforms. For instance, Dioptra could be used as the preferred method for reporting quantitative results in the optional "Value for Money" section in the 8+3 harmonised reporting format. This would both ensure the consistency and rigour of Value for Money data and reduce work for implementers, who would know that investments in analytical capacity could benefit them regardless of the donor to whom they are reporting.

CONCLUSION

Time is running out if we want the Grand Bargain to deliver on its original promise – delivering more effective and efficient humanitarian aid. Building on five years of solid technical work and key lessons learned from the response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Grand Bargain signatories should now focus on **removing existing barriers to aid reforms through inclusive, high-level political dialogue**. This dialogue should lead to an agreement on evidence-based reforms that produce measurable improvements in the lives of people in crisis, rather than focus on bureaucracies.

A more responsive humanitarian system will be one that puts affected populations at the centre of the intervention. This move requires investing more resources – including financial flows and the power to decide how to allocate them – **at the country level**, where they are most needed. By prioritising quality financing and localisation, the Grand Bargain is moving in the right direction but needs to go farther by **focusing on downstream accountability, higher transparency and more funding to the frontlines**. The success of the Grand Bargain 2.0 will be measured by how it helps deliver these system-wide changes.

ANNEX I. PROPOSED METRICS TO MONITOR GRAND BARGAIN 2.0 PERFORMANCE

The table below details proposed metrics to monitor the implementation of key priorities envisaged for the Grand Bargain 2.0. These metrics are meant to complement, not substitute, current indicators developed by individual Grand Bargain work streams.

Grand Bargain 2.0 priority	Proposed target(s) to be agreed at Principal level	Proposed indicator	Expected outcome
More funding to frontline implementers	A minimum percentage of donor funding to second-level recipients, disaggregated by recipient type	Percentage of donor funding that is cascaded to local, national and international implementing partners	Higher levels of support closer to affected populations
Better-quality funding to frontline implementers	A minimum percentage of multi-year, flexible funding to second-level recipients, disaggregated by recipient type	Percentage of multi-year, flexible funding that is cascaded to local, national and international implementing partners	More predictable, agile and sustainable support closer to affected populations
More timely funding to frontline implementers	Timeframe of disbursement: within a quarter of donor pledge (or donor allocation)	Time interval between announcement of a pledge and disbursement to the first local, national or international implementing partner	More timely and responsive support to affected populations
Radical financial transparency	A minimum target of humanitarian financial flows to second-level recipients reported to FTS within a quarter of disbursement	Proportion of all humanitarian financial flows to second-level recipients that are reported to FTS	Higher visibility and tracking of humanitarian financing flows cascading down the transaction chain
A contextualised approach to humanitarian assistance (localisation)	25% of humanitarian funding to local and national responders (*already exists*)	Percentage of humanitarian funding to local and national responders (*already exists*)	More equitable transfer of resources to local actors
More meaningful roles played by local actors	Local actors are either in a co-chairing or executive role in relevant decision-making fora	Level of representation of local actors in relevant decision-making fora (Grand Bargain, IASC, Humanitarian Coordination Teams meetings, etc.)	Higher participation of and influence by local actors in key humanitarian processes
A defined, predictable global humanitarian cash coordination mechanism	A predictable cash coordination mechanism is fully in operation within a given timeframe	Level of strategic, predictable cash coordination (current baseline: no coordination)	a) Expanded reach/ scope of coverage of affected people b) More agile and cost-efficient cash delivery c) More effective linkages to social protection mechanisms or economic resilience-building driven by local actors
Use of standardised ways to improve and measure cost effectiveness	Evidence-based tools are used in all GB reforms which aim to increase efficiency/ cost-effectiveness	Type of tools used to define and measure GB reforms which aim to increase efficiency/cost-effectiveness	Better price/quality ratio for services delivered to affected populations

NOTES

1 The Facilitation Group is the main executive body of the Grand Bargain. In its current configuration, it includes the following Grand Bargain signatories: ECHO, IFRC, OCHA, SCHR, the UK and WFP.

2 Displacements within and from Watchlist countries according to UNHCR. NB: "refugees" include UNHCR-registered refugees, Venezuelans recorded by UNHCR and Palestinians registered under UNRWA's mandate. Source: UNHCR, UNRWA.

3 See https://www.who.int/health-cluster/news-and-events/news/GHRP-COVID-19-July-2020-final.pdf?ua=1

4 In global policy discussions, the use of the term 'localisation' has come under criticism, as it is often perceived as a label imposed by stakeholders predominantly in the Global North. IRC understands the term 'decolonisation' to mean the process of deconstructing colonial ideologies of the superiority and privilege of Western thought and approaches. Decolonisation involves dismantling structures that perpetuate the status quo and addressing unbalanced power dynamics. Furthermore, decolonisation involves valuing and revitalising local, indigenous, and non-Western sources/forms of knowledge and approaches and vetting out settler biases or assumptions that have impacted local ways of being.

5 High-Level Panel on Humanitarian Financing, *Report to the Secretary-General: Too Important to fail – addressing the humanitarian financing gap*, 2016.

6 See the 2016 and 2021 Global Humanitarian Overviews.

7 See *2021 Global Humanitarian Overview*. The percentage of humanitarian funds received relates to the 2016-2020 period as data for 2021 is still incomplete.

8 Estimates vary, but the average length of time a refugee has been displaced is between 10 and 26 years. See *Global Forced Migration. The Political Crisis of Our Time. A Democratic Staff Report Prepared for the use of the Committee on Foreign Relations*, United States Senate, June 18, 2020.

9 See Metcalfe-Hough, Victoria et al., *Grand Bargain annual independent report 2020*, ODI, June 2020 and Metcalfe-Hough, Victoria, *The Future of the Grand Bargain: a new ambition?*, ODI, June 2020.

10 See *2021 Global Humanitarian Overview*.

11 Based on FTS data on GHRP funding at the time of writing: https://fts.unocha.org/appeals/952/recipient-types

12 Information gathered from NGO coordination meetings in autumn 2020.

13 See Workstream 2 on Localisation: *Potential of pooled funds for localization and a call for country-based co-facilitators* – November 2020 update.

14 See also IAHE, *Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and Girls*, Final Evaluation Report, October 2020.

15 International Rescue Committee, *A Win-Win: Multi-year flexible funding is better for people and better value for donors*, June 2020.

16 Former UK Department for International Development, now part of UK's Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO).

17 Swedish International Development Agency.

18 International Rescue Committee, *Ibid.*

19 See International Rescue Committee and VOICE, *Where's the Money? How the Humanitarian System is Failing to Fund an End of Violence Against Women and Girls*, 2019, page 19.

20 See the Call to Action on Protection from Gender-Based Violence in Emergencies.

21 See International Rescue Committee, *The Essentials for Responding to Violence Against Women and Girls During and After COVID-19*.

22 The full commitment reads as follows: "Aid organisations and donors commit to achieve by 2020 a global, aggregated target of at least 25 per cent of humanitarian funding to local and national responders as directly as possible to improve outcomes for affected people and reduce transactional costs." In the lack of an agreed terminology, IRC considers local and national responders to be community-based and national actors rooted in the relevant country. It must be noted that there is still no agreed Grand Bargain definition of '25 per cent of humanitarian funding', which has generated many different interpretations and calculations. IRC is also in the process of calculating its 25% of humanitarian funding and welcomes a definitive definition of this percentage to be agreed in consultation with all Grand Bargain constituencies.

23 In line with IRC's new strategic plan for the period 2020-2033, every IRC programme office will set context-specific targets for the share of programming that they intend to be delivered by local partners by 2024. Every relevant office will identify 5-10 local civil society organisations with whom to prioritise building long-term relationships. They will be our partners of choice for local implementation, including for emergency response. Half will be women-led or women-focused. We will support, learn from, and work alongside these partners to reach more people with more impactful solutions. Globally, this will amount to at least 150 organisations by the end of 2024 and will create a global network of stronger organisations, helping us achieve scale, impact, and stability when it is time to exit.

24 See IRC, *Localizing the Response - A Comparative Review of INGO Direct Service Delivery and Partnerships with Local and National Actors*, January 2019. See also Women Deliver, *Advancing Gender-Transformative Localization*.

25 Inter-Agency Standing Committee, IASC Interim Guidance on Localisation and the COVID-19 Response, 27 May 2020.

26 ODI, Grand Bargain annual independent report 2020.

27 CaLP network, *State of the World's Cash 2020*.

28 Challenges posed to the efficient and effective delivery of humanitarian cash assistance have been highlighted in multiple instances. See for example IASC commissioned *World Bank Group. Cash Transfers in Humanitarian Contexts: Strategic Note 2016 World Bank, Washington, DC*.; the Global Public Policy Institute (GPPI) *Cash Coordination in Humanitarian Contexts* and more recently in CaLP's State of the World's Cash I and 2020.

29 CaLP, *The State of the World's Cash 2018*.

30 CaLP *The State of the World's Cash 2020*.

31 Members of the Good Humanitarian Donorship Initiative (March 2018), Multi Donor Letter to the IASC Working Group Chair.

32 See *NGO Position Paper - Cash Coordination in Humanitarian Response*, May 2018.

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Chapter 5. Integrative Discussion

Introduction

This chapter presents the main findings from the publications selected for this thesis and integrates them with new primary research on the issue of donor accountability to aid recipients for humanitarian and development aid effectiveness. Section 5.1 synthesises findings from the individual papers, as well as from my new primary data, highlighting similarities, gaps and differences in how GPEDC and GB have contributed to stronger donor accountability to either governments receiving development aid or implementing agencies delivering humanitarian assistance to populations in crisis. Section 5.2 analyses the contributions of my work to theory, practice and policy through a power analysis lens. It then identifies potential alternatives for improved donor accountability to aid recipients. Section 5.3 draws preliminary conclusions on the significance of the research findings and revisits my conceptual framework in light of this work. Section 5.4 explores the broader implications of my research for the international cooperation field. Finally, Section 5.5 presents a brief summary of the integrative discussion chapter.

5.1.   Synthesis of research findings

This section summarises how the themes emerging from selected publications, interviews with key informants and my professional contribution to the research field address the analytical questions identified in Chapter 3, namely:

a) Have GB and GPEDC led to higher accountability of donor governments to aid recipients?

b) To what extent did the original design of GB and GPEDC result in gaps in donor accountability to aid recipients?

c) How can GB and GPEDC be improved to address donor accountability to aid recipients?

As noted in the Introduction, the question of accountability cannot be separated from the question of power. Similarly, the notions of aid and power are intimately intertwined. For these reasons, I have analysed my research findings through a power lens and conceptual frame. In

response to the three analytical questions, my findings identify a number of similarities in donor behaviour towards aid recipients between GPEDC and GB. To some degree, these similarities are to be expected given that, by design, this study focuses on GPEDC and GB as two multi-stakeholder initiatives both promoting aid effectiveness. Research findings also show several common gaps on donor accountability to aid recipients in the original design of the two initiatives, as well as limited but significant differences. Taken together, these elements point to key learnings and potential opportunities to strengthen overall donor accountability in future aid effectiveness policy and practice. What follows is a list of the most recurring commonalities, differences and lessons learned from a comparative analysis of the research findings from this study.

5.1.1. The added value of monitoring aid effectiveness commitments in a multi-stakeholder partnership

Many interviewees considered GPEDC's monitoring exercise and GB's reporting process as the most valuable contribution not just to donor accountability but to the overall credibility of either initiative. As challenging as it is to measure progress against aid effectiveness commitments, having a monitoring framework with indicators, targets and timelines provides a clear sense of direction. This kind of clarity is welcome in what is often perceived as an extremely complex endeavour to advance aid reform. In addition, adopting a multi-stakeholder approach to monitoring adds a layer of mutual accountability that is meant to encourage both individual and collective progress.

In GPEDC's case, eleven out of the 30 indicators in the reformed monitoring framework directly relate to donors (called development partners). The full list of GPEDC indicators is available in Figure 3 for reference. The original 13 targets agreed in Paris in 2005 still apply to 'traditional' Western donors and the Paris principles are routinely used in OECD/DAC Peer Reviews to assess donor behaviour. While GPEDC progress reports have mostly delivered disappointing findings on donor performance, there is a general sense that donors are still held accountable to recipient governments for their promises through GPEDC's monitoring exercise (Glennie, 2022).

Similarly, ODI's Grand Bargain Annual Independent Reports (AIRs) have provided much needed analysis of signatories' progress against their promises, complementing individual self-reports. Box 1 below describes how AIRs have consistently pointed to the same major challenges to donor accountability to aid recipients year after year.

Box 1. Main challenges to donor accountability to recipients in the Grand Bargain

ODI has produced six out of the seven independent reports on the GB (Metcalfe-Hough et al., 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023). This continuity has ensured consistent and comparable findings on GB signatories' progress against their commitments from one year to the next. With regard to donors, ODI finds the main barrier to change, as with other signatories, is their lack of determination to drive deep institutional reforms. In particular, ODI identifies the following main challenges in ensuring donors are held accountable to aid recipients, including populations in crisis, for their GB commitments:

1. The humanitarian response is still supply- rather than demand-driven. Accountability to Affected Populations (AAP) has encouraged a variety of feedback mechanisms, such as perception surveys, to understand what people think of the aid they receive. AAP is also helpful in providing information on aid services to these people. However, it does not yet mean aid is based on what people actually want. Donors bear special responsibility in making sure implementing agencies do not just consult affected populations but design their interventions with them based on what people say they need.

2. Donors have not sufficiently adapted their internal systems to reach the target of channeling 25% of their humanitarian funding to local and national actors as directly as possible. This is often due to domestic political pressures, legal and administrative requirements in donor countries, which represent insurmountable barriers for many donor agencies.

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3. While several donors have increased their levels of quality funding – that is, predictable and flexible funding for the most part – over the years, these increases have not been at the scale required to produce the desired effectiveness and efficiency gains within the humanitarian system. Instead of aiming for transformational change, donors have opted for incremental increases.

The combination of external and internal monitoring has been effective in fostering signatories' ownership of the findings and ODI's recommendations. Targets and indicators have progressively narrowed the focus on select priorities. Senior representatives from GB signatories have then discussed both priorities and challenges in GB Annual Meetings and dedicated discussions. For all the limitations described in this chapter, the contribution of these initiatives remains valuable, as noted by the following informants:

> In terms of GPEDC's added value to donor accountability, for a time, it was the norm-setting. The peak of that was the monitoring exercise.
> (Respondent O, Executive Director of an international NGO in North America)

> The Grand Bargain has provided a framework for quite a long time, a clear direction on cash, accountability to affected populations, even on localisation, although it did not set a clear number target. It brought the humanitarian community around a reform agenda. It managed to bring along donors and aid agencies.
> (Respondent S, Founder of a European INGO)

Overall, both GB and GPEDC were established to create a new, multistakeholder space for agreeing basic aid effectiveness norms in humanitarian and development assistance. Referring to my conceptual framework, the added value of these partnerships is a good illustration of what Gaventa (2006) calls visible forms of power. Through this lens, GB and GPEDC are publicly recognised as providing authoritative mechanisms to improve aid effectiveness standards (see Table 4 in Section 5.2.1 below).

5.1.2. Conflating accountability with monitoring efforts

In the previous section, I have described the added value of adopting a multi-stakeholder approach to monitoring progress on aid effectiveness commitments. However, monitoring efforts alone have not been enough to guarantee accountability in either GPEDC or GB. In the former case, it was clear from the outset that the monitoring framework could only capture a snapshot of progress against a limited number of focus areas (Bena, 2012:6; Abdel-Malek, 2015:214). Even before GPEDC became operational, signatories built its monitoring framework around what they perceived to be ten priority focus areas, with the general understanding that they would be still held accountable for the remaining commitments through other, unspecified, means. The monitoring framework underwent a substantial revision in 2018 to align GPEDC indicators to the broader SDG review process and to reflect new developments in measuring the effectiveness of development cooperation, for example with the introduction of new principles for private sector engagement (the Kampala Principles). Figure 3 provides a snapshot of the area of progress prioritised by GPEDC's revised monitoring framework.

In the case of GB, there was a similar process of naturally selecting the most important commitments out of a high number of initial pledges. Two years after its inception, in 2018, the GB had already narrowed its self-reporting exercise to eleven 'core' commitments out of its original 51 pledges (see Table 2 in Chapter 2 for details).

The assumption here, too, was that the monitoring process was a proxy for the broader accountability efforts expected of GB signatories. As seen in the literature review, in the lack of an explicit theory of change in either initiative, it was never explained how to ensure broader accountability. My paper *Focus on the Frontlines* suggests several ways to address this challenge: by reinvigorating the dialogue among different GB constituencies; by holding the GB's senior leadership more accountable to the broader GB membership; by radically increasing financial transparency; and by strengthening partnerships with local actors (Bena, 2021).

As a result, both GPEDC and GB have progressively created two layers of accountability: one defined by the technical work underpinning their monitoring framework and the other one open for general discussion. By focusing their norm-setting ambitions on select monitoring efforts, both initiatives have – perhaps inadvertently – fostered the idea that 'real' accountability is limited to what is defined by metrics, and that the rest can be safely ignored. As explained by these informants:

> The GB monitoring process should measure what has been done. Instead, it often resembles a 'tick-the-box' exercise.
>
> (Respondent X, CEO of an international NGO in South Asia)

> The technical work of monitoring GPEDC commitments works best when it informs a broader dialogue among key stakeholders, especially at the country level.
>
> (Respondent C, Team Coordinator from a European donor government)

What these respondents seem to suggest is that there needs to be a fine balance between monitoring and broader accountability, which must be sustained through a strategically led, collective reflection on the information gathered. Monitoring efforts should illustrate how mutual

accountability translates in practice. They should encourage stakeholders to discuss what more they can do, where the gaps are and how they can join efforts to fill them.

In fact, neither GPEDC nor GB has struck this balance between technical monitoring and broader accountability for long. On the contrary, conversations have gradually focused on measurement indicators without clarifying how stakeholders' behaviour should change to ensure accountability for the full set of commitments made. This finding is based on my experience working with both alliances, as well as on informant interviews. For example, in following GPEDC's work over the years, I have been struck by the fact that a comprehensive list of commitments agreed in and since Busan has never been compiled. Without it, GPEDC discussions have moved between two extremes: they have either revolved around GPEDC's general principles – country ownership, focus on results, inclusive partnerships and transparency and mutual accountability – or become overly technical and limited by the scope of GPEDC's monitoring exercise. What I have missed is a conversation about the overall direction of travel for the partnership or its role in connecting global with national effectiveness policies, or in changing stakeholder behaviour.

> Real accountability for effective development cooperation happens on two levels. At the global level, it means agreeing good development policies and honouring international commitments. Once you have these two elements in place, you need to monitor donors' behaviour change. If donor governments start indeed to change their behaviour to fulfill their commitments, you will start seeing deep reforms in the international aid system. You will start seeing profound changes in how the system is structured.
>
> (Respondent L, Executive Director of an Africa-based international NGO network)

For most interviewees familiar with GPEDC, the most promising dialogue between donors and recipients on accountability took place between Paris (2005) and Busan (2011), when a series of independent surveys, evaluation and review of the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness

provided timely data on donor performance, which the OECD/DAC secretariat used to promote a lively dialogue on the future of effective development cooperation. By the time GPEDC became operational in 2012, however, this healthy alternation of monitoring and accountability conversations had already started giving way to overwhelmingly technical discussions about GPEDC's monitoring framework. At the global level, GPEDC's monitoring work has become the center of attention, while the common ground for a broader accountability dialogue among signatories is limited to how they are inspired by GPEDC's four principles: ownership of development priorities by developing [sic] countries, focus on results, inclusive development partnerships, and transparency and mutual accountability (OECD, 2011:11; Bhattacharya et al., 2021:320). At the country level, GPEDC launched a series of 'Action Dialogues' in 2021 to, among others, inform how to accelerate implementation for mutual accountability (GPEDC, 2024). The impact of these Dialogues remains to be seen.

In the meantime, the reform of GPEDC's monitoring framework has required a pause in the monitoring cycle. During this time, OECD and UNDP have refined GPEDC indicators and redesigned the data collection process to allow more flexibility for recipient countries so they can choose the best time to gather the data at the country level. As shown in Figure 8, rather than following the same reporting period, recipient countries can now decide the year of reference for their reporting within a three-year interval from 2023 to 2025.
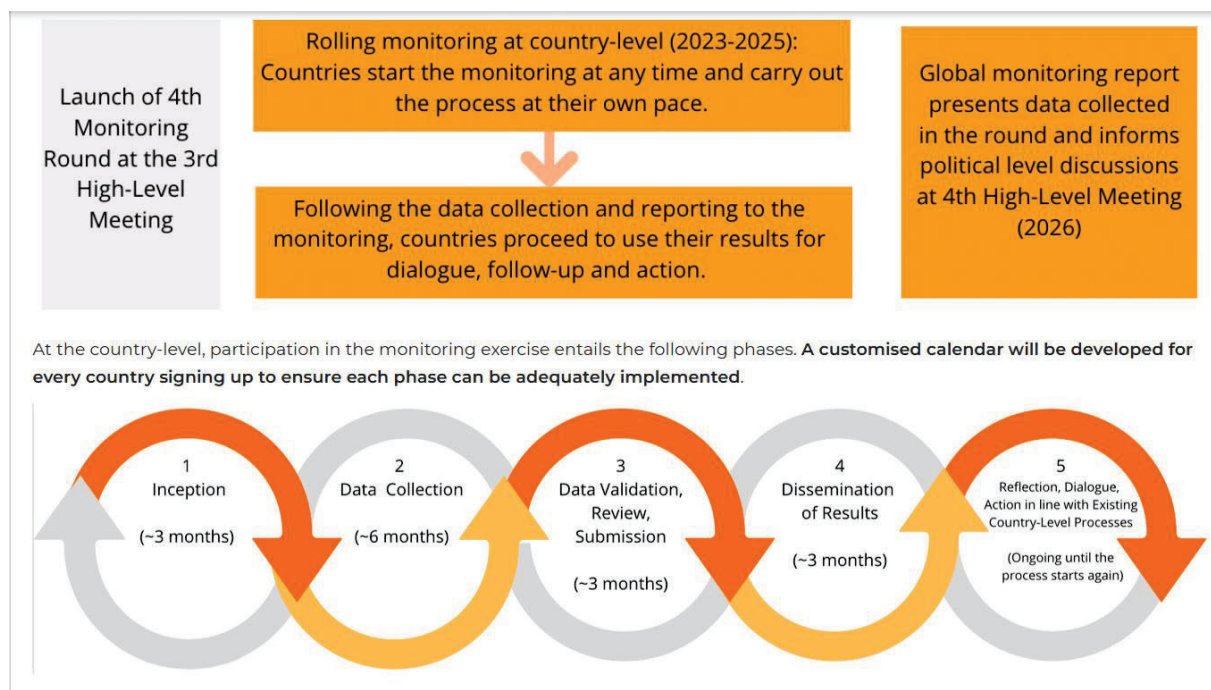
Figure 8. GPEDC's current monitoring cycle (2023-2026)

Source: GPEDC's website.

As a result, the reform of GPEDC's monitoring framework has led to a seven-year pause in producing global progress reports, from 2019 to 2026. This is a considerable period to go without an aggregate measure of progress. Even when the publication of these reports resumes in 2026, its frequency will decrease from biannual to quadrennial, following a decision by GPEDC's multi-stakeholder Steering Committee. The reasons for this change in frequency, as explained by Respondent AA (Head of Unity of a European donor agency) are mostly related to the cost of producing a labour-intensive product which is used by a relatively small community of policy- and decision-makers. This is a legitimate argument, which is also consistent with another key research finding explained in Section 5.1.6: that is, producing data is good for accountability but is not enough unless the data is *used*. For donors to invest scarce resources in data generation, there must be a return on their investment in terms of robust and constant data analysis.

GPEDC's decision to pause the production of global Progress Reports raises questions about how accountability will be upheld in between publications. Here we see donors' financial leverage at play. A budgetary constraint allows donors to limit GPEDC's original responsibility to hold donors and other stakeholders to account through monitoring. It can be a form of hidden power which weakens GPECD's ability to uphold mutual accountability. Donors' financial leverage within GPEDC skews the balance of power I described in my conceptual framework in their favour.

A similar dynamic between monitoring and accountability has taken place in the Grand Bargain. Some informants have noted a disconnect between the GB's reporting process and donor accountability to affected populations.

> Donor accountability has been outsourced to intermediaries as the main recipients
> of funding. They are expected to set up all these mechanisms – compliance,
> monitoring, reporting, feedback and complaints – but how much that trickles up
> to donors is unclear. There hasn't been a lot of progress on that.
>
> Respondent J (Adjunct Lecturer from a US University)

> The annual self-reporting… within the Grand Bargain has been useful to a degree.
> Basically, you have to read between the lines what people have not done or not
> done enough. Donors are not best placed to say what they have not done. Others
> don't want to expose them to the critique.
>
> (Respondent AB, Senior Advisor at a donor agency in Europe)

Compared to GPEDC, the combination of internal and external GB reporting through self-reports and AIRs initially provided stronger foundations to hold GB signatories accountable for their commitments. The annual cadence of AIRs also provided a frequent reminder of aid effectiveness commitments in humanitarian interventions. On the other hand, based on my direct experience attending years of GB meetings, there have been fewer opportunities than in GPEDC for a

collective discussion on the findings from individual self-reports and the only moment GB signatories come together to reflect on AIRs is usually at GB Annual Meetings. The last Annual Meeting session dedicated to a discussion on AIR findings dates back to June 2023 (Grand Bargain, 2023b).

While GB monitoring indicators were refined in early 2024 to streamline data collection and encourage self-reporting by signatories, at the time of writing (January 2025), there are no plans to hold broader accountability discussions based on self-reports alone. Meanwhile, the production of AIRs has been paused from 2023 to 2026 due to funding constraints and at the suggestion of AIRs' authors (ODI). Their rationale was that it is better for GB stakeholders to focus on implementing their commitments than to invest in a resource-intensive assessment which will likely produce the same recommendations as those made in previous years. This is a similar argument to what donors have used to de-fund the production of GPEDC reports. Producing AIRs has indeed required time and resources. In addition, it has not necessarily led GB members to use AIR data for better informed decision-making. Like GPEDC, GB stakeholders may have focused too much on generating data and too little on using that data afterwards. At the same time, donors' decision to stop funding AIRs shows their hidden power at play. Their move has directly affected GB's ability to hold GB stakeholders accountable to each other and to aid recipients.

Looking at this imbalanced power dynamic between donors and recipients through a conceptual lens, an evidence-based dialogue on donor accountability to aid recipients is unlikely to happen in the medium term. In the absence of independent monitoring, the risk of relying on inherently subjective self-reports by GB signatories may increase (Metcalfe-Hough et al., 2021:17). GB signatories may use their self-reports to showcase their achievements and minimise their shortcomings in fulfilling their commitments. This trend seems to be confirmed by the agenda set for recent GB Annual Meetings. They were more of an opportunity to share positive examples of how signatories have implemented agreed aid reforms rather than a mutual accountability

moment (Grand Bargain, 2023c:3 and 2024:5). However, GB Caucuses may help reverse this trend, as explained in Box 2 below.

Box 2. The special case of the Grand Bargain Caucuses

GB Caucuses are time-bound negotiations that bring together a limited number of GB signatories around specific aid reform challenges. Since 2022, GB Caucuses have produced 'outcome documents' or multi-stakeholder agreements on cash coordination, quality funding, the role of intermediaries, funding for localisation and anticipatory action (GB, no date d).

While GB Caucuses have been criticised for inviting only the most relevant stakeholders to the negotiating table, their model has proven more effective in advancing aid reforms than the broader GB. For example, through the Caucus on quality funding, donor governments have agreed to increase their levels of multi-year humanitarian funding by December 2023 and all aid providers have committed to cascade more multi-year humanitarian funding to local and national actors (Grand Bargain, 2022:3). Correspondingly, the new self-reporting template includes new indicators of progress against Caucus commitments, such as the percentage change in multi-year funding by donors and the percentage of multi-year funding cascaded to local and national actors.

To date, however, there has only been a top-level analysis of progress on these Caucus commitments by the GB secretariat, which was presented at the 2024 GB Annual Meeting. Post-negotiation dialogue across all Caucuses has also been limited. Members of GB Caucuses – and donors in particular – tend to mention their follow-up work only in their self-reports (GB, 2017-2023). None of the donors who have endorsed Caucus outcome documents has suggested a follow-up conversation on their implementation. In other words, donors prefer to comply with the minimum GB monitoring requirements.

Conflating accountability with monitoring efforts seems to be the natural response in both GPEDC and GB to re-establish the status quo and resist meaningful policy dialogue. By reducing accountability conversations to the bureaucratic process of submitting monitoring reports on a limited set of commitments, GPEDC and GB have lowered their original ambitions to deliver better aid. As an informant deeply familiar with GPEDC accountability noted, accountability for GPEDC commitments remains vague:

> Anyone can say anything… the application of principles and commitments is diffuse.
>
> (Respondent B, Team Lead at an inter-governmental organisation)

Left unchecked, this reductionist approach to accountability has generated dissatisfaction among many GPEDC and GB stakeholders and raised questions about the ultimate purpose of monitoring efforts. What has been particularly missing is peer pressure between donors to champion bolder aid reforms.

In sum, research findings on GPEDC and GB monitoring efforts highlight two important dimensions of donor accountability, which complement the broader definition of accountability explained in the Introduction. First, these monitoring processes lead governments to provide a lot of information but that does not automatically result in higher data transparency. Referring to the more recent literature on transparency and accountability analysed in Section 2.1.2, the information provided by donors must be accessible and legible by citizens and aid groups, not just a relatively small policy community. While GPEDC and GB have produced valuable monitoring reports over the years, the data provided are still too technical to be used by the wider public. From this perspective, transparency within GPEDC and GB is far from 'clear' but remains 'opaque' (Fox, 2022:47). Second, although donors have responded to requests for more and better data on a regular basis, this type of response alone has not been enough. Responsiveness, even when sustained over time, is not the same as accountability (Fox et al., 2024:14). Whether donors comply with monitoring requirements or not, they may still choose to do so on a discretionary

basis. What has been missing in both GPEDC and GB is an additional step showing donors' willingness to change their decision-making process in light of the monitoring findings. Feedback from key informant interviews in particular confirms that accountability 'with teeth' can only happen when donors turn their arbitrary or incomplete responses to recipients' requests into an institutional obligation to respond and change as needed (Fox et al., 2024:13).

5.1.3   Political ambitions *vs.* technical discussions

In my published papers, especially *The Outcome* and *Focus on the Frontlines*, I have highlighted how an effective interplay between monitoring and accountability in GPEDC and GB requires another balancing act – between political ambitions and technical discussions. 'Political' is a term used here to describe the higher-level ambitions of these initiatives, in contrast with the technical discussions that are necessary but insufficient to ensure robust accountability. A political dialogue is one that draws on technical data to rally the aid community around transformative aid effectiveness reforms. It is up to the GPEDC and GB's leadership to promote this dialogue by keeping all stakeholders motivated to hold each other, and themselves, accountable for realising their common vision.

Many interviewees emphasised the same idea. Respondent A, an Adjunct Professor at a gradual school in Southern Africa, and Respondent E, a Senior Leader from an international NGO based in Europe, recalled how political ambitions were highest when GPEDC were first established and led by politicians themselves. The Fourth High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness in Busan attracted notable speakers, such as then US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and Rwanda President Paul Kagame. Their attendance of the conference helped build momentum towards the official launch of GPEDC the following year, in 2012 (OECD, 2011). In GB's case, notable champions included former European Commission Vice President for Budget and Human Resources (currently the Managing Director of the IMF) Kristalina Georgieva. As Respondent S, the Founder and former Director of an international NGO recalled, Georgieva led the UN High Level Panel on Humanitarian Financing, which recommended the establishment of the GB. The alliance was launched at the high-profile World Humanitarian Summit in 2016 under the auspices of the UN Secretary-General

and Georgieva ended up being GB's first 'Eminent Person' from 2016 to 2019. Nevertheless, neither GPEDC nor GB's ambitious founding documents include any detail about the governance structure required to translate these aspirations into action. The assumption was that this structure would be put in place at a later stage with the help of a secretariat.

In GPEDC and GB alike, setting high expectations without the aid architecture for meeting them created a hiatus of several months, which led to loss of political momentum. By the time GPEDC's secretariat was fully staffed and monitoring negotiations were finalised, many senior donor representatives had already delegated their personal engagement to their technical teams. Respondent F, a Senior Lecturer at a graduate school in South America, thought the loss of donor interest in GPEDC might have been due to the changing political landscape since Busan. GPEDC's co-Chairs – Ministers Armida Alisjahbana from Indonesia, Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala from Nigeria and Justine Greening from the UK – were busy themselves with other priorities. As a former member of the Joint OECD-UNDP Support Team, I vividly recall how challenging it was just to keep GPEDC on the co-Chairs' agenda and ensure they would move forward more or less at the same time. Compromise solutions sometimes involved delaying important discussions with GPEDC's main governing body, the multi-stakeholder Steering Committee, and keeping the co-Chairs' direct engagement in the partnership to the bare minimum. As a result, most of the work following Busan was of a technical nature. Similarly, 'Eminent Person' Kristalina Georgieva – GB's first leader from 2016 to 2019 — was Chief Executive Officer of the World Bank at the time, so fully absorbed in other work. While she propelled the GB to global attention, her engagement in the following two years remained light and rare as a small secretariat juggled with ten different 'workstreams', each one covering the technicalities of aid reform (High Level Panel on Humanitarian Financing, 2016).

It is no secret that politicians often accept to support multiple initiatives without expecting to be deeply involved in driving them forward (Unsworth, 2009:890). They would barely have time to do their job otherwise. Complex multi-stakeholder aid effectiveness initiatives such as GPEDC and GB, however, require dedicated leadership as they promote system-wide change that is measured

in years, at best. This timescale is hardly compatible with politicians' fast-paced schedule; even retired public officials, like two of the three GB's current leaders (Michael Köhler, former European Commission senior official and Manuel Bessler, former Swiss Development Co-operation senior representative), have engaged with the alliance intermittently. Except for former politician and Norwegian Refugee Council's Secretary-General Jan Egeland, who proactively led the GB from 2021 to 2023, the main responsibility to drive GPEDC and GB forward has gradually fallen onto their governance structures: GPEDC's Steering Committee and the Joint OECD-UNDP Support Team, and GB's Facilitation Group and Secretariat, respectively.

Without steady political leadership, both initiatives have gone through cycles of stalemate dominated by technocratic discussions and proliferation of working groups. Some of these groups have indeed produced valuable work, such as the so-called '8+3 reporting template', which is a standardised reporting tool meant to harmonise and reduce humanitarian reporting requirements (GB, 2019b). However, in the absence of Principal-level endorsement of this reform from GB signatories, the adoption of this template has been limited (Metcalfe, 2023:21). This example shows how, since their establishment, GPEDC and GB have witnessed a change in internal power dynamics, with senior decision-makers from donor agencies either disengaging from the conversation (McKee et al., 2020:13) or questioning the added value of GPEDC or GB in private exchanges with civil society representatives, including myself:

> GPEDC became technocratic way too soon. These are political issues. It was never a technical choice only…. The discussion is highly political, [it's] hard for recipients to talk about money received. It's not a partnership of equals in reality.
>
> (Respondent I, Team Lead of an inter-governmental organisation)

> [Within GB] there's lack of leaders but there is no other platform. We decided not to kill the GB but then there's no drive except for civil society.
>
> (Respondent U, Director at an international NGO)

This level of skepticism about the effectiveness of GPEDC and GB is a form of invisible donor power. As illustrated in Table 4, donors' hesitation to support these platforms politically fuels widespread beliefs that GPEDC and GB do not promote a more equitable playing field between donors and recipients. These beliefs, when supported by powerful stakeholders like donors, both produce and become the effect of a pervasive narrative (Foucault, 1995:26; Clegg, 1993:28). As such, they undermine the ability of these partnerships to hold donors to account for their aid effectiveness commitments, as originally intended and represented in my conceptual framework. This is because partners themselves see there are no consequences for the power asymmetries within either initiative – nor are there any explicit discussions about how to compensate for these asymmetries. Donors' greater power is left unchallenged, which weakens GPEDC and GB's overall accountability to aid recipients (Taggart, 2022:1469).

5.1.4. The trade-off between mutual accountability and inclusion

A remarkable change brought by GPEDC has been its inclusion of all the main development cooperation stakeholders, including different groups of donors: 'South-South' providers, such as China and India, governments that are both providers and recipients, such as Indonesia and Brazil, and recipient governments, such as Malawi. As explained in Chapter 2, already before Busan, OECD/DAC donors had welcomed the idea to 'broaden the tent' and share the responsibility for effective development cooperation with other donors. In doing so, they were hoping not only to share the burden of advancing system reform but also to stay relevant in a rapidly changing development landscape.

On their part, South-South providers did not necessarily share the commitments made in Paris and Accra but accepted to 'join the club' from Busan onwards to reflect their new identity as global cooperation leaders, albeit with common but differentiated commitments. (Bracho, 2017:16; see also Section 2.2 in the literature review for details).

GB, on the other hand, is mainly open to Western donors and does not include recipient governments. Out of its 68 signatories, it features 24 OECD/DAC members[1]. Over the years, signatories have discussed the pros and cons of 'broadening the tent' to other, 'non-traditional' donors, particularly in consideration of the widening gap between humanitarian needs and available financial resources. Nevertheless, to date, there is still general hesitation to engage providers from profoundly different backgrounds. While the four humanitarian principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence are recognised as universal, many GB signatories are concerned that non-DAC donors may either apply them in arbitrary ways or ignore them in practice. This is what has transpired from several discussions in which I have participated over the years.

Indeed, the expectation that non-DAC donors will follow a DAC-driven accountability agenda without questioning its legitimacy is not realistic. GPEDC's inclusion strategy has meant that donors like China and India have been free to ignore pre-Busan promises (the so-called 'unfinished aid agenda') and cherry-pick their commitments from the 2011 Busan outcome document onwards (Abdel-Malek, 2015:208; Bracho, 2017:24). Five years later, in 2016, the outcome document of GPEDC's second High-Level Meeting reiterated this point by holding only DAC donors to account for implementing the Paris and Accra agenda, noting that they would develop 'time-bound action plans in relation to these commitments' (Nairobi Outcome Document, 2016:10). However, those plans have yet to materialise. While China and India participated in the first few GPEDC Steering Committee meetings, they did not attend its High-Level Meetings in Mexico City (2014) or Nairobi (2016). To date, there are no reports on which Busan commitments they have chosen to implement, or how.

At the same time, it is undeniable that GPEDC still reflects a Western view of aid and development effectiveness, building on decades of OECD/DAC's work. Its outreach to South-South and

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[1] These members are: Australia, Belgium, Canada, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, EU/DG ECHO, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Luxembourg, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Korea, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom and United States.

Triangular Cooperation providers notwithstanding, the OECD hosts most of the Joint OECD-UNDP Support Team and plays an influential role in key GPEDC activities. On several occasions, BRICS countries have questioned the legitimacy of GPEDC's mandate as partly outside the UN system (Bracho, 2017). Indeed, GPEDC is the result of a decade-long aid effectiveness process led by OECD/DAC donors. The most concrete links to the UN system are the fact that GPEDC's secretariat, the Joint Support Team, includes few UNDP staff and that GPEDC's monitoring data inform two SDG indicators (SDG 5 and SDG 17). Nevertheless, GPEDC is still perceived by many as being the OECD/DAC's brainchild (Brown, 2020:1243; Taggart, 2022:1463). For BRICS donors to fully embrace GPEDC's agenda, they would need to see a significant shift in decision-making power from the OECD to UNDP. Ideally, the Joint Support Team should be an independent secretariat funded through a pooled mechanism.

Therefore, there seems to be a trade-off between inclusion and accountability, and donor accountability in particular. As GPEDC courted non-DAC donors in an effort to stay relevant in the global development landscape (Bracho, 2017:17), it did not provide clear guidance on how to reconcile different views on international cooperation. This confusion, which I described in detail in the literature review, has undermined GPEDC's ability to hold both DAC and non-DAC donors to account to aid recipients (Bhattacharya et al., 2021:318). The clarity and shared understanding of the principles and targets agreed in Paris was lost (McKee et al., 2020:10) with seemingly no corresponding accountability gains in return. This is proven by the fact that China, India and the likes no longer engage in GPEDC's regular work, as confirmed by my interview with Respondent D, Coordinator at a donor agency. Unlike what happened in 2014 and 2016, the latest GPEDC Progress Report does not include any data from China (GPEDC, 2019b). Mutual accountability between DAC and non-DAC donors is still only a theory within GPEDC. GB signatories have a point in being skeptical about inviting other humanitarian donors to the table without redefining the rules of the game.

As a final point, the sheer number of GPEDC and GB stakeholders makes mutual accountability a challenge. While engaging more players has given both initiatives some political weight, the

higher the number of signatories, the more complex and time-consuming it is to secure an agreement on any commitment, let alone hold signatories accountable for it. There needs to be a strategic balance between participation and effectiveness. Instead, these initiatives have often pursued the lowest common denominator in moving forward.

> Accountability works better in smaller clubs.
> (Respondent A, Adjunct Professor at a graduate institute in Southern Africa)

5.1.5. Global vs. country-level accountability

Compared to the donor-centric discussions on aid effectiveness held at global level before Busan, another major innovation brought by GPEDC has been its focus on country-level accountability. In line with the 'global light, country-focused' approach promoted in Busan (Bena, 2012:5), GPEDC stakeholders set out to translate their mutual accountability for global commitments into a structured dialogue on effective development cooperation at the country level under the leadership of recipient governments. The general expectation was that gathering GPEDC stakeholders in country would promote more relevant discussions on aid and development effectiveness closer to the receiving end. Recipient governments would be able to present national monitoring data to other GPEDC signatories around the table, including donors, and the outcomes of those discussions would feed back into global progress reports and donor profiles.

In reality, this approach has led donor governments to disengage from accountability to aid recipients, both in Northern and Southern capitals. Respondent AA, Head of Unit at a European donor agency, admitted this level of donor disengagement is 'a big issue' within GPEDC. Without clear guidance on how to sustain global-to-local dialogue, recipient governments have had no blueprint to hold their donors to account. Only in May 2024 did GPEDC issue a guide for National Coordinators in recipient countries on how to hold country-level Action Dialogues (see Section 6.1.1). GPEDC monitoring rounds have indeed provided some structure to frame country-level conversations with donors around accountability, but national monitoring cycles have gradually

followed longer and more staggered timelines, which have made it difficult to connect what was discussed at country level with an assessment of global progress. This has been particularly the case after the decision to pause the production of global progress reports from 2019 to 2026.

At the GPEDC Geneva summit in 2022, it became evident that the 'global light, country-focused' approach had its limitations (Taggart, 2022). Only one head of a donor country participated in the conference: the President of the Swiss Confederation Ignacio Cassis, because he represented the host country. On average, the conference programme featured donor representatives at Director-General level, while recipient countries were represented by their Ministers (GPEDC, 2022; Glennie, 2022). This imbalance in representation by donor and recipient countries was a clear sign that GPEDC had not helped flatten power hierarchies, in line with Faul's social network analysis of multi-stakeholder partnerships (Faul, 2016).

The divide between global and local conversations on effective development co-operation has grown to such degree that, according to Respondent E (a senior leader at a European INGO), even some civil society organisations from the Global South are now disengaging from aid effectiveness discussions. In recent preparatory meetings for the Fourth UN International Conference on Financing for Development (to be held in June 2025), these CSOs have expressed their concerns about making any references to aid effectiveness on the grounds that it is a 'donor-imposed agenda'. Instead of supporting multi-stakeholder efforts to turn global commitments to aid reform into improvements at the country level, these civil society actors have grown skeptical of aid effectiveness. They see it as a set of external conditions imposed by donors from the Global North. From their perspective, aid effectiveness can be considered as a form of Gaventa's invisible power (2006, 2007), a way to internalise beliefs about aid as a form of neo-colonialism.

GB accountability conversations, on the other hand, are still predominantly held at the global level, partly because humanitarian assistance does not always follow the principle of country ownership. Humanitarian principles – especially the principle of independence – may be hard to reconcile with the actions of a government which is party to a conflict or is unwilling to lead

humanitarian responses. For these reasons, the GB includes no governments nor local authorities receiving humanitarian assistance in its membership. Instead, donors interact with intermediaries, such as UN agencies, INGOs and local civil society organisations (CSOs), as the actors delivering aid to affected populations.

This lack of country ownership for GB commitments has translated into faulty donor accountability to aid recipients at the country level. Without a dedicated policy space to hold GB discussions in country, accountability efforts have been left to the initiative of local and national CSOs. Under the leadership of global CSO networks, such as NEAR, a few National Reference Groups (NRGs) have been established in around a dozen countries since 2021 (NEAR, 2024:1). However, at the time of writing, some NRGs have already paused, the NRGs' remit varies from country to country and it is unclear if and how they engage donor representatives on progress against their GB commitments. Resource constraints are also a barrier to NRGs' development (NEAR, 2024:3).

> [Regarding NRGs] donors shift the blame on another actor and start another process. There are already a million country-level structures for coordination. All three NRGs at the [GB] Annual Meeting were just getting started. There is no merit in this idea. They wasted three years.
>
> (Respondent X, CEO of an INGO from Asia)

Other regional or country-level initiatives, such as the Indonesian Localisation Conference & Asia-Pacific Local Leaders Summit in Indonesia in August 2024, have led to renewed momentum around humanitarian aid effectiveness (GB, 2024c) but there are no formal linkages between these discussions and global accountability for GB commitments. Here too, the decision to suspend GB Annual Independent Reports further complicates the situation as there are no plans to conduct in-depth, collective analysis of GB signatories' progress until 2026, so there is no

independent way to cross-check what is happening on the ground with what donors say in their self-reports.

While donor accountability to aid recipients is still considered a priority within the GB compared to what has happened within GPEDC in recent years, global accountability discussions are moving too slowly in both initiatives and are not clearly connected to a multistakeholder dialogue on humanitarian or development aid effectiveness at the country level. There may be positive deviance to this trend at the project level, for example in the case of donor accountability to recipients in specific health interventions (Gisselquist et al., 2023:1). It would be interesting to investigate how these best practices in connecting global to local accountability for specific projects can inspire similar linkages on a sector-wide scale. Today, however, this research field remains unexplored.

5.1.6. The 'evidence trap'

Another common and recurring theme emerging from the research is donors' tendency to ask for ever-new evidence of the need for aid effectiveness reforms (Metcalfe-Hough et al., 2021:72-73; GPPi, 2020:29). Reforms are in and of themselves an indicator of accountability to recipients as most GPEDC and GB commitments focus on reforming the aid system (see Annex I). The more GPEDC and GB advance on the aid reform agenda, the higher their accountability to people living in poverty and in crisis. Despite the abundant data produced by GPEDC and GB's monitoring exercises, however, donor governments are often reluctant to fulfil their original commitments on the grounds that there is insufficient evidence of the need to improve their policies or practices. Hence, they encourage aid recipients to produce more timely or granular data before moving forward with their promised reforms. This is what I call the 'evidence trap'.

For example, through the GB, donors originally promised to make 30% of their humanitarian funding more flexible within five years (GB, 2016:12). They had the option of achieving higher flexibility through a variety of means, such as lifting the most restrictive conditions that tightly earmark funding to a specific humanitarian crisis or activity. At donors' request, several

implementing agencies provided robust evidence that more flexible funding was more effective and produced better outcomes for affected populations than earmarked funding (UNHCR, 2022:13). My co-authored report *A Win-Win* was also designed to respond to this kind of donors' requests for additional evidence. Nevertheless, there was no increase in the proportion of flexible government funding by the original deadline of 2021 (Metcalfe-Hough et al., 2021:107). Since the publication of these reports, donors have continued to mention the same reasons for not providing adequate levels of flexible funding, citing public expectations about how funding is disbursed, parliamentary scrutiny and lack of more 'information in real-time' on the impact of this kind of funding (Metcalfe-Hough et al., 2023:58). According to donors' argument, and based on my direct experience interacting with them, aid recipients had to produce new evidence that flexible funding was still more effective than earmarked funding. Donor agencies needed that additional evidence to convince their parliaments and taxpayers that fulfilling the original GB promise to unearmark humanitarian funding still made sense (Metcalfe-Hough et al., 2021:72-73; GPPi, 2020:29; Development Initiatives and Norwegian Refugee Council, 2019:14). Key informants pointed to a similar dynamic within GPEDC, for example in terms of demonstrating that effective development co-operation produces better 'results':

> We [CSOs] tried to test this new approach to results by providing data through [GPEDC's] monitoring process... but donors don't really want to contribute at the country level. They are not willing to re-ignite the aid effectiveness process.
>
> (Respondent O, Executive Director of a North American INGO)

Recent research on the added value of cash and voucher assistance (CVA) highlights the same challenge:

> One key informant felt that there was too much emphasis on waiting for evidence instead of adopting a 'can do' attitude, by trialling CVA modalities for sectoral

interventions while adhering to 'do no harm' principles without a massive, pre-existing evidence base.

(CALP, 2022:29)

The argument about recipients needing to produce new evidence relies on three questionable assumptions. First, it implies that the commitments agreed in GB and GPEDC's founding documents can be renegotiated or ignored at donors' will. The underlying assumption is that these commitments only reflect donors' good intentions *at a certain point in time*; they do not necessarily engage stakeholders to turn those intentions into action. Second, this argument follows a circular logic as the original commitments were already made on the basis of strong evidence. Fulfilling promises should not require proof of concept – otherwise, they would not have been made in the first place. Following this logic only brings back stakeholders to square one, fuelling mistrust. Third, in theory, donors' requests for new evidence can be endless (Achamkulangare and Bartsiotas, 2017:2; Consortium BKP Development, 2020:60). As aid reform largely depends on donor governments' behaviour, and political circumstances are constantly changing, there will always be new, unforeseen developments in implementing commitments. There will always be a need for more data. The question is – when is enough, enough? How can donors make the best-informed decision *based on available evidence*?

Donors' ongoing quest for new data creates a sort of 'evidence trap' for aid recipients. By questioning the relevance of their original promises to an ever-changing world, donors can delay the implementation of their commitments while recipients get busy collecting new data. By the time additional evidence is produced – which can take up to four years in GPEDC's case – the world has changed again, which gives donors an excuse to ask for new evidence before implementing their part of the deal. This donor behaviour partly explains why GB's original five-year mandate (from 2016 to 2021) has been extended twice and is currently set to expire in 2026. For some informants, donors' ongoing requests for new evidence are a way to let conversations move in circles, instead of resolving them. This undermines the accountability and overall credibility of either GPEDC or GB.

Some of the big changes are at the [donor] headquarters level, but donors say: as long as they don't see change at country level, we cannot change at headquarters. They say: we are still waiting for proof of concept, a year in.

(Respondent B, Coordinator at an intergovernmental organisation)

You get to a point where you no longer need to produce evidence.

(Respondent R, Director of an international network)

5.1.7. Loss of institutional memory

A rather surprising finding from key informant interviews is the underestimated role institutional memory has played in GPEDC and GB accountability alike over the years. Institutional memory refers to the structured knowledge of how these alliances work, what each constituency has committed to do and why things may have gone differently than planned (Brownlie, 2016:151). Besides its most tangible forms, such as outcome documents, monitoring data and progress reports, institutional memory relies on the direct experience and lessons learned by individual professionals who have followed either initiative for a considerable period of time (Byrne, 2015:263).

Naturally, many policymakers and practitioners have moved on to follow other processes since the establishment of GPEDC in 2012 and GB in 2016. To a certain degree, it is in the very nature of multilateralism to witness a frequent change of stakeholder representatives. In the case of GPEDC and GB, this change has happened in parallel to increasingly complex discussions about implementing aid effectiveness commitments. As new generations of policymakers have come on board, the lessons learned by their predecessors have often been left to rushed conversations, summary handover notes or, conversely, lengthy reports which few professionals have the time to read. Within both GPEDC and GB, there has been no linear progression in the knowledge accumulated over the years, nor internal arrangements to facilitate that kind of intangible wisdom

that could avoid duplication of efforts. Instead, conversations have been moving in circles, often re-opening previously resolved discussions.

> Within GPEDC, there is a problem with staff turnover. Many people come and go. Institutional memory is a problem among donors as well. For example, the European Commission used the 2019 Progress Report to put this issue on the table. GPEDC is hardly understood in its historical context.
>
> (Respondent E, Senior Leader of an INGO, based in Europe)

I have personally experienced this trend to repeat the same conversations in both initiatives. Within the GB, for example, I closely followed two Caucuses during the period from late 2021 to mid-2022: the former on cash coordination and the latter, which I managed, on quality funding. I then left the organisation for which I was working at the time, IRC, in 2023, after sharing a list of lessons learned from managing a Caucus with the wider GB membership. In 2023, both the GB leadership and secretariat were also almost completely renewed. I then re-engaged with the GB in the second half of 2024 on behalf of another organisation, Save the Children. In my new role, I participated in a third Caucus on anticipatory action and followed the broader GB work. By the time I re-engaged, very few GB representatives seemed to remember what previous Caucuses had discussed or agreed only two years before. Although some of the commitments agreed in the quality funding Caucus had been captured in GB's revised monitoring indicators, more recent discussions focused on understanding the 'real barriers to quality funding', which the GB had already abundantly addressed in past Annual Independent Reports, catalogues of best practices and related research. Donors especially seemed oblivious to past discussions, as hinted by the Facilitation Group, a GB governing body (GB, 2023b:2).

This loss of hard-earned institutional knowledge has had a detrimental impact on both GPEDC and GB accountability. In both cases, the general assumption has been that *producing* the right information or monitoring tool would in itself be enough to improve stakeholder accountability. In fact, there needs to be an equal investment in *preserving and using* the lessons learned from

reaching those milestones to advance the aid reform agenda. There comes a point where generating new knowledge will hardly make any difference in changing behaviour. Within GPEDC and GB, facilitating knowledge exchange can be more important than producing knowledge itself. For that to happen, there needs to be a deliberate investment in preserving the collective, intangible wisdom accumulated in both initiatives over the years. Without it, the documentation produced may lead to little more than information overload. My experience witnessing institutional memory loss in GPEDC and GB leads me to believe it can be a form of both hidden and invisible power. While it is seldom intentional, institutional memory loss can be a manifestation of hidden power because it naturally preserves the status quo. It encourages new conversations about the same topics, which allows those in power (e.g. donors) to renegotiate the terms of pre-agreed reforms. Institutional 'amnesia' can also be invisible power because it leads members of these alliances to be unaware of past solutions to accountability dilemmas. It can lead to ignoring the progress made in holding donors more accountable to aid recipients.

5.1.8. Siloed approaches

Research findings confirm one of the main reasons for writing this thesis: that is, few are aware that GPEDC and GB focus on the same issue (aid efficiency and effectiveness) from different angles (development and humanitarian assistance, respectively). Despite this, I could not find any official documents citing these initiatives together in relation to aid effectiveness. Neither the GPEDC nor the GB secretariats are familiar with each other's work. Only five out of 30 interviewees knew of the existence of both initiatives. Of these, only two informants were deeply familiar with both. Since GB's establishment, I have personally witnessed only one donor representative make a direct connection between GPEDC and GB in an oral intervention once. There seems to be a general lack of awareness of both initiatives across constituencies. The result is that they address similar challenges in silos.

Aid transparency is a case in point. Both GPEDC and GB strive to provide more transparent information about the financial aid flows given by donors and received at the country level, either by governments or implementing agencies, such as the UN and NGOs. Often, different donor

departments work on similar transparency sub-themes, like data comparability or data use. For example, GPEDC focuses on the comparability of development data between OECD's Common Reporting System (CRS) and the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI), while GB focuses on the comparability of humanitarian data between IATI and the Financial Tracking Service (FTS). It is unclear whether humanitarian and development departments within the same donor agency talk to each other about common aid transparency challenges. Learning about these internal donor coordination mechanisms would require a research project of its own. What can be inferred from interviewing key informants from the same donor agency, who should be knowledgeable about GPEDC and GB's transparency work, is that different donor agencies/departments hold aid transparency discussions in parallel instead of adopting a holistic, 'nexus' approach. The reasons for this divide are rooted in the way the donor agency is structured, as the following observations by two donor officials confirm:

> It may sound banal but the humanitarian and development world are very siloed institutionally. [My colleague leading the humanitarian department] does not find OECD's work relevant. The UN system is also siloed.
>
> (Respondent AA, Head of Unit at a European donor agency)

> Humanitarian and development work are still financed through separate budgets. There have been no conversations between [my colleague] and I, no alignment.
>
> (Respondent AB, Senior Advisor from the same European donor agency)

Internal coordination and technical considerations aside, the disconnect between GPEDC and GB adds to donor accountability challenges. To start, GPEDC and GB miss the opportunity to learn from each other, leading to duplication of resources. In the case of aid transparency, for example, GPEDC donors have learned that focusing on which data to use for country-level discussions with recipients can be more important than supporting the generation of new data, years before GB started discussing the same issue in the transparency work stream – and reaching the same

conclusion. If the two alliances had connected with each other, they could have saved time (and money) to inform better decision-making.

In addition, siloed approaches to aid effectiveness make little sense on the receiving end. Aid recipients, be it governments or local humanitarian associations, prefer to address humanitarian and development aid issues together, either because they follow a more holistic approach than their donors, or due to low capacity to engage with humanitarian and development donor agencies separately, or other reasons. Also, new primary data confirms what existing literature says (Anderson et al., 2012:66), which is that populations in need of aid do not distinguish between humanitarian and development assistance. To them, this distinction is an artificial donor construct that overcomplicates aid and does not reflect how it should help them in practice.

> Look at the financial instruments, they highlight the stupidity of the sector. Recipients don't think in silos. Humanitarian/development silos create an inherent inefficiency, you're not fostering the nexus.
>
> (Respondent R, Director of an international network)

Some donors justify their lack of a nexus approach on the grounds that it can be quite the challenge to reconcile humanitarian principles (humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence) with country ownership of development policies (Hegertun et al., 2023:6). Others mention separate parliamentary oversight mechanisms to explain why they cannot merge humanitarian and development budget envelopes (OECD, 2022:28). In either case, the status quo does not improve accountability to aid recipients.

In recent years, GPEDC has made an effort to strengthen nexus approaches. In 2018, it established an Open Working Group to track 'progress towards delivering effectively in fragile and conflict affected situations' (GPEDC, no date:1). Following the group's recommendation, GPEDC developed a 'tailored approach' to monitoring effective development co-operation in fragile

contexts in 2019 and has rolled it out in the current 2023-2026 monitoring round (GPEDC, 2019b:13). Monitoring results have so far reported only top-level findings on the coordination among development, humanitarian and peacebuilding actors, for example in the Democratic Republic of Congo (GPEDC, 2024b:3) and Yemen (GPEDC, 2024c:3), without elaborating further.

Through a power analysis lens, we see how siloed approaches can be a form of hidden power. This is because within the same donor agency, they allow different humanitarian and development divisions to maintain control over their respective financial resources without being accountable for a joint, more sensible approach, and a shared budget. From this perspective, siloed approaches perpetuate old power structures while keeping the conversation about the nexus going for decades.

> There's a way power structures perpetuate their power, whether intentionally or not. You change the bottles but it's still the same wine. What's the difference between the nexus and LRRD [Linking Relief, Rehabilitation and Development, a similar concept to the nexus that several European donors used in the late 1990s]? It's all old wine in different bottles. Power is not something people give up, except for people like Nelson Mandela. Power has to be seized.
>
> (Respondent Q, Senior Director at an INGO, based in East Africa)

5.1.9. The unresolved challenge of accountability to target populations

My new primary research further points to the disconnect in donor accountability for aid effectiveness – whether between aid providers and their implementing partners, between different departments in the same donor government, or between providers and recipients.

The elephant in the room is the disconnect between the words and actions of DAC donors. This raises local and national accountability questions… there is a global to local disconnect… the trust element in accountability has gone down.

(Respondent B, Team Lead at an intergovernmental institution in Europe)

Above all, taxpayers in donor countries, who are the ultimate providers delegating their authority to their government, do not interact with the ultimate targets of their financial assistance: either communities receiving development funding channeled through their national government or populations in crisis receiving humanitarian assistance through NGOs, local actors or UN agencies. As described in all selected publications, a number of intermediaries operate at every step of the transaction chain, making accountability a challenge. In particular, *Busan in a Nutshell* and *The Outcome of GPEDC HLM2* focus on the complexity of holding specific GPEDC constituencies accountable in addition to governments, such as the private sector and CSOs (Bena, 2012:9; Bena and Tomlinson, 2017:7). *A Win-Win* and *Focus on the Frontlines* analyse the role of UN agencies in fulfilling a core GB commitment on multi-year planning and funding (Bena et al., 2020:4; Bena, 2021:7).

Development assistance is usually a government-to-government transaction. It is, as Respondent S, the Founder of a Europe-based INGO put it, 'a dialogue by proxies'. Based on the principle of country ownership and in line with ODA's original definition, it is up to the receiving government to allocate donor funding for its 'economic development and welfare' (OECD, 2024). Because money is fungible, a recipient government may choose to use it for other purposes, or to a different degree, than originally intended. Taxpayers from donor countries have little to no visibility on how their funding has been managed. Similarly, target communities in recipient countries have no way of providing direct feedback on the services received to taxpayers in donor countries.

In humanitarian assistance, it is relatively easier to track donor funding to affected populations as it usually relies on other channels than national government budgets. However, here too, taxpayers from donor countries need to rely on several intermediaries to learn how their funding has been used. In the best-case scenario, parliamentary oversight, donor agencies' country visits and monitoring reports by implementing partners provide some degree of accountability to taxpayers. Conversely, there is no formal way to hold these taxpayers to account to recipient populations, who mostly rely on sporadic opportunities, such as perception surveys (Ground Truth Solutions, 2023, 2024), to convey their messages to donors.

As discussed in the literature review, recent aid trends, such as localisation, locally-led development and accountability to affected populations have offered donor governments the opportunity to shift the focus on accountability to recipients away from themselves. This is a subtle way for donors to outsource responsibility for the quality of the aid provided to implementing agencies, as hinted by Respondent J in Section 5.1.2 above. In this regard, there are similarities with the 'global light, country-focused' approach promoted in Busan, which put the onus of aid effectiveness on recipient countries.

In addition, donor accountability to aid recipients can be hard to reconcile with the politics of aid. Although the definition of ODA – and of humanitarian assistance in particular – refers to non-political purposes (OECD, 2024), in reality aid is often allocated based on a combination of reasons which may include geopolitical, economic, commercial and other self-interests of donor governments (Gibson et al., 2005:141; Gulrahani and Calleja, 2019:10; Dreher, 2024). New research findings, including my reflections on my interaction with GPEDC and GB donor stakeholders over the years, confirm what academic literature has said for decades: aid is inherently political (Yanguas, 2018:156; Unsworth, 2009:884; Gibson et al., 2005:141). This is even more the case at the time of writing, when most DAC donors are under increasing domestic pressure to reduce their aid budgets despite skyrocketing humanitarian and development needs.

What emerges from my new primary data also highlights a dichotomy between aid politics and the lack of an open acknowledgement of the politicisation of aid in either GPEDC or GB (Yanguas, 2018:156). References to donor governments' political pressures remain vague in both initiatives. Ignoring the full gamut of donor motives behind their aid effectiveness performance may be a way to protect the non-political nature of these multi-stakeholder alliances. In reality, not acknowledging aid politics makes for frustrating discussions about donor accountability to recipients within GPEDC and GB as everybody seems to be aware of the real reasons for donors' limited progress against their commitments and yet no-one wants to mention the 'elephant in the room': politics. Not only does this invisible tension undermine trust in the success of multistakeholder initiatives like GPEDC and GB. It also points to hidden and invisible forms of power of providers over recipients of aid, which fuel skepticism about whether either initiative will strengthen accountability to people in need of development or humanitarian assistance (Gaventa, 2006).

In short, both GPEDC and GB still rely on opaque modalities to promote donor accountability for their aid effectiveness commitments. Despite their original ambitions, the primary focus of these initiatives is still to ensure accountability *to* donors rather than to promote donor accountability to recipients. The analysis of my selected publications and of key informant interviews confirms that, given the limited opportunities for direct interaction with recipient populations, donor accountability to aid recipients remains elusive in both GPEDC and GB.

5.2.   Research contributions

This section looks back at the research findings emerging from the previous sections to identify their main contributions to aid effectiveness theory, practice and policy. It uses a power analysis lens to describe internal dynamics within GPEDC and GB, as well as their role compared to bilateral donor-recipient relations. The latter part of the section draws on key informants' suggestions to present a couple of practical alternatives to strengthen donor accountability to recipients beyond the multi-stakeholder partnership model: establishing independent citizen committees and scaling up cash assistance.

5.2.1. Donor accountability and power

In analysing donor behaviour in GPEDC and GB, we see Gaventa's description of power relations at play. In particular, his power cube framework helps to better understand how donors influence the aid effectiveness agenda in ways that are often hidden or invisible.

Table 4 draws on Gaventa's theory to identify forms of visible, hidden and invisible power in GPEDC and GB. Recalling Goetz's definition of accountability as the power to hold duty-bearers answerable for their performance (Goetz and Jenkins, 2005:8), and to sanction them if they perform poorly, in theory the more GPEDC and GB hold donors accountable for their aid effectiveness commitments to recipients, the more successful they are in mitigating donor power. In fact, the table makes it clear that donors' power over aid recipients is much stronger than originally intended when either initiative was established. In identifying forms of visible power, or formal mechanisms through which power is exercised and enforced, we can see that GPEDC and GB's influence has weakened over the years due to several reasons, as explained in previous sections. Among the main ones, both partnerships have less convening power than when they started; several informants have pointed to loss of momentum in both initiatives; and donors' progress against their aid effectiveness commitments has either stalled in the case of GPEDC (GPEDC, 2019b) or raised questions about the reliability of self-reported data in the case of GB (Development Initiatives, 2024:27). As a consequence, today GPEDC and GB do not have the ability to counteract donors' influence over other stakeholders, especially aid recipients.

If we look at GPEDC and GB through a hidden power lens, this imbalance is even clearer. If we define hidden power in terms of who sets the agenda for visible decision-making, it is donors again who have the upper hand. The research findings show how their financial leverage gives them more negotiating power with individual governments or organisations. In line with Faul's social network analysis (2016:185), informal social networks in multistakeholder partnerships may amplify, rather than reduce, power asymmetries in donors' favour. The lack of an explicit theory of change for either initiative leads to ambiguity and confusion among stakeholders, undermining collective efforts to uphold accountability to aid recipients.

The system is designed to promote accountability to those in power.

(Respondent W, Founder and Leader of a Foundation in the Asia-Pacific region)

Two factors play a particularly important role in increasing donors' hidden power and lowering their accountability to recipients. The former has been the decision to pause the production of GPEDC's Progress Reports from 2019 to 2026 and of GB's Annual Independent Reports from 2023 to 2026. While the reasons for such decisions are complex, as described earlier in this chapter, the result has directly impacted on the ability of both partnerships to monitor donor performance through the collection of reliable data. The latter factor has been the loss of institutional memory in GPEDC and GB, which has slowed down the pace of progress. Although it may not be perceived as directly related to lower donor accountability to recipients, limited institutional knowledge has allowed donors to question agreed commitments.

Finally, both GPEDC and GB display donors' invisible power as what shapes the ideas, values and notions of change. It is a form of influencing people's awareness of their own rights and agency (Lukes, 2005:13). A clear example of this power is the dominant narrative that the aid effectiveness agenda is no longer relevant in today's world, as mentioned by academic literature (Brown, 2020:1245; Lundsgaarde and Engberg-Pedersen, 2019:23). Several interviewees noted loss of momentum in both GPEDC and GB:

Early on, Busan was quite impressive but it's lost momentum now… GPEDC went through ups and downs, now it's at its lowest level.

(Respondent A, Adjunct Professor from Southern Africa)

The big issue after many years is that GPEDC has lost momentum with both recipients and providers.

(Respondent AA, Head of Unit of a European donor agency)

There's a total disconnect in the Grand Bargain. It ignores the bigger trends around; this is why there has been lesser engagement by some signatories.

(Respondent T, Head of Research of a European think tank)

This narrative is what justifies labeling the Paris and Accra agenda as a marginal 'unfinished aid business' in GPEDC when in fact it is still of primary importance to recipient countries, as underlined by interviewees from recipient countries:

From our perspective, as recipient countries, there's a breakdown with donor members. They don't know what GPEDC is about... We have a good level of engagement but only with other recipient countries.

(Respondent Y, Head of Office of a government in Central Africa)

The number one problem for us is donors' data. Contrary to what was agreed, donors do not use our country systems so we cannot track financial flows.

(Respondent AC, Director of Strategy of a government in West Africa)

It is the same narrative that equates aid effectiveness with 'cost efficiency' and 'value for money' to which I refer in *A Win-Win* (2020:5-6), *Focus on the Frontlines* (2021:11) and in many GB conversations I have personally witnessed with donors. For example, I have often heard several GPEDC, including donors, privately say that GPEDC 'is dead'. By the time of GPEDC's Geneva Summit in December 2022, skepticism about GPEDC's future had become a widespread belief in the aid effectiveness community, even though only few voiced it publicly (Glennie, 2022). Just like a self-fulfilling prophecy, when even influential stakeholders like donors suggest that GPEDC may be doomed, they implicitly turn a belief into accepted knowledge (Foucault, 1995:26). By virtue

of their higher power, donors have in fact signalled to other members of the Partnership that being skeptical about GPEDC's future is justified. Although largely left unsaid, this general skepticism has shaped the dominant discourse within GPEDC. Through a power lens, it can also be considered a type of donors' invisible power. Along similar lines, donors' decision to stop funding the publication of GPEDC's Progress Reports and GB AIRs can be seen as a form of donors' invisible power, as much as of their hidden power. Not only has their decision limited GPEDC and GB's ability to monitor donor performance (hidden power), but it has also led both initiatives to find alternative ways to talk about the implementation of aid effectiveness commitments (invisible power). In other words, by controlling GPEDC and GB's financial resources, donors also implicitly control the narrative around monitoring and accountability (Clegg, 1993:25).

In conclusion, Gaventa's three forms of power, particularly hidden and invisible power, unveil donors' more influential role in both GPEDC and GB compared to the influence by other stakeholders, especially aid recipients. In consideration of this imbalanced power dynamics between donors and recipients, GPEDC and GB's ability to hold donors to account for their aid effectiveness commitments seems diminished.

Table 4. Forms of power in the Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation and the Grand Bargain. Source: Author's creation based on Gaventa, 2006.

Forms of power	Brief description of this form of power	In GPEDC	In GB
Visible	Formal mechanisms through which power is exercised and enforced	• Donor commitments in the founding document (2011) • High Level Meeting Outcome documents (2014, 2016, 2022) • Monitoring indicators and targets in donor profiles (2023-2026) • Donors' public statements (ongoing) • Steering Committee meetings and other formal discussions • Perception surveys	• Donor commitments in the founding document (2016) • Annual self-reporting process • Annual Independent Reports (2017-2023) • Caucus Outcome documents (2022-2024) • Donors' public statements (ongoing) • Facilitation Group meetings and other formal discussions • Accountability to affected populations studies
Hidden	Determines who sets the agenda for visible decision-making	• Bilateral negotiations between donor and recipient governments • Donors' informal social networks (OECD-DAC meetings, behind-the-scenes discussions) • Agenda-setting (e.g. from aid effectiveness to development	• Bilateral negotiations between donor and recipient agencies • Donors' informal social networks (Good Humanitarian Donorship meetings, behind-the-scenes coordination) • Agenda-setting (e.g. over-emphasis on learning) • Selective self-reporting • No explicit theory of change

Forms of power	Brief description of this form of power	In GPEDC	In GB
		effectiveness; from donorship to ownership to partnership) • Increasing complexity of development cooperation; ambiguity by inclusiveness • Donors' disengagement from High Level meetings • No explicit theory of change • Limited/no institutional memory • Pause in the global monitoring process (2019-2026) • No global opportunity to discuss the ongoing monitoring process at the country level • No formal linkages with global discussions on aid quantity (ODA trends, DAC Peer Reviews,…)	• Limited/no institutional memory; re-opening of closed discussions • Limited/no follow-up on Caucus outcomes • Pause in Annual Independent Reports (2023-26) • No dedicated opportunity to discuss accountability at the global level • No formal linkages with policy discussions on aid quantity (e.g. within IASC)
Invisible	Shapes the boundaries of socio-	• Belief that aid effectiveness is outdated in policy and research	• Over-emphasis on aid effectiveness as cost effectiveness and value for money

Forms of power	Brief description of this form of power	In GPEDC	In GB
	economic, political, psychological and cultural change	• Belief that GPEDC has moved beyond donorship towards partnership • False assumption that GPEDC is a multi-stakeholder partnership with equal peer-to-peer relationships • Delegating accountability for aid effectiveness to recipient governments (global light, country focus) • Assumption that the 'unfinished aid business' is a marginal issue on GPEDC's agenda • General skepticism about GPEDC's future; donors' implicit support for this belief • Donors' control over GPEDC's financial resources as a way to shape the dominant, albeit implicit, narrative	• False assumption that GB is a multi-stakeholder partnership with equal peer-to-peer relationships • Delegating accountability to affected populations to recipient agencies • General skepticism about GB's future; donors' implicit support for this belief • Donors' control over GPEDC's financial resources as a way to shape the dominant, albeit implicit, narrative

5.2.2. Alternatives for improved donor accountability to aid recipients

Although the analysis of my published and new research leads to sobering findings on donor accountability for aid effectiveness, new primary data also points to promising alternatives to address the accountability imbalance between providers and recipients of aid. A few tools are already available in the aid system while others need scaling up to their full potential. The sections below explain each alternative in detail.

5.2.2.1.   *Donor accountability through citizen committees*

Within the aid system established by OECD/DAC donor countries, a few tools have already been developed which can significantly increase donor accountability to recipients.

Among existing tools, community surveys are carried out by third parties – usually independent research organisations – to gather feedback from recipient populations and amplify their voices to the donor community at specific moments in time (Ground Truth Solutions, 2024). Local actors can also run surveys or similar form of community feedback (NEAR, 2023).

Ongoing feedback mechanisms provide another accountability tool. For example, in recent years, the nonprofit Talk to Loop (no date) has set up an independent platform which affected communities can use to safely share their feedback on the assistance received on a rolling basis. Users can access Talk to Loop either online or through their smartphones or via SMS or voice message. After they have left their feedback in their local dialect, their message is transcribed, moderated and posted. Relevant organisations are notified about the message so they can react accordingly and users receive a message with the organisation's feedback through their preferred channel. Unlike complaint mechanisms put in place by implementing agencies, Talk to Loop does not run aid operations so there is no potential conflict of interest preventing it from sharing the feedback directly with donor agencies.

An alternative way to improve donor accountability is to connect taxpayers with recipients within the existing aid architecture. Credit for this idea largely goes to my former colleague Wale

Osofisan, Senior Director of Governance at the International Rescue Committee. This proposal, which complements De Renzio's accountability theory (2006b), implies creating 'citizen committees' in both donor countries and receiving communities. Drawing on citizens' assembly models from deliberative democracy literature (Dryzek et al., 2011:36; Reuchamps et al., 2023), each committee would consist of a representative sample of either taxpayers or recipients interested in verifying how aid funds have been used in a given project. Relying on polling models to randomly select committee members would help reduce the politicisation of aid or bias, ensuring there are no conflicts of interest (Vlerick, 2020:307). Through citizen committees, taxpayers and recipients would have the opportunity to connect on a regular basis, and hold each other, as well as their respective governments, to account for the effectiveness and efficiency of the aid transaction.

While their specific modalities are yet to be defined, citizen committees could be an interesting way to make aid effectiveness discussions more participatory and transparent, following the example of social accountability processes (McGee, 2013:S118; Malena et al., 2004:4). These committees would be added to the existing aid architecture to close the feedback loop between donor taxpayers and recipient citizens without replacing traditional accountability lines, such as NGOs reporting to their donors. In this sense, citizen committees would not be too disruptive, although they might be resource-intensive, especially in the initial set-up phase. They may also lead to complex power relationships with the government agency they are supposed to monitor. Clearly, this model needs testing in the international aid context but its accountability potential looks promising (Dryzek et al., 2011:40).

Figure 9 below illustrates how these committees would add to the existing aid architecture summarised by De Renzio (2006b) in Figures 2 and 5 (see Chapter 2). The diagram describes accountability relationships between DAC donor countries and aid recipients, based on my conversations with Osofisan, insights from KIIs and reflections on my professional experience. In the diagram, aid recipients can be either governments receiving development assistance or implementing organisations, such as UN agencies, NGOs or CSOs, which receive humanitarian

and/or development assistance directly from donors. The blue arrows point towards who is held accountable in the current aid system.

On the DAC donor side, taxpayers hold their parliament to account with their voting power. In turn, parliament instructs the donor agency to allocate its ODA either to the government or an implementing agency in the receiving country. The blue double arrow between the donor agency and the receiving government represents mutual accountability in government-to-government relations, at least in ideal circumstances.

On the recipient side, if the country is a democracy, its parliament oversees how the government allocates the financial aid received to its general population. This process can be difficult to follow as aid is fungible so can be moved around to cover for other priorities. However, parliament has a responsibility to track aid financial flows. In turn, citizens in the receiving country hold parliament to account for this oversight function and for sharing information (IPU, 2007:29). In the case of humanitarian or development assistance given directly to implementing agencies, the receiving government and parliament may be bypassed; it is up to the donor agency to monitor how its aid is used. Civil society groups in both donor and receiving countries have no formal accountability line on this transaction chain, which is why there are no arrows to or from them. Nevertheless, they play an important complementary watchdog role.

On both sides of Figure 9, the orange arrows represent the additional accountability lines introduced by citizen committees. Parliaments would instruct them to monitor the behaviour of donor and recipient government agencies, respectively. In the case of aid disbursed directly to implementing agencies, which is usually what happens with humanitarian assistance, citizen committees in the recipient country would also monitor the quality of that aid. The orange double arrows show mutual accountability between committees in donor and recipient countries. Through their direct communication, these committees can help close the feedback loop between voters in their respective countries and government agencies managing aid along the transaction chain from donor to recipient. The dotted double arrows illustrate the stronger, albeit indirect,

connection between taxpayers as the ultimate providers of aid and the population in the receiving country as the ultimate aid recipients.

Referring to my conceptual framework, citizen committees in donor and receiving countries would strengthen donor accountability to aid recipients because they would introduce an element of independent scrutiny. They would also connect and communicate directly, ensuring a higher degree of coordination between the providing and receiving ends of international aid. This extra level of oversight (Dryzek et al., 2011:34) would add pressure on donor agencies to fulfil their aid effectiveness commitments.

> What is [recipients'] choice in today's current aid architecture? It boils down to reactive feedback mechanisms. And what are the consequences for dissatisfaction of aid recipients? None. But if you create a taxpayer committee for every single project, that provides oversight on a periodical basis.
>
> (Wale Osofisan, Senior Director, International Rescue Committee)

Who is accountable to whom?

DAC DONOR COUNTRY

RECIPIENT COUNTRY
and POPULATION GROUPS

Taxpayers/voters

Parliament

Civil society organisations

Citizen committees on aid effectiveness

Donor government agency

Government

Implementing agencies (UN, NGOs, CSOs)

Population/ voters

Civil society organisations

Parliament

Citizen committees representing people receiving development assistance

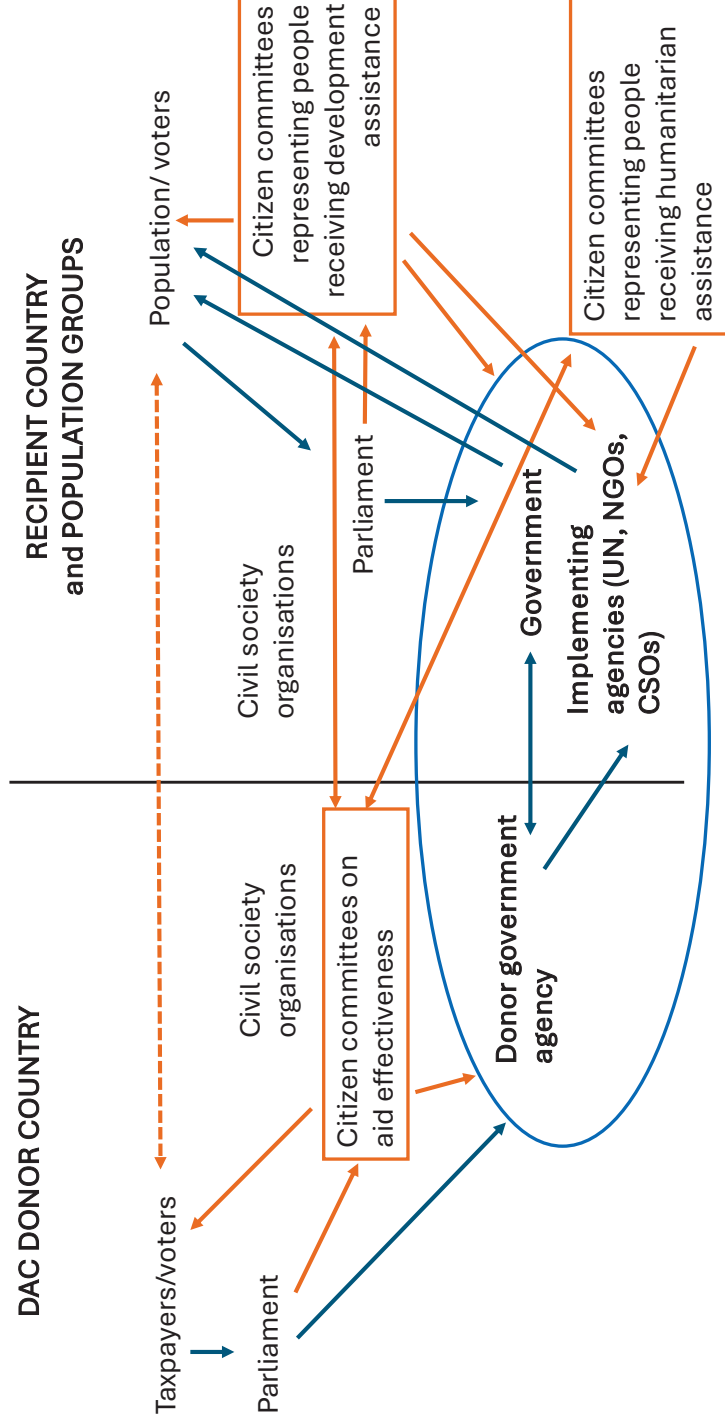Citizen committees representing people receiving humanitarian assistance

Figure 9. Accountability lines in donor and recipient countries, revisited.

Source: Author's creation, adapted from De Renzio, 2006b.

5.2.2.2. *Donor accountability through scaled-up cash assistance*

A surprising finding from the literature and key informant interviews is the potential of cash assistance to radically increase donor accountability to aid recipients. According to the latest research, around 21% of international humanitarian aid is provided as CVA (CALP, 2023:31). This figure represents an increase over the last decade but the pace of this increase is slowing down, despite evidence that the humanitarian system could provide up to half of all its aid in cash (CALP, 2023:35). Research has also shown the positive effect of cash use on humanitarian and development outcomes alike (Crosta et al., 2024:2; Haushofer and Shapiro, 2018:30; Tappis and Doocy, 2018:137; USAID, 2024:4; Venton et al., 2015:29-30). Cash transfers are easier to track than in-kind assistance, reducing the number of intermediaries involved and the chances of theft or diversion (Bailey and Harvey, 2015:5; Elayah et al., 2022:11). Contrary to popular belief, cash does not carry higher risks than other forms of assistance. In fact, higher standards of monitoring and oversight are usually applied (GiveDirectly, 2024). While there are some concerns about the protection of recipient information, for example when using biometrics to monitor who receives cash assistance, it is possible to protect personal data by using alternative means of verification, as has been done for the Ukraine crisis response (Siad, 2024:92).

By far, based on numerous surveys (CALP, 2022:15; Ground Truth Solutions, 2023:14; UNHCR, 2023), cash transfers are the preferred form of aid by recipients, especially because of their multipurpose use. Cash transfers allow receivers to buy what they need, when they need it. Alternatively, receivers may choose to save some or all the money for later, which allows them to better allocate their resources according to their specific situation. This shift in the power of choice (Bryant and Fouad, 2024:16; WFP, 2021:1) from providers to receivers is a key factor in enhancing donor accountability to aid recipients. It is based on sharing transparent information about the amount of money given and then transferred through one or more intermediaries.

> If you want more donor accountability, only peer pressure and cash assistance work.
>
> (Respondent D, Dean of a US graduate school)

The visibility of each cash transaction allows both donors and recipients to follow the cash transfer and detect who is responsible if the process does not go as planned. The feedback loop from donor to recipient is complete when the recipient receives the cash transfer and the donor is notified of the final transaction. The receiver can now dispose of the money as they see fit, which increases their sense of autonomy (Shapiro, 2019:146).

These advantages notwithstanding, there are multiple barriers to reaching adequate levels of cash assistance globally. At system level, scaling up the use of cash creates tensions. CALP (2022:6) found that as the use of multipurpose cash increases, the humanitarian system may no longer need to organise itself around sectors of intervention. Instead, it could either adopt a multisectoral response model or delegate cash delivery to local actors, in line with donors' GB commitments to localisation (GB, 2016:5). This potentially profound change may be causing resistance from those stakeholders, such as national and international NGOs, who fear becoming irrelevant in such a scenario.

> The increasing use of CVA is putting pressure on the humanitarian system to change and at the same time, the system requires changes to scale up CVA – there is clear pressure in both directions.
>
> (CALP, 2022:6).

Tensions and ambivalence about increasing the volume of cash assistance can be found in the donor community as well. In general, humanitarian donors see great potential in CVA for cost and time efficiency, and effectiveness more broadly (CALP, 2022:31; GHD, no date:3). However, some donors still raise questions about the potential for aid diversion in delivering cash despite evidence to the contrary (Elayah et al., 2022:11). Major providers like the US are legally restrained from converting part of their in-kind assistance, especially food aid, into CVA (CALP, 2022:26).

At its core, increasing cash assistance involves relinquishing control of donor resources to recipients (Bryant and Fouad, 2024:22), which for some donor governments may be hard to explain to their taxpayers. A few interviewees also hinted at the underlying racism in some donors' reluctance to increase cash assistance.

> We still want to be the experts, we haven't shifted the power. Do we really have to do post-distribution monitoring of cash and voucher assistance? Or is it just a comfort blanket?
>
> (Respondent R, Director of a global multi-stakeholder network)

> Why is cash assistance still a small part of humanitarian assistance? What's keeping us from scaling up cash? There are ideological issues there. Most European countries do cash transfers every day through their welfare systems, e.g. to pay out child benefits, unemployment benefits, disability. It's ok to do that in the Global North, but it's not ok to do that as aid.
>
> (Respondent Q, Senior Director at an INGO, based in East Africa)

In these informants' view, donors assume they know best and use in-kind aid and conditionality as expressions of their 'superiority' and power over recipients. For these interviewees, donors' resistance to increase cash assistance reflects an old-fashioned view of international cooperation as, fundamentally, charity (Bryant and Fouad, 2024:10).

Still, decades of academic and policy literature (Tappis and Doocy, 2018; Bastagli et al., 2019), coupled with overwhelmingly positive lessons learned from cash practices (WFP, 2021), show the potential of cash assistance to enhance donor accountability to aid recipients. It is also clear that scaling up cash in both development and humanitarian assistance is feasible but requires more than just producing new evidence, in line with my findings in Section 5.1.6. The focus should rather be

on changing public perceptions around the use of cash in international assistance, whether in the form of humanitarian cash transfers or longer-term social protection schemes. By amplifying the voices of cash recipients, efforts to change the narrative around cash will support more accountable and effective aid (Bryant and Fouad, 2024:27).

5.3.   Preliminary conclusions

This section looks back at the main research findings to draw preliminary conclusions on their relevance to the issue of donor accountability to aid recipients for their aid effectiveness commitments. It then assesses strengths and weaknesses of the conceptual framework used for this thesis and suggests an amended version of the framework in light of my research. A final analysis of how my work addresses the analytical questions identified for this thesis is presented in the concluding chapter.

5.3.1.   Significance of the research findings

In reply to the analytical questions in Chapter 3, the research findings presented so far point to a limited degree of donor accountability to aid recipients in both GPEDC and GB. Recalling the close relationship between aid accountability and power (Goetz and Jenkins, 2005; Eyben, 2008; McGee, 2020), we can see important similarities, gaps and some differences in how these initiatives address power relations between donors and recipients. In particular, we can draw interesting findings on the two key components of accountability: *answerability* and *enforceability*.

In terms of similarities, GPEDC and GB have both promoted higher *answerability* of donors to their recipients by sharing more information on what donors are doing to fulfill their aid effectiveness commitments. In this regard, both initiatives have contributed to increasing donor transparency. The publication of GB independent reports for six consecutive years is particularly noteworthy as it has introduced a level of external scrutiny, unlike for GPEDC. However, more information alone has not been sufficient to ensure those commitments are honoured. Section 5.1.7 in this Chapter explains how too much information has been counter-productive as it has overwhelmed stakeholders without being used for meaningful dialogue between proxy providers (donor agencies

acting on behalf of taxpayers in donor countries) and proxy recipients (receiving governments or humanitarian agencies acting on behalf of affected populations). By reforming their monitoring system, both GPEDC and GB have acknowledged the limitations of over-focusing on information collection and have started selecting the most useful data for answerability purposes.

Research findings also indicate that the other essential component of accountability – *enforceability* – has been missing from GPEDC and GB alike. In neither initiative have donors faced any consequences for failing to meet their aid effectiveness commitments to recipients. On the contrary, recipients have been under higher scrutiny for how they comply with donor requirements. The onus of ensuring accountability to the ultimate recipients of aid – population groups living in poverty or in crisis – has gradually shifted to receiving governments within GPEDC or implementing humanitarian agencies within GB. New primary data points to the structural challenge of holding donors to account in an ecosystem that was never designed to promote responsibility to aid recipients in the first place. On a few occasions, donors have been under pressure from their peers to improve their performance, as in the case of GB Caucus negotiations, but this pressure has been short-lived, leading some donors to quickly revert to their former behaviour without any repercussions. This finding is consistent with what academic literature describes as *responsiveness*, that is, governments' willingness to respond to citizen demands on a discretionary basis. Full accountability, or accountability *with teeth*, goes one step further as it requires governments to institutionalise the way they respond to citizen voice and improve their performance as needed (Fox et al., 2024:13).

In terms of gaps, the original multi-stakeholder partnership model promoted by GPEDC and GB was not built on an explicit theory of change. This has led to ambiguity about how either partnership would achieve its objectives in practice. Much of the mechanics in GPEDC and GB has relied on the expectation that their multi-stakeholder nature would *somehow* ensure a higher degree of mutual accountability, including accountability to recipients. An array of tools originally intended to strengthen donor accountability, including the production of global reports, peer pressure and high-

level dialogue, either have been discontinued or have lost traction since the establishment of these alliances.

In addition, a power analysis of my research findings shows how GPEDC and GB have gradually lost their ability to counterbalance donors' greater influence over recipients in bilateral relations. By bringing to the fore hidden and invisible forms of power, referring to Gaventa's theory (2006), new primary data have confirmed what I already highlighted in my publications, which is that there needs to be a step change in the way both partnerships reduce power asymmetries among their members. This seems to be a fundamental precondition to improve donor accountability to aid recipients.

In terms of lessons learned, a key finding is that there needs to be renewed external scrutiny of the implementation of donor commitments at global and country level. In particular, authoritative independent progress reports represent a solid basis for generating new momentum into country-level dialogue between donors and recipients. Political will to drive that kind of dialogue has been missing and should resume as well.

Strengthening these accountability tools in GPEDC and GB is essential but not sufficient to ensure an adequate level of donor accountability to aid recipients. My research findings also point to alternative solutions which have the potential to significantly improve donor accountability in the existing international aid system. These are the establishment of independent citizen committees in donor and recipient countries and a substantial increase in the use of cash transfers. Section 5.4 provides more detail on the implications of the former alternative, which is less known, for broader research and practice.

5.3.2. Revisiting the conceptual framework of this thesis

My conceptual framework was developed by drawing on relevant theories in aid effectiveness literature and on my research findings. It provided a structure to address the research questions based on my understanding of the key concepts and relationships identified for this study. It also

built on the notions of aid and accountability as power to look at the research findings through a power lens. This section highlights some of the strengths and areas for future development of the conceptual framework.
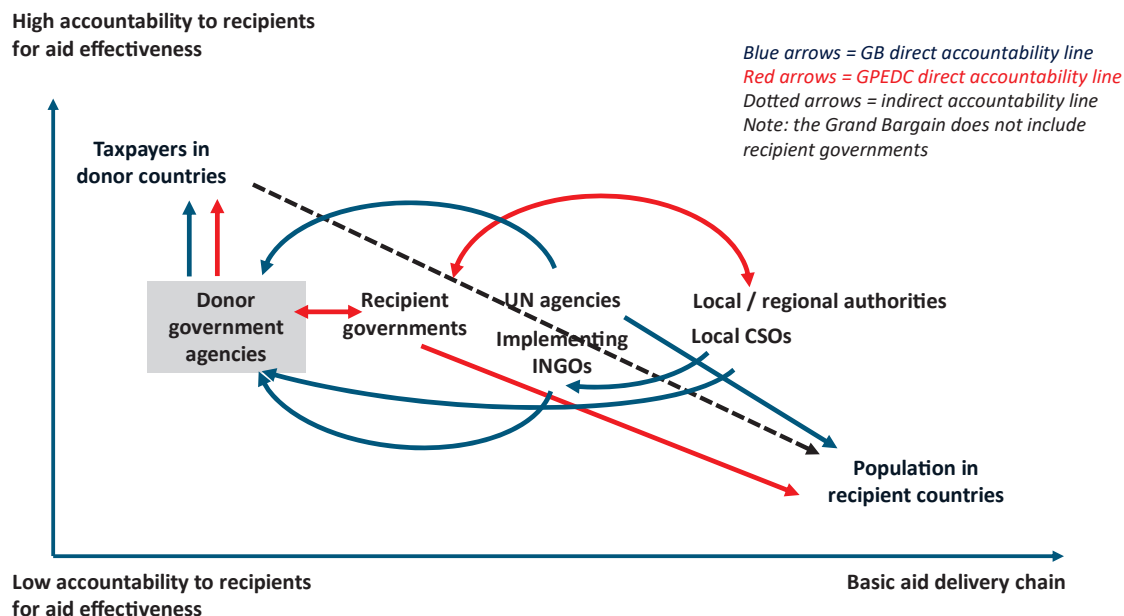
The strength of the framework is that it provided a degree of clarity in an increasingly complex aid effectiveness system. It helped highlight the primary role of power in aid, accountability and multi-stakeholder partnerships, including in GPEDC and GB. It showed the original aspiration to leverage these partnerships as a counterweight to donors' greater power in bilateral relations with their recipients and mapped a number of other power-moderating factors, such as peer pressure. The framework also made it possible to see how taxpayers in donor countries, in their role as the original providers of ODA, remain fundamentally disconnected from citizens in receiving countries, who are the ultimate ODA recipients.

The conceptual framework was especially helpful in drawing attention to the unequal playing field in both GPEDC and GB. A recurring finding was that most of the elements contributing to higher donor accountability to aid recipients have required a balancing act between GPEDC and GB's original aspirations and the reality of implementing aid reforms in the context of asymmetrical power dynamics. Contrary to the general assumption that these multi-stakeholder partnerships contribute to reducing the power imbalance between donors and recipients, it became apparent that GPEDC and GB do not counterbalance donors' greater influence in aid effectiveness discussions. In fact, mapping the different forms of power at play in both partnerships – particularly donors' hidden and invisible power – led to recognise that GPEDC and GB may amplify pre-existing power asymmetries. The lesser role played by the other mitigating factors in the framework in recent years became evident in light of the research findings.

In terms of the future development of my conceptual framework, it could illustrate the complex web of relationships in the aid sector and the aid effectiveness community in particular. While the sharp focus on donors and recipients brought much needed clarity to a very broad topic, such as accountability for aid effectiveness, the framework has the potential to provide a more granular
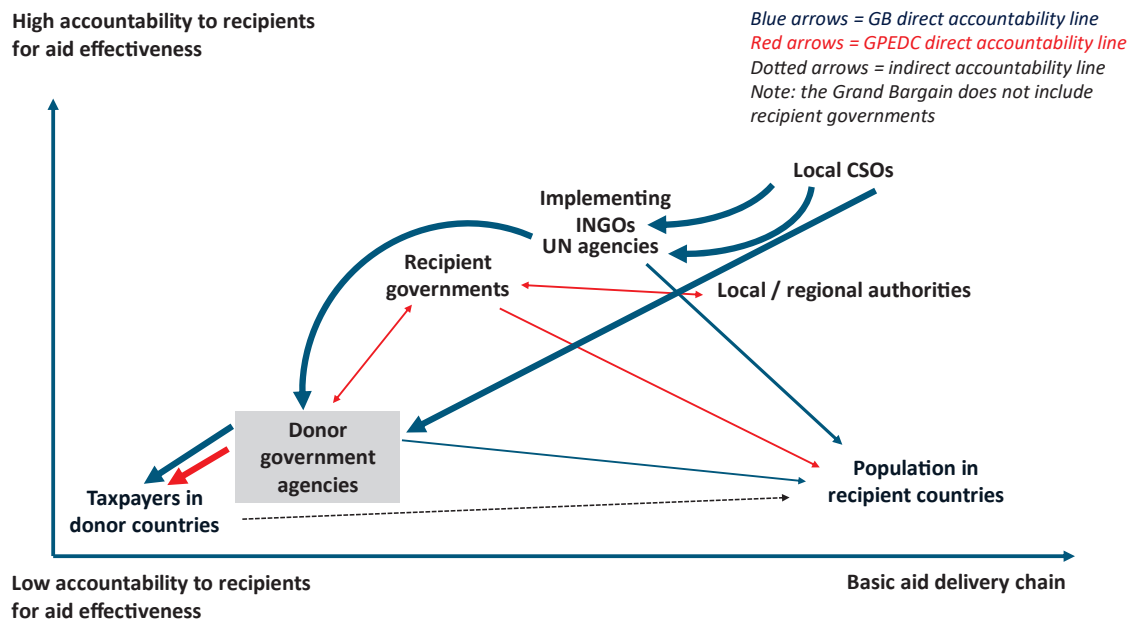
description of key GPEDC and GB stakeholders. For example, future analysis could further differentiate between types of recipient intermediaries (governments in the Global South, UN agencies, NGOs, CSOs, etc.) instead of considering them together. It could also clarify the role of other GPEDC and GB stakeholders, such as parliamentarians in GPEDC or local actors in GB, in supporting higher donor accountability to recipients. My choice was mostly due to my desire to bring the focus of attention squarely back to donor governments and study their behaviour in aid effectiveness.

To compensate for the conceptual framework's generic view of donor-recipient relations in GPEDC and GB, I have provided a more detailed description of recipient groups in both initiatives in Figures 10 and 11 below. My objective was to show how donor accountability to aid recipients changes from one recipient group to the other before and after integrating the research findings into my conceptual framework. The arrows in both diagrams represent where accountability lines go and their width how strong they are. Double arrows symbolise mutual accountability between stakeholders. Dotted arrows are used to show taxpayers' indirect accountability to the ultimate recipients of international assistance – citizens in receiving countries. Figure 10 shows all the key intermediaries between taxpayers and recipient populations on the same level, symbolising the peer-to-peer dynamics originally intended in GPEDC and GB relations.

High accountability to recipients
for aid effectiveness

Blue arrows = GB direct accountability line
Red arrows = GPEDC direct accountability line
Dotted arrows = indirect accountability line
Note: the Grand Bargain does not include
recipient governments

Taxpayers in
donor countries

Donor
government
agencies

Recipient
governments

UN agencies

Implementing
INGOs

Local / regional authorities

Local CSOs

Population in
recipient countries

Low accountability to recipients
for aid effectiveness

Basic aid delivery chain

Figure 10. A preliminary description of donor accountability to different GPEDC and GB recipient groups. Source: Author's creation.

In reality, research findings demonstrate that accountability for aid effectiveness still tends to move upstream in both initiatives, towards donors rather than recipients. Figure 11 illustrates similar accountability patterns in GPEDC and GB. Compared to Figure 10, the degree to which different stakeholders are held accountable to aid recipients varies significantly depending on their actual power within and beyond each partnership. Taxpayers' accountability to recipients is lowest due to the lack of effective monitoring systems in GPEDC or GB. Local CSOs turn out to be the recipient group with the highest level of accountability to donors due to the compound effect of heavy compliance requirements and risk transferred to them. Mutual accountability lines are weaker than expected, as shown by the thinner arrows connecting donor government agencies, recipient governments and local authorities.

High accountability to recipients
for aid effectiveness

Blue arrows = GB direct accountability line
Red arrows = GPEDC direct accountability line
Dotted arrows = indirect accountability line
Note: the Grand Bargain does not include
recipient governments

Local CSOs

Implementing
INGOs
UN agencies

Recipient
governments

Local / regional authorities

Donor
government
agencies

Taxpayers in
donor countries

Population in
recipient countries

Low accountability to recipients
for aid effectiveness

Basic aid delivery chain

Figure 11. A revised description of donor accountability to different GPEDC and GB recipient groups in light of the research findings. Source: Author's creation.

A limitation of the conceptual framework is that it adapts Faul's theory on power asymmetries in multistakeholder partnerships to GPEDC and GB but does not use the same methodology to reach the conclusions presented in this chapter. Faul carried out a Social Network Analysis (SNA) to compare formal partnership relations with informal relationships within a global education partnership (2016:186). She relied on specific SNA software to analyse findings from her key informant interviews and calculate relational and network metrics. Unlike Faul, I have relied on qualitative research analysis and autoethnography to infer similar conclusions about how GPEDC and GB perpetuate donors' greater influence over aid recipients. The reason for adapting Faul's theory despite these methodological differences is twofold: first, Faul generalises her conclusions to other multistakeholder partnerships beyond the education sector (Faul, 2016:185). Second, she specifically refers to aid effectiveness discourse from the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness to the Accra Agenda for Action to Busan to describe the increasing complexity in aid relationships and

coordination (2016:186). Future research on GPEDC and GB could apply SNA to further triangulate the findings on the power asymmetries in both initiatives.

The findings presented in this chapter have led me to revisit my conceptual framework to reflect how my understanding of the research questions has evolved in light of my publications and new primary research. In particular, research findings have highlighted donor motives beyond aid effectiveness considerations as important factors influencing the aid system. In contrast, the evidence gathered shows how the enforceability dimension in donor accountability to recipients is lacking. The influence of donor-recipient bilateral relations is stronger than the mitigating factors originally designed to reduce donor power through GPEDC and GB. These initiatives' attempts to create a level playing field have been either paused or downplayed. For example, GPEDC's global progress reports and GB's Annual Independent Reports have been put on hold until 2026, which has weakened collective monitoring efforts.

Donors' hidden and invisible power has also become more prominent over the years, as shown by the higher donor pressure on GPEDC and GB. By driving the agenda of what can and cannot be discussed in official GPEDC and GB meetings, donors have reduced the ability of both initiatives to tackle ongoing aid effectiveness challenges under the pretext that they are no longer relevant to multistakeholder partnerships. In turn, this rationale has fuelled the widespread belief that GPEDC and GB themselves may no longer be fit for purpose. In accepting this language, donors have played a major role in shaping the narrative around accountability for their aid effectiveness commitments.

Research findings have confirmed that taxpayers exert growing pressure on their donor agency representatives. Taxpayers also remain distant and disconnected from the populations they intend to assist with their public funds so the feedback loop between these two key groups remains incomplete. The combination of these power dynamics results in a lower level of donor accountability to aid recipients than what was originally expected from either GPEDC or GB.

In conclusion, my conceptual framework has proven useful in clarifying the steps involved in holding donors to account to recipients for their aid effectiveness commitments in GPEDC and GB. It has helped structure the analysis of the concepts discussed in this thesis. In addition, revisiting the framework has allowed key findings to emerge and explain otherwise undetected accountability challenges.

5.4.   Broader implications of the findings

On a broader level, my research findings point to predictable donor behavior towards aid recipients across GPEDC and GB – predictable in its tendency to dilute accountability through delaying tactics, technocratic discussions and limited political drive. Weak donor accountability to recipients is also consistent with research findings from other multistakeholder international cooperation partnerships (Faul, 2014:12). Power dynamics in these initiatives is generally skewed in favour of donors, resulting in a visible and invisible imbalance in how partnership members interact with each other (Gaventa, 2011).

A few elements then emerge which should be considered for future research. First, there needs to be a deeper understanding of which forms of pressure on donor governments are conducive to higher accountability to their aid recipients – whether it is peer pressure from other donor countries or from an external entity or from a legally binding agreement or from citizen groups in the donor and/or recipient country, or a combination of all these factors.

Second, future research could draw on citizen assembly models in governance literature to further explore the idea of establishing citizen committees in donor and aid recipient countries. In particular, additional studies could suggest ways to ensure these committees are in regular contact with each other so that they can jointly oversee how governments and implementing agencies manage aid funds along the transaction chain. New research and policy should specifically look into the power dynamics between these committees and the government they monitor to understand the actual levers of influence citizen representatives have over elected public officials.

Third, it would be helpful to shed more light on the human and psychological dimensions of donor accountability to recipients. Too often, these factors are hidden or underestimated, particularly in aid policy discussions. However, the findings described in this chapter indicate how donor accountability may heavily depend on how individual donor officials respond to domestic pressures, find acceptable justifications for their agency's lack of progress on commitments or resort to ever-new requests for evidence to delay action. These tactics are seldom discussed in multi-stakeholder initiatives and yet they have surfaced in GPEDC and GB often enough to warrant further research. The human factor in donor accountability to aid recipients must be brought front and center.

Summary

This chapter has explored the issue of donor accountability to aid recipients in GPEDC and GB. Through a comparative analysis of the two initiatives, it has addressed the question of whether they have helped improve donor accountability for the quality of their development and humanitarian assistance. The findings from selected publications and new primary data have highlighted gaps in the original design of GB and GPEDC, which have had direct implications for donor accountability to citizens in receiving countries. Drawing on the academic literature, the chapter has also compared the research findings in GPEDC and GB to garner lessons learned on what works for higher donor accountability, to be considered for further research. The following chapter will summarise the main findings from my publications and integrative discussion and reiterate the overall contribution of my research and practice to the aid effectiveness field.

Chapter 6. Conclusion

Introduction

This conclusion summarises the key findings from my publications and the integrative discussion chapter on the issue of donor accountability to aid recipients for their aid effectiveness commitments. Section 6.1 highlights the main outcomes from a comparative analysis of GPEDC and GB as two relevant aid effectiveness initiatives and explains how they answer the research questions identified for this thesis. Section 6.2 reiterates the overall contributions of my research and professional practice to the aid effectiveness field. It also includes a critical reflection on the limitations of my findings and recommends opportunities for further studies. Section 6.3 provides final thoughts on my research and professional experience and its impact on theory and practice.

6.1.   Summary of key findings

This study has aimed to assess DAC donors' accountability to aid recipients for the quality, or effectiveness, of their international assistance (ODA). Despite the vast academic and policy literature on aid effectiveness, there has been less attention to donor accountability to recipients in recent years. I have therefore sought to explore this topic by building on my past publications and direct experience working on two aid effectiveness-related initiatives: GB, which focuses on humanitarian aid, and GPEDC, which focuses on development aid. Together, they represent the most notable system-wide attempts to improve the quality of ODA, either to recipient governments or UN agencies and civil society organisations delivering humanitarian assistance to populations in crisis.

Through a comparative analysis of GPEDC and GB, I have addressed three research questions:

a) Have GB and GPEDC led to higher accountability of donor governments to aid recipients?

b) To what extent did the original design of GB and GPEDC result in gaps in donor accountability to aid recipients?

c) How can GB and GPEDC be improved to address donor accountability to aid recipients?

To answer these questions, I have assumed aid and accountability to be two forms of power, as long recognised by academic literature (Goetz and Jenkins, 2005; Eyben, 2008; McGee, 2020). Therefore, using a power lens, I have reviewed four of my most relevant publications, which are included in Chapter 4. I have then complemented this work with a critical reflection on my professional experience with, and direct exposure to, GPEDC and GB, using a qualitative autoethnographic approach. To triangulate these data, I have cross-checked them with insights from interviews with 30 key informants knowledgeable about either GPEDC or GB or both. The following sub-sections summarise my findings in reply to each research question.

6.1.1. Key elements leading to higher donor accountability in GPEDC and GB

By comparing and contrasting which elements have led to higher donor accountability to aid recipients in GPEDC and GB, significant similarities emerge. To start, these elements may have *promoted*, but not necessarily *led to*, higher donor accountability. What I found is that, for the most part, they have remained aspirational in nature due to the unequal power relations between donors and recipients.

My research shows that measuring progress against aid effectiveness commitments through GPEDC's monitoring exercise and GB's self-reporting process and AIRs has been the most valuable contribution to donor accountability so far. In both cases, these efforts have generated and disseminated important information on the quality of ODA. Data transparency has started to improve. Despite the often-sobering results, measuring key aspects of aid effectiveness has instilled a widespread belief that donors are still held accountable for their most important promises. In GB's case, the combination of self-reporting and external monitoring has been even more conducive to fostering signatories' sense of ownership of the findings and external recommendations. By performing a norm-setting function, GPEDC and GB have created authoritative spaces to improve aid effectiveness practices. Through a power analysis lens, this achievement reflects these initiatives' visible power over donor behaviour.

However, findings also show that monitoring core commitments alone has not been sufficient to ensure an adequate level of accountability in either partnership. This is due to lack of clarity over how to use monitoring data to drive a broader accountability conversation at country and global level. A common pattern has therefore been to conflate accountability with monitoring efforts. The pause in the production of GPEDC's global progress reports from 2019 to 2026 and of GB AIRs from 2023 to 2026 has further reduced opportunities to discuss donor accountability for aid effectiveness. A notable exception has been GPEDC's recent initiative to organise country-level 'Action Dialogues' to promote faster implementation of commitments and mutual accountability based on available monitoring data. The impact of these Dialogues remains to be seen.

A third common element that was designed to provide a robust accountability system for upholding aid effectiveness commitments has been the technical work on priority aid reforms. Both GPEDC and GB members have embarked upon years of deep discussions to address the most complex challenges in improving the quality of international aid. To some degree, this level of engagement has produced promising results, such as the agreement to reduce the burden of reporting requirements through the adoption of the GB '8+3' template. At the same time, neither partnership has been able to sustain this work with steady high-level leadership from their members. This imbalance has led to loss of political momentum, which has fueled skepticism about GPEDC and GB's ability to achieve their ambitious objectives.

The multi-stakeholder nature of these partnerships has been another important accountability tool. In this regard, GPEDC is the more inclusive partnership as its members feature all the main recipient constituencies, including low and middle-income country governments. The evolution from a donor-driven approach to aid effectiveness in the 2000s to a multi-stakeholder approach in GPEDC and GB in the 2010s and 2020s has highlighted the importance of collective responsibility and reciprocity between aid constituencies. Here too, however, the trade-off between inclusion and accountability has often penalised the latter. This is due to the high number of GPEDC and GB members, which has made it more challenging to move forward together on any commitment, and

to the profoundly different views on aid effectiveness between DAC and non-DAC donors, particularly within GPEDC.

Striking the right balance between global and country-level accountability has also proven challenging. While GPEDC's 'global light, country-focused' approach was originally meant to inspire more relevant conversations on effective development co-operation closer to the receiving end, in reality it has led to donors' gradual disengagement at the country level. Similarly, the National Reference Groups recently established by GB in a dozen countries were supposed to foster mutual accountability closer to the frontlines of humanitarian action. To date, though, they have mainly attracted civil society stakeholders while donors still prefer to engage at the global level. This has increased the divide between global and local policy discussions on accountability to aid recipients.

Finally, donors' tendency to ask implementing agencies for ever-new evidence of the need for aid reforms has only partly led to higher accountability to aid recipients. In addition to the data already provided through GPEDC and GB monitoring processes, this additional information has kept domestic audiences in donor countries updated on how taxpayer money is used. At the same time, it has allowed donors to delay the implementation of several key aid effectiveness commitments while implementing organisations – such as NGOs, CSOs and UN agencies – demonstrate proof of their ongoing relevance. Across GPEDC and GB, this pattern has created an 'evidence trap' which keeps aid effectiveness discussions moving in circles instead of moving forward.

6.1.2. Gaps in donor accountability within GPEDC and GB

In reply to my second research question, this study shows several gaps in donor accountability in the original design of GPEDC and GB alike.

First, neither initiative was built on a clear theory of change. This has led to ambiguity about how they would achieve their objectives in practice, how they would take context into consideration and whether change would be directly attributable to GPEDC and GB's actions. For years, GPEDC and GB members have simply relied on the assumption that the multi-stakeholder nature of these

partnerships would ensure a higher degree of mutual accountability, including accountability to recipients, through a combination of tools. Consistent with my conceptual framework, these tools included, for example, high-level peer pressure between and within GPEDC and GB constituencies. However, if one of those tools is discontinued or used to a lesser degree, as has been the case with peer pressure, it is unclear how to uphold responsibility for agreed commitments, particularly by donors. In the lack of a solid shared understanding of how change happens, both partnerships have suffered from growing confusion about who is accountable to whom.

Second, within GPEDC and GB, donor governments have been disconnected from recipient populations. My research findings confirm what the literature says: taxpayers, as the ultimate providers of aid, do not directly interact with the ultimate recipients of aid, the population groups targeted for humanitarian or development assistance. Instead, taxpayers deliver aid through several intermediaries, including their donor agencies. What I found is that these agencies, too, rarely connect with target populations, leaving it to recipient governments and implementing agencies to be accountable for the aid provided. This shift in accountability from donors to implementing agencies is a way to outsource responsibility towards aid recipients under the pretext of recent aid trends, such as locally led development and accountability to populations affected by humanitarian crises. As my power analysis shows, it is a form of hidden power.

Third, neither GPEDC nor GB have acknowledged the inherent politics of aid. While this approach may have been a way to safeguard the formal, non-political purposes of ODA, there has been no public recognition of the need to discuss the full array of donor motives behind aid effectiveness decisions, including donors' commercial, geopolitical and military interests. Avoiding politics has led to frustration within GPEDC and GB about the 'real' agenda behind donor performance. This lack of accountability further brings to the fore hidden forms of donor power in the shape of what features on the agenda for discussion.

Fourth, a major, underestimated gap has been the lack of effective mechanisms to prevent loss of institutional memory. For all the documentation produced by GPEDC and GB, there has been no

linear progression in the knowledge accumulated over the years, nor internal arrangements to disseminate that kind of intangible wisdom that could avoid duplication of efforts. As new leaders and secretariat staff have come on board of both initiatives, this void of institutional knowledge has allowed donors to re-open previously resolved discussions, for example on the evidence of the need for flexible humanitarian funding. As a result, donor accountability for past commitments has been delayed to the benefit of the status quo – again, another form of hidden power.

Finally, the design of GB and GPEDC has lacked holistic approaches to similar challenges in humanitarian and development co-operation. There is little or no awareness that both these initiatives promote system-wide aid effectiveness reforms, neither in academia nor among the aid practitioners interviewed for this thesis. Albeit from different angles, tackling the same issues, such as aid transparency, through siloed initiatives has gone counter to the nexus approaches so often championed by the aid effectiveness community. It also does not make sense to aid recipients. The internal divide between humanitarian and development departments in most DAC donor agencies bears significant responsibility for these silos.

6.1.3. Ways to improve donor accountability in GPEDC and GB

In reply to my third research question, several key learnings on donor accountability to aid recipients emerge from my comparative analysis of GPEDC and GB.

First of all, these multi-stakeholder partnerships may amplify, rather than reduce, power asymmetries between donors and recipients. As explained in my original conceptual framework, in theory, both GPEDC and GB can leverage a variety of accountability tools to compensate for donors' greater bilateral influence over aid recipients. These mitigating factors include GPEDC's transparency and mutual accountability principle, GB's spirit of mutual concessions ('quid pro quo'), political engagement, global and country-level policy dialogue, etc. Referring to Gaventa's power framework (2006), my research outcomes tell a different story. They point to hidden and invisible power dynamics which undermine the effectiveness of these mitigating factors. For example, donors' gradual disengagement from GPEDC's ministerial-level meetings (McKee et al., 2020:11) or

the pause in the production of GB AIRs has reduced opportunities for key accountability discussions. Invisible power dynamics come to the fore when donors refer to GPEDC's aid effectiveness commitments as a marginal, 'unfinished business' when in fact it is still a top priority for recipient governments (Glennie, 2022). Along the same lines, over-emphasising 'cost effectiveness' and 'value for money' in GB discussions prioritises a donor agenda instead of recipient needs. In both initiatives, donors shape the narrative around what matters, either by validating limiting beliefs about the scope of GPEDC and GB or by controlling the language used. In addition, donors' implicit support for the general skepticism about GPEDC and GB's future has effectively turned this widespread belief into accepted knowledge (Foucault, 1995:29; Clegg, 1993:42).

To triangulate these findings, I found that donor behaviour in the implementation of the GCR hints at similar power dynamics to those in GPEDC and GB (See Annexes III and IV). Indeed, the GCR illustrates how donor accountability to recipients follows the same patterns when it targets a specific population group: in this case, refugees and their host communities. GCR accountability mechanisms, such as Global Refugee Fora and data collection for GCR indicator reports, also raise the same concerns about the unequal playing field of the GCR as a multi-stakeholder initiative with embedded hidden and invisible forms of donor power.

When we look at the implications of the research findings, a major lesson learned is that donor accountability to recipients in GPEDC and GB reflects the limited scope of accountability for international aid in general. Of the two essential components of accountability – *answerability* and *enforceability* –, aid effectiveness initiatives like GPEDC and GB have mainly advanced the former by providing more information on their members' performance. Specifically, both initiatives have shared more (and often better-quality) data on what donors are doing to fulfill their aid effectiveness commitments. At the same time, the data provided has not resulted in optimal transparency due to their highly technical nature and relatively low usability. In terms of enforceability, in neither initiative have donors faced any consequences for failing to meet their aid effectiveness commitments to recipients. On the contrary, over the years, recipient governments

and implementing agencies have come under higher scrutiny for how they comply with donor requirements. In addition, research findings add nuance to the definition of accountability as the combination of answerability and enforceability through a responsiveness lens. Indeed, a key conclusion is that donors have generally responded to recipients' requests for deep aid effectiveness reforms on a discretionary basis. Even when sustained over time, donors' responsiveness to recommendations from GPEDC and GB's work has been partial or arbitrary. As such, it has not turned into institutional change and accountable responsiveness (Fox et al., 2024:14). Overall, donor accountability to aid recipients for GPEDC and GB commitments remains elusive.

Further learnings suggest two possible solutions to the donor accountability dilemma, beyond GPEDC and GB. The former is to add pressure on donor performance by setting up independent citizen committees in donor and recipient countries. This complementary accountability mechanism would allow representatives from taxpayers and recipient populations to connect and monitor the quality of humanitarian and development assistance together. Establishing a direct connection between taxpayers as the ultimate providers and recipient populations as the ultimate receivers of aid would also give recipients a stronger voice in key aid allocation decisions. The latter solution is to significantly scale up the use of cash assistance, which has yet to reach the critical level required for system-wide progress on aid effectiveness. This step would shift the power of choice about how aid is used from donors to recipients. It implies that donor governments relinquish control over their resources, which may be challenging to implement. Nevertheless, decades of research demonstrate the full potential of cash assistance at scale.

6.2. Overall contributions of my research and practice

There has been less academic interest in donor accountability for aid effectiveness in recent years. This contrasts with my experience working with aid recipients – either governments from the Global South or people affected by humanitarian crises – for whom the quality of international aid is still a priority. With this study, I have therefore sought to revive attention to donor accountability from

the perspective of aid recipients, drawing on my published works, new primary research and direct professional exposure to two aid effectiveness-related initiatives: GPEDC and GB.

To my knowledge, this is the first piece of research comparing GPEDC and GB. This is in itself a contribution to addressing two key challenges in aid effectiveness policy and practice. First, because it shows how these initiatives operate in silos, contrary to the nexus approaches they are supposed to champion. Second, because my findings have foregrounded the considerable loss of institutional memory in both initiatives, which has undermined collective progress on the aid effectiveness agenda. Through my own reflections and interviews with key informants, I have highlighted how siloed approaches and lack of awareness of past achievements have led to unnecessary duplication of efforts in the broader aid effectiveness community.

I have been able to reach these findings using an autoethnographic lens. As one of the very few policymakers who has worked on both GPEDC and GB, I realised at the outset of my research that autoethnography would be an appropriate method for sharing my knowledge and helping preserve institutional memory. Once recurring patterns in donor accountability started to emerge from my direct exposure to the two partnerships, I also noticed they were not easily detectable by outsiders. In this regard, triangulating my own recollections with insights from key interviewees has been a valuable way to disseminate knowledge that would otherwise be inaccessible. This has been especially the case in identifying forms of hidden and invisible power in GPEDC and GB.

Using, to the extent possible, a jargon-free language, I have relied on autoethnography to disseminate my research findings with a broader audience: ideally, not only academics and policymakers but also concerned citizens in donor and recipient countries who wish to have a more comprehensive picture of how donor governments are held accountable for the quality of the international assistance they provide.

Another contribution of my research has been to unveil the risk that multi-stakeholder initiatives such as GPEDC and GB may amplify power asymmetries between donors and recipients instead of

mitigating them. In this regard, my findings are consistent with Faul's theory (2016). They demystify the general belief that GPEDC and GB offer a level playing field to their members, which is a form of invisible donor power. While Faul's Social Network Analysis (SNA) was not directly related to the objectives of this thesis, future research could apply SNA to GPEDC and GB to confirm the relevance of Faul's theory to these two initiatives.

As a final point, my conceptual framework has built on the widely accepted notion that aid and accountability are two inter-related forms of power. Through this power lens, it has combined different theories by De Renzio (2006a, 2006b), Faul (2016), Gaventa (2006) and McGee (2013) into a model which may prove useful for improving aid effectiveness policy. In light of the research findings, it has become evident how low donor accountability to aid recipients is largely due to the disconnect between taxpayers and end users. Finding ways to close this feedback loop would introduce an element of independent joint scrutiny by the most powerful actors (taxpayers) and the most relevant stakeholders (end users). This finding is consistent with my own experience and insights from the senior aid practitioners interviewed for this study.

Future research could test my assumptions by establishing two pilot citizen committees – a taxpayer committee in the donor country and a citizen committee in the recipient country – to jointly monitor a specific aid effectiveness commitment, for example the use of country administrative and financial systems by a specific donor. On a programmatic level, a similar joint arrangement could be piloted to monitor a given donor project. A number of questions about the sampling and functioning of these committees remain to be addressed before embarking on such an effort.

6.3.   Final Thoughts

This final chapter has summarised the main research findings on donor accountability to recipients in two aid effectiveness-related initiatives, GPEDC and GB. Building on my published works, my new primary research and my professional experience with GPEDC and GB, this study has found recurring similarities in donor behaviour towards aid recipients across the two initiatives. It has also identified important gaps in the original design of GPEDC and GB and key lessons learned on what

works and what doesn't in holding donors more responsible for progress on their aid effectiveness commitments.

Overall, research findings show a limited degree of donor accountability to aid recipients. While my work has focused on GPEDC and GB, their internal dynamics reflect fundamental power asymmetries between donors and recipients in the broader aid community. In particular, new primary data has unveiled the structural challenge of holding donors to account in an ecosystem that was never designed to promote accountability to aid recipients in the first place. For donor accountability to improve, this study suggests closing the feedback loop between taxpayers and recipients and shifting the power of choice to recipient populations through a significant increase in cash assistance.

> Fundamentally, the problem is aid is not accountable to the people or governments to which it is given.
>
> (Respondent I, Team Lead at an inter-governmental institution based in Europe).

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Annexes

Annex I.

Key development and humanitarian aid effectiveness commitments

- *The Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness* and *The Accra Agenda for Action (2005 and 2008)*
- *The Busan Partnership for Effective Development Co-operation (2011)*
- *The Grand Bargain – A Shared Commitment to Better Serve People in Need (2016)*

The Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness
and the Accra Agenda for Action

Table of Contents

Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness
Ownership, Harmonisation, Alignment, Results and Mutual Accountability

I. Statement of Resolve

1.   We, Ministers of developed and developing countries responsible for promoting development and Heads of multilateral and bilateral development institutions, meeting in Paris on 2 March 2005, resolve to take far-reaching and monitorable actions to reform the ways we deliver and manage aid as we look ahead to the UN five-year review of the Millennium Declaration and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) later this year. As in Monterrey, we recognise that while the volumes of aid and other development resources must increase to achieve these goals, aid effectiveness must increase significantly as well to support partner country efforts to strengthen governance and improve development performance. This will be all the more important if existing and new bilateral and multilateral initiatives lead to significant further increases in aid.

2.   At this High-Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness, we followed up on the Declaration adopted at the High-Level Forum on Harmonisation in Rome (February 2003) and the core principles put forward at the Marrakech Roundtable on Managing for Development Results (February 2004) because we believe they will increase the impact aid has in reducing poverty and inequality, increasing growth, building capacity and accelerating achievement of the MDGs.

Scale up for more effective aid

3.   We reaffirm the commitments made at Rome to harmonise and align aid delivery. We are encouraged that many donors and partner countries are making aid effectiveness a high priority, and we reaffirm our commitment to accelerate progress in implementation, especially in the following areas:

   i. Strengthening partner countries' national development strategies and associated operational frameworks (*e.g.*, planning, budget, and performance assessment frameworks).

   ii. Increasing alignment of aid with partner countries' priorities, systems and procedures and helping to strengthen their capacities.

   iii. Enhancing donors' and partner countries' respective accountability to their citizens and parliaments for their development policies, strategies and performance.

   iv. Eliminating duplication of efforts and rationalising donor activities to make them as cost-effective as possible.

   v. Reforming and simplifying donor policies and procedures to encourage collaborative behaviour and progressive alignment with partner countries' priorities, systems and procedures.

   vi. Defining measures and standards of performance and accountability of partner country systems in public financial management, procurement, fiduciary safeguards and environmental assessments, in line with broadly accepted good practices and their quick and widespread application.

4.   We commit ourselves to taking concrete and effective action to address the remaining challenges, including:

   i. Weaknesses in partner countries' institutional capacities to develop and implement results-driven national development strategies.

   ii. Failure to provide more predictable and multi-year commitments on aid flows to committed partner countries.

   iii. Insufficient delegation of authority to donors' field staff, and inadequate attention to incentives for effective development partnerships between donors and partner countries.

   iv. Insufficient integration of global programmes and initiatives into partner countries' broader development agendas, including in critical areas such as HIV/AIDS.

   v. Corruption and lack of transparency, which erode public support, impede effective resource mobilisation and allocation and divert resources away from activities that are vital for poverty reduction and sustainable economic development. Where corruption exists, it inhibits donors from relying on partner country systems.

5.   We acknowledge that enhancing the effectiveness of aid is feasible and necessary across all aid modalities. In determining the most effective modalities of aid delivery, we will be guided by development strategies and priorities established by partner countries. Individually and collectively, we will choose and design appropriate and complementary modalities so as to maximise their combined effectiveness.

6.   In following up the Declaration, we will intensify our efforts to provide and use development assistance, including the increased flows as promised at Monterrey, in ways that rationalise the often excessive fragmentation of donor activities at the country and sector levels.

Adapt and apply to differing country situations

7.   Enhancing the effectiveness of aid is also necessary in challenging and complex situations, such as the tsunami disaster that struck countries of the Indian Ocean rim on 26 December 2004. In such situations, worldwide humanitarian and development assistance must be harmonised within the growth and poverty reduction agendas of partner countries. In fragile states, as we support state-building and delivery of basic services, we will ensure that the principles of harmonisation, alignment and managing for results are adapted to environments of weak governance and capacity. Overall, we will give increased attention to such complex situations as we work toward greater aid effectiveness.

Specify indicators, timetable and targets

8.   We accept that the reforms suggested in this Declaration will require continued high-level political support, peer pressure and coordinated actions at the global, regional and country levels. We commit to accelerate the pace of change by implementing, in a spirit of mutual accountability, the Partnership Commitments presented in Section II and to measure progress against 12 specific indicators that we have agreed today and that are set out in Section III of this Declaration.

9.   As a further spur to progress, we will set targets for the year 2010. These targets, which will involve action by both donors and partner countries, are designed to track and encourage progress at the global level among the countries and agencies that have agreed to this Declaration. They are not intended to prejudge or substitute for any targets that individual partner countries may wish to set. We have agreed today to set five preliminary targets against indicators as shown in Section III. We agree to review these preliminary targets and to adopt targets against the remaining indicators as shown in Section III before the UNGA Summit in September 2005; and we ask the partnership of donors and partner countries hosted by the DAC to prepare for this urgently.[1] Meanwhile, we welcome initiatives by partner countries and donors to establish their own targets for improved aid effectiveness within the framework of the agreed Partnership Commitments and Indicators of Progress. For example, a number of partner countries have presented action plans, and a large number of donors have announced important new commitments. We invite all participants who wish to provide information on such initiatives to submit it by 4 April 2005 for subsequent publication.

Monitor and evaluate implementation

10.   Because demonstrating real progress at country level is critical, under the leadership of the partner country we will periodically assess, qualitatively as well as quantitatively, our mutual progress at country level in implementing agreed commitments on aid effectiveness. In doing so, we will make use of appropriate country level mechanisms.

11.   At the international level, we call on the partnership of donors and partner countries hosted by the DAC to broaden partner country participation and, by the end of 2005, to propose arrangements for the medium term monitoring of the commitments in this Declaration. In the meantime, we ask the partnership to co-ordinate the international monitoring of the Indicators of Progress included in Section III; to refine targets as necessary; to provide appropriate guidance to establish baselines; and to enable consistent aggregation of information across a range of countries to be summed up

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1. In accordance with paragraph 9 of the Declaration, the partnership of donors and partner countries hosted by the DAC (Working Party on Aid Effectiveness) comprising OECD/DAC members, partner countries and multilateral institutions, met twice, on 30-31 May 2005 and on 7-8 July 2005 to adopt, and review where appropriate, the targets for the twelve Indicators of Progress. At these meetings an agreement was reached on the targets presented under Section III of the present Declaration. This agreement is subject to reservations by one donor on (a) the methodology for assessing the quality of locally-managed procurement systems (relating to targets 2b and 5b) and (b) the acceptable quality of public financial management reform programmes (relating to target 5a.ii). Further discussions are under way to address these issues. The targets, including the reservation, have been notified to the Chairs of the High-level Plenary Meeting of the 59th General Assembly of the United Nations in a letter of 9 September 2005 by Mr. Richard Manning, Chair of the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC).

in a periodic report. We will also use existing peer review mechanisms and regional reviews to support progress in this agenda. We will, in addition, explore independent cross-country monitoring and evaluation processes – which should be applied without imposing additional burdens on partners – to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how increased aid effectiveness contributes to meeting development objectives.

12.   Consistent with the focus on implementation, we plan to meet again in 2008 in a developing country and conduct two rounds of monitoring before then to review progress in implementing this Declaration.

II. Partnership Commitments

13.   Developed in a spirit of mutual accountability, these Partnership Commitments are based on the lessons of experience. We recognise that commitments need to be interpreted in the light of the specific situation of each partner country.

Ownership

Partner countries exercise effective leadership over their development policies, and strategies and co-ordinate development actions.

14.   **Partner countries** commit to:

- Exercise leadership in developing and implementing their national development strategies[2] through broad consultative processes.
- Translate these national development strategies into prioritised results-oriented operational programmes as expressed in medium-term expenditure frameworks and annual budgets (**Indicator 1**).
- Take the lead in co-ordinating aid at all levels in conjunction with other development resources in dialogue with donors and encouraging the participation of civil society and the private sector.

15.   **Donors** commit to:

- Respect partner country leadership and help strengthen their capacity to exercise it.

Alignment

Donors base their overall support on partner countries' national development strategies, institutions and procedures.

Donors align with partners' strategies

16.   **Donors** commit to:

- Base their overall support — country strategies, policy dialogues and development co-operation programmes – on partners' national development strategies and periodic reviews of progress in implementing these strategies[3] (**Indicator 3**).
- Draw conditions, whenever possible, from a partner's national development strategy or its annual review of progress in implementing this strategy. Other conditions would be included only when a sound justification exists and would be undertaken transparently and in close consultation with other donors and stake holders.
- Link funding to a single framework of conditions and/or a manageable set of indicators derived from the national development strategy. This does not mean that all donors have identical conditions, but that each donor's conditions should be derived from a common streamlined framework aimed at achieving lasting results.

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2. The term `national development strategies' includes poverty reduction and similar over arching strategies as well as sector and thematic strategies.
3. This includes for example the Annual Progress Review of the Poverty Reduction Strategies (APR).

Donors use strengthened country systems

17. Using a country's own institutions and systems, where these provide assurance that aid will be used for agreed purposes, increases aid effectiveness by strengthening the partner country's sustainable capacity to develop, implement and account for its policies to its citizens and parliament. Country systems and procedures typically include, but are not restricted to, national arrangements and procedures for public financial management, accounting, auditing, procurement, results frameworks and monitoring.

18. Diagnostic reviews are an important – and growing – source of information to governments and donors on the state of country systems in partner countries. Partner countries and donors have a shared interest in being able to monitor progress over time in improving country systems. They are assisted by performance assessment frameworks, and an associated set of reform measures, that build on the information set out in diagnostic reviews and related analytical work.

19. **Partner countries** and **donors** jointly commit to:

- Work together to establish mutually agreed frameworks that provide reliable assessments of performance, transparency and accountability of country systems (**Indicator 2**).

- Integrate diagnostic reviews and performance assessment frameworks within country-led strategies for capacity development.

20. **Partner countries** commit to:

- Carry out diagnostic reviews that provide reliable assessments of country systems and procedures.

- On the basis of such diagnostic reviews, undertake reforms that may be necessary to ensure that national systems, institutions and procedures for managing aid and other development resources are effective, accountable and transparent.

- Undertake reforms, such as public management reform, that may be necessary to launch and fuel sustainable capacity development processes.

21. **Donors** commit to:

- Use country systems and procedures to the maximum extent possible. Where use of country systems is not feasible, establish additional safeguards and measures in ways that strengthen rather than undermine country systems and procedures (**Indicator 5**).

- Avoid, to the maximum extent possible, creating dedicated structures for day-to-day management and implementation of aid-financed projects and programmes (**Indicator 6**).

- Adopt harmonised performance assessment frameworks for country systems so as to avoid presenting partner countries with an excessive number of potentially conflicting targets.

Partner countries strengthen development capacity with support from donors

22. The capacity to plan, manage, implement, and account for results of policies and programmes, is critical for achieving development objectives – from analysis and dialogue through implementation, monitoring and evaluation. Capacity development is the responsibility of partner countries with donors playing a support role. It needs not only to be based on sound technical analysis, but also to be responsive to the broader social, political and economic environment, including the need to strengthen human resources.

23. **Partner countries** commit to:

- Integrate specific capacity strengthening objectives in national development strategies and pursue their implementation through country-led capacity development strategies where needed.

24. **Donors** commit to:

- Align their analytic and financial support with partners' capacity development objectives and strategies, make effective use of existing capacities and harmonise support for capacity development accordingly (**Indicator 4**).

Strengthen public financial management capacity

25. **Partner countries** commit to:

- Intensify efforts to mobilise domestic resources, strengthen fiscal sustainability, and create an enabling environment for public and private investments.
- Publish timely, transparent and reliable reporting on budget execution.
- Take leadership of the public financial management reform process.

26. **Donors** commit to:

- Provide reliable indicative commitments of aid over a multi-year framework and disburse aid in a timely and predictable fashion according to agreed schedules (**Indicator 7**).
- Rely to the maximum extent possible on transparent partner government budget and accounting mechanisms (**Indicator 5**).

27. **Partner countries** and **donors** jointly commit to:

- Implement harmonised diagnostic reviews and performance assessment frameworks in public financial management.

Strengthen national procurement systems

28. **Partner countries** and **donors** jointly commit to:

- Use mutually agreed standards and processes[4] to carry out diagnostics, develop sustainable reforms and monitor implementation.
- Commit sufficient resources to support and sustain medium and long-term procurement reforms and capacity development.
- Share feedback at the country level on recommended approaches so they can be improved over time.

29. **Partner countries** commit to take leadership and implement the procurement reform process.

30. **Donors** commit to:

- Progressively rely on partner country systems for procurement when the country has implemented mutually agreed standards and processes (**Indicator 5**).
- Adopt harmonised approaches when national systems do not meet mutually agreed levels of performance or donors do not use them.

Untie aid: getting better value for money

31. Untying aid generally increases aid effectiveness by reducing transaction costs for partner countries and improving country ownership and alignment. DAC Donors will continue to make progress on untying as encouraged by the 2001 DAC Recommendation on Untying Official Development Assistance to the Least Developed Countries (**Indicator 8**).

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4. Such as the processes developed by the joint OECD-DAC – World Bank Round Table on Strengthening Procurement Capacities in Developing Countries.

Harmonisation

| *Donors' actions are more harmonised, transparent and collectively effective.*

Donors implement common arrangements and simplify procedures

32. **Donors** commit to:

- Implement the donor action plans that they have developed as part of the follow-up to the Rome High-Level Forum.

- Implement, where feasible, common arrangements at country level for planning, funding (*e.g.* joint financial arrangements), disbursement, monitoring, evaluating and reporting to government on donor activities and aid flows. Increased use of programme-based aid modalities can contribute to this effort (**Indicator 9**).

- Work together to reduce the number of separate, duplicative, missions to the field and diagnostic reviews (**Indicator 10**); and promote joint training to share lessons learnt and build a community of practice.

Complementarity: more effective division of labour

33. Excessive fragmentation of aid at global, country or sector level impairs aid effectiveness. A pragmatic approach to the division of labour and burden sharing increases complementarity and can reduce transaction costs.

34. **Partner countries** commit to:

- Provide clear views on donors' comparative advantage and on how to achieve donor complementarity at country or sector level.

35. **Donors** commit to:

- Make full use of their respective comparative advantage at sector or country level by delegating, where appropriate, authority to lead donors for the execution of programmes, activities and tasks.

- Work together to harmonise separate procedures.

Incentives for collaborative behaviour

36. **Donors** and **partner countries** jointly commit to:

- Reform procedures and strengthen incentives – including for recruitment, appraisal and training – for management and staff to work towards harmonisation, alignment and results.

Delivering effective aid in fragile states[5]

37. The long-term vision for international engagement in fragile states is to build legitimate, effective and resilient state and other country institutions. While the guiding principles of effective aid apply equally to fragile states, they need to be adapted to environments of weak ownership and capacity and to immediate needs for basic service delivery.

38. **Partner countries** commit to:

- Make progress towards building institutions and establishing governance structures that deliver effective governance, public safety, security, and equitable access to basic social services for their citizens.

- Engage in dialogue with donors on developing simple planning tools, such as the transitional results matrix, where national development strategies are not yet in place.

- Encourage broad participation of a range of national actors in setting development priorities.

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5. The following section draws on the draft Principles for Good International Engagement in Fragile States, which emerged from the Senior Level Forum on Development Effectiveness in Fragile States (London, January 2005).

39. **Donors** commit to:

- Harmonise their activities. Harmonisation is all the more crucial in the absence of strong government leadership. It should focus on upstream analysis, joint assessments, joint strategies, co-ordination of political engagement; and practical initiatives such as the establishment of joint donor offices.

- Align to the maximum extent possible behind central government-led strategies or, if that is not possible, donors should make maximum use of country, regional, sector or non-government systems.

- Avoid activities that undermine national institution building, such as bypassing national budget processes or setting high salaries for local staff.

- Use an appropriate mix of aid instruments, including support for recurrent financing, particularly for countries in promising but high-risk transitions.

Promoting a harmonised approach to environmental assessments

40. Donors have achieved considerable progress in harmonisation around environmental impact assessment (EIA) including relevant health and social issues at the project level. This progress needs to be deepened, including on addressing implications of global environmental issues such as climate change, desertification and loss of biodiversity.

41. **Donors** and **partner countries** jointly commit to:

- Strengthen the application of EIAs and deepen common procedures for projects, including consultations with stake holders; and develop and apply common approaches for "strategic environmental assessment" at the sector and national levels.

- Continue to develop the specialised technical and policy capacity necessary for environmental analysis and for enforcement of legislation.

42. Similar harmonisation efforts are also needed on other cross-cutting issues, such as gender equality and other thematic issues including those financed by dedicated funds.

Managing for Results

Managing resources and improving decision-making for results

43. Managing for results means managing and implementing aid in a way that focuses on the desired results and uses information to improve decision-making.

44. **Partner countries** commit to:

- Strengthen the linkages between national development strategies and annual and multi-annual budget processes.

- Endeavour to establish results-oriented reporting and assessment frameworks that monitor progress against key dimensions of the national and sector development strategies; and that these frameworks should track a manageable number of indicators for which data are cost-effectively available (**Indicator 11**).

45. **Donors** commit to:

- Link country programming and resources to results and align them with effective partner country performance assessment frameworks, refraining from requesting the introduction of performance indicators that are not consistent with partners' national development strategies.

- Work with partner countries to rely, as far as possible, on partner countries' results-oriented reporting and monitoring frameworks.

- Harmonise their monitoring and reporting requirements, and, until they can rely more extensively on partner countries' statistical, monitoring and evaluation systems, with partner countries to the maximum extent possible on joint formats for periodic reporting.

46.	**Partner countries** and **donors** jointly commit to:

- Work together in a participatory approach to strengthen country capacities and demand for results-based management.

Mutual Accountability

Donors and partners are accountable for development results

47.	A major priority for partner countries and donors is to enhance mutual accountability and transparency in the use of development resources. This also helps strengthen public support for national policies and development assistance.

48.	**Partner countries** commit to:

- Strengthen as appropriate the parliamentary role in national development strategies and/or budgets.
- Reinforce participatory approaches by systematically involving a broad range of development partners when formulating and assessing progress in implementing national development strategies.

49.	**Donors** commit to:

- Provide timely, transparent and comprehensive information on aid flows so as to enable partner authorities to present comprehensive budget reports to their legislatures and citizens.

50.	**Partner countries** and **donors** commit to:

- Jointly assess through existing and increasingly objective country level mechanisms mutual progress in implementing agreed commitments on aid effectiveness, including the Partnership Commitments. (**Indicator 12**).

III. Indicators of Progress

To be measured nationally and monitored internationally

OWNERSHIP	TARGET FOR 2010
1 *Partners have operational development strategies* – Number of countries with national development strategies (including PRSs) that have clear strategic priorities linked to a medium-term expenditure framework and reflected in annual budgets.	**At least 75% of partner countries** have operational development strategies.

ALIGNMENT	TARGET FOR 2010
2 *Reliable country systems* – Number of partner countries that have procurement and public financial management systems that either (a) adhere to broadly accepted good practices or (b) have a reform programme in place to achieve these.	(a) **Public financial management** – Half of partner countries move up at least one measure (*i.e.*, 0.5 points) on the PFM/ CPIA (Country Policy and Institutional Assessment) scale of performance. (b) **Procurement** – One-third of partner countries move up at least one measure (*i.e.*, from D to C, C to B or B to A) on the four-point scale used to assess performance for this indicator.
3 *Aid flows are aligned on national priorities* – Percent of aid flows to the government sector that is reported on partners' national budgets.	**Halve the gap** – halve the proportion of aid flows to government sector not reported on government's budget(s) (with at least 85% reported on budget).
4 *Strengthen capacity by co-ordinated support* – Percent of donor capacity-development support provided through co-ordinated programmes consistent with partners' national development strategies.	**50% of technical co-operation flows** are implemented through co-ordinated programmes consistent with national development strategies.

5a *Use of country public financial management systems* – Percent of donors and of aid flows that use public financial management systems in partner countries, which either (a) adhere to broadly accepted good practices or (b) have a reform programme in place to achieve these.

PERCENTAGE OF DONORS	
TARGET	SCORE*
All donors use partner countries' PFM systems.	5+
90% of donors use partner countries' PFM systems.	3.5 to 4.5

PERCENTAGE OF AID FLOWS	
TARGET	SCORE*
A two-thirds reduction in the % of aid to the public sector not using partner countries' PFM systems.	5+
A one-third reduction in the % of aid to the public sector not using partner countries' PFM systems.	3.5 to 4.5

5b *Use of country procurement systems* – Percent of donors and of aid flows that use partner country procurement systems which either (a) adhere to broadly accepted good practices or (b) have a reform programme in place to achieve these.

PERCENTAGE OF DONORS	
TARGET	SCORE*
All donors use partner countries' procurement systems.	A
90% of donors use partner countries' procurement systems.	B

PERCENTAGE OF AID FLOWS	
TARGET	SCORE*
A two-thirds reduction in the % of aid to the public sector not using partner	A
A one-third reduction in the % of aid to the public sector not using partner countries' procurement systems.	B

6 *Strengthen capacity by avoiding parallel implementation structures* – Number of parallel project implementation units (PIUs) per country.	**Reduce by two-thirds** the stock of parallel project implementation units (PIUs).

ALIGNMENT	TARGET FOR 2010
7 *Aid is more predictable* – Percent of aid disbursements released according to agreed schedules in annual or multi-year frameworks.	**Halve the gap** halve the proportion of aid not disbursed within the fiscal year for which it was scheduled.
8 *Aid is untied* – Percent of bilateral aid that is untied.	**Continued progress over time.**

HARMONISATION	TARGET FOR 2010
9 *Use of common arrangements or procedures* – Percent of aid provided as programme-based approaches.	**66% of aid flows** are provided in the context of programme-based approaches.
10 *Encourage shared analysis* – Percent of (a) field missions and/or (b) country analytic work, including diagnostic reviews that are joint.	(a) **40% of donor missions** to the field are joint. (b) **66% of country analytic work is joint.**

MANAGING FOR RESULTS	TARGET FOR 2010
11 *Results-oriented frameworks* – Number of countries with transparent and monitorable performance assessment frameworks to assess progress against (a) the national development strategies and (b) sector programmes.	**Reduce the gap by one-third** – Reduce the proportion of countries without transparent and monitorable performance assessment frameworks by one-third.

MUTUAL ACCOUNTABILITY	TARGET FOR 2010
12 *Mutual accountability* – Number of partner countries that undertake mutual assessments of progress in implementing agreed commitments on aid effectiveness including those in this Declaration.	**All partner countries** have mutual assessment reviews in place.

Important Note: In accordance with paragraph 9 of the Declaration, the partnership of donors and partner countries hosted by the DAC (Working Party on Aid Effectiveness) comprising OECD/DAC members, partner countries and multilateral institutions, met twice, on 30-31 May 2005 and on 7-8 July 2005 to adopt, and review where appropriate, the targets for the twelve Indicators of Progress. At these meetings an agreement was reached on the targets presented under Section III of the present Declaration. This agreement is subject to reservations by one donor on (a) the methodology for assessing the quality of locally-managed procurement systems (relating to targets 2b and 5b) and (b) the acceptable quality of public financial management reform programmes (relating to target 5a.ii). Further discussions are underway to address these issues. The targets, including the reservation, have been notified to the Chairs of the High-level Plenary Meeting of the 59th General Assembly of the United Nations in a letter of 9 September 2005 by Mr. Richard Manning, Chair of the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC).

*Note on Indicator 5: Scores for Indicator 5 are determined by the methodology used to measure quality of procurement and public financial management systems under Indicator 2 above.

Appendix A:

Methodological Notes on the Indicators of Progress

The Indicators of Progress provides a framework in which to make operational the responsibilities and accountabilities that are framed in the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness. This framework draws selectively from the Partnership Commitments presented in Section II of this Declaration.

Purpose – The Indicators of Progress provide a framework in which to make operational the responsibilities and accountabilities that are framed in the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness. They measure principally collective behaviour at the country level.

Country level vs. global level – The indicators are to be measured at the country level in close collaboration between partner countries and donors. Values of country level indicators can then be statistically aggregated at the regional or global level. This global aggregation would be done both for the country panel mentioned below, for purposes of statistical comparability, and more broadly for all partner countries for which relevant data are available.

Donor / Partner country performance – The indicators of progress also provide a benchmark against which individual donor agencies or partner countries can measure their performance at the country, regional, or global level. In measuring individual donor performance, the indicators should be applied with flexibility in the recognition that donors have different institutional mandates.

Targets – The targets are set at the global level. Progress against these targets is to be measured by aggregating data measured at the country level. In addition to global targets, partner countries and donors in a given country might agree on country-level targets.

Baseline – A baseline will be established for 2005 in a panel of self-selected countries. The partnership of donors and partner countries hosted by the DAC (Working Party on Aid Effectiveness) is asked to establish this panel.

Definitions and criteria – The partnership of donors and partner countries hosted by the DAC (Working Party on Aid Effectiveness) is asked to provide specific guidance on definitions, scope of application, criteria and methodologies to assure that results can be aggregated across countries and across time.

Note on Indicator 9 – Programme based approaches are defined in Volume 2 of Harmonising Donor Practices for Effective Aid Delivery (OECD, 2005) in Box 3.1 as a way of engaging in development cooperation based on the principles of co-ordinated support for a locally owned programme of development, such as a national development strategy, a sector programme, a thematic programme or a programme of a specific organisation. Programme based approaches share the following features: (a) leadership by the host country or organisation; (b) a single comprehensive programme and budget framework; (c) a formalised process for donor co-ordination and harmonisation of donor procedures for reporting, budgeting, financial management and procurement; (d) Efforts to increase the use of local systems for programme design and implementation, financial management, monitoring and evaluation. For the purpose of indicator 9 performance will be measured separately across the aid modalities that contribute to programme-based approaches.

Appendix B:

List of Participating Countries and Organisations

Participating Countries

Albania	Australia	Austria	Bangladesh
Belgium	Benin	Bolivia	Botswana
[Brazil]*	Burkina Faso	Burundi	Cambodia
Cameroon	Canada	China	Congo D.R.
Czech Republic	Denmark	Dominican Republic	Egypt
Ethiopia	European Commission	Fiji	Finland
France	Gambia, The	Germany	Ghana
Greece	Guatemala	Guinea	Honduras
Iceland	Indonesia	Ireland	Italy
Jamaica	Japan	Jordan	Kenya
Korea	Kuwait	Kyrgyz Republic	Lao PDR
Luxembourg	Madagascar	Malawi	Malaysia
Mali	Mauritania	Mexico	Mongolia
Morocco	Mozambique	Nepal	Netherlands
New Zealand	Nicaragua	Niger	Norway
Pakistan	Papua New Guinea	Philippines	Poland
Portugal	Romania	Russian Federation	Rwanda
Saudi Arabia	Senegal	Serbia and Montenegro	Slovak Republic
Solomon Islands	South Africa	Spain	Sri Lanka
Sweden	Switzerland	Tajikistan	Tanzania
Thailand	Timor-Leste	Tunisia	Turkey
Uganda	United Kingdom	United States of America	Vanuatu
Vietnam	Yemen	Zambia	

*To be confirmed.
More countries than listed here have endorsed the Paris Declaration. For a full and up to date list please consult www.oecd.org/dac/effectiveness/parisdeclaration/members.

Participating Organisations

African Development Bank	Arab Bank for Economic Development in Africa
Asian Development Bank	Commonwealth Secretariat
Consultative Group to Assist the Poorest (CGAP)	Council of Europe Development Bank (CEB)
Economic Commission for Africa (ECA)	Education for All Fast Track Initiative (EFA-FTI)
European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD)	European Investment Bank (EIB)
Global Fund to Fight Aids, Tuberculosis and Malaria	G24
Inter-American Development Bank	International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD)
International Monetary Fund (IMF)	International Organisation of the Francophonie
Islamic Development Bank	Millennium Campaign
New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD)	Nordic Development Fund
Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)	Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS)
OPEC Fund for International Development	Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat
United Nations Development Group (UNDG)	World Bank

Civil Society Organisations

Africa Humanitarian Action
AFRODAD
Bill and Melinda Gates Foundations
Canadian Council for International Cooperation (CCIC)
Comité Catholique contre la Faim et pour le Développement (CCFD)
Coopération Internationale pour le Développement et la Solidarité (CIDSE)
Comisión Económica (Nicaragua)
ENDA Tiers Monde
EURODAD
International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN)
Japan NGO Center for International Cooperation (JANIC)
Reality of Aid Network
Tanzania Social and Economic Trust (TASOET)
UK Aid Network

Accra Agenda for Action

Ministers of developing and donor countries responsible for promoting development and Heads of multilateral and bilateral development institutions endorsed the following statement in Accra, Ghana, on 4 September 2008 to accelerate and deepen implementation of the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness (2 March 2005).

This is a moment of opportunity

1.   We are committed to eradicating poverty and promoting peace and prosperity by building stronger, more effective partnerships that enable developing countries to realise their development goals.

2.   There has been progress. Fifteen years ago, two out of five people lived in extreme poverty; today, that figure has been reduced to one in four. However, 1.4 billion people – most of them women and girls – still live in extreme poverty,[1] and access to safe drinking water and health care remains a major issue in many parts of the world. In addition, new global challenges – rising food and fuel prices and climate change – threaten the advances against poverty many countries have made.

3.   We need to achieve much more if all countries are to meet the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Aid is only one part of the development picture. Democracy, economic growth, social progress, and care for the environment are the prime engines of development in all countries. Addressing inequalities of income and opportunity within countries and between states is essential to global progress. Gender equality, respect for human rights, and environmental sustainability are cornerstones for achieving enduring impact on the lives and potential of poor women, men, and children. It is vital that all our policies address these issues in a more systematic and coherent way.

4.   In 2008, three international conferences will help us accelerate the pace of change: the Accra High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness, the United Nations High Level Event on the MDGs in New York, and the Financing for Development follow-up meeting in Doha. Today at Accra, we are leading the way, united in a common objective: to unlock the full potential of aid in achieving lasting development results.

We are making progress, but not enough

5.   Learning from our past successes and failures in development co-operation and building on the 2003 Rome Declaration on Harmonisation, in March 2005 we adopted an ambitious set of reforms: the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness. In the Paris Declaration, we agreed to develop a genuine partnership, with developing countries clearly in charge of their own development processes. We also agreed to hold each other accountable for achieving concrete development results. Three and one-half years later, we are reconvening in Accra to review progress and address the challenges that now face us.

6.   Evidence shows we are making progress, but not enough. A recent evaluation shows that the Paris Declaration has created powerful momentum to change the way developing countries and donors work together on the ground. According to the 2008 Monitoring Survey, a large number of developing countries have improved their management of public funds. Donors, in turn, are increasingly improving their co-ordination at country level. Yet the pace of progress is too slow. Without further reform and faster action we will not meet our 2010 commitments and targets for improving the quality of aid.

We will take action to accelerate progress

7.   Evidence shows that we will need to address three major challenges to accelerate progress on aid effectiveness:

8.   *Country ownership is key.* Developing country governments will take stronger leadership of their own development policies, and will engage with their parliaments and citizens in shaping those policies. Donors will support them by respecting countries' priorities, investing in their human resources and institutions, making greater use of their systems to deliver aid, and increasing the predictability of aid flows.

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1. These figures are based on a recent World Bank study that found the poverty line to be $1.25 a day in 2005 prices.

9.   *Building more effective and inclusive partnerships.* In recent years, more development actors – middle-income countries, global funds, the private sector, civil society organisations – have been increasing their contributions and bringing valuable experience to the table. This also creates management and co-ordination challenges. Together, all development actors will work in more inclusive partnerships so that all our efforts have greater impact on reducing poverty.

10.   *Achieving development results – and openly accounting for them – must be at the heart of all we do.* More than ever, citizens and taxpayers of all countries expect to see the tangible results of development efforts. We will demonstrate that our actions translate into positive impacts on people's lives. We will be accountable to each other and to our respective parliaments and governing bodies for these outcomes.

11.   Without addressing these obstacles to faster progress, we will fall short of our commitments and miss opportunities to improve the livelihoods of the most vulnerable people in the world. Therefore, we are reaffirming the commitments we made in the Paris Declaration and, in this Accra Agenda for Action, are agreeing on concrete and monitorable actions to accelerate progress to meet those commitments by 2010. We commit to continuing efforts in monitoring and evaluation that will assess whether we have achieved the commitments we agreed in the Paris Declaration and the Accra Agenda for Action, and to what extent aid effectiveness is improving and generating greater development impact.

Strengthening Country Ownership over Development

12.   Developing countries determine and implement their development policies to achieve their own economic, social and environmental goals. We agreed in the Paris Declaration that this would be our first priority. Today, we are taking additional steps to turn this resolution into a reality.

We will broaden country-level policy dialogue on development

13.   We will engage in open and inclusive dialogue on development policies. We acknowledge the critical role and responsibility of parliaments in ensuring country ownership of development processes. To further this objective we will take the following actions:

   a) Developing country governments will work more closely with parliaments and local authorities in preparing, implementing and monitoring national development policies and plans. They will also engage with civil society organisations (CSOs).

   b) Donors will support efforts to increase 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.

   c) 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.

Developing countries will strengthen their capacity to lead and manage development

14.   Without robust capacity – strong institutions, systems, and local expertise – developing countries cannot fully own and manage their development processes. We agreed in the Paris Declaration that capacity development is the responsibility of developing countries, with donors playing a supportive role, and that technical co-operation is one means among others to develop capacity. Together, developing countries and donors will take the following actions to strengthen capacity development:

   a) Developing countries will systematically identify areas where there is a need to strengthen the capacity to perform and deliver services at all levels – national, sub-national, sectoral, and thematic – and design strategies to address them. Donors will strengthen their own capacity and skills to be more responsive to developing countries' needs.

   b) Donors' support for capacity development will be demand-driven and designed to support country ownership. To this end, developing countries and donors will i) jointly select and manage technical co-operation, and

ii) promote the provision of technical co-operation by local and regional resources, including through South-South co-operation.

c) Developing countries and donors will work together at all levels to promote operational changes that make capacity development support more effective.

We will strengthen and use developing country systems to the maximum extent possible

15.   Successful development depends to a large extent on a government's capacity to implement its policies and manage public resources through its own institutions and systems. In the Paris Declaration, developing countries committed to strengthen their systems[2] and donors committed to use those systems to the maximum extent possible. Evidence shows, however, that developing countries and donors are not on track to meet these commitments. Progress in improving the quality of country systems varies considerably among countries; and even when there are good-quality country systems, donors often do not use them. Yet it is recognised that using country systems promotes their development. To strengthen and increase the use of country systems, we will take the following actions:

a) Donors agree to use country systems as the first option for aid programmes in support of activities managed by the public sector.

b) Should donors choose to use another option and rely on aid delivery mechanisms outside country systems (including parallel project implementation units), they will transparently state the rationale for this and will review their positions at regular intervals. Where use of country systems is not feasible, donors will establish additional safeguards and measures in ways that strengthen rather than undermine country systems and procedures.

c) Developing countries and donors will jointly assess the quality of country systems in a country-led process using mutually agreed diagnostic tools. Where country systems require further strengthening, developing countries will lead in defining reform programmes and priorities. Donors will support these reforms and provide capacity development assistance.

d) Donors will immediately start working on and sharing transparent plans for undertaking their Paris commitments on using country systems in all forms of development assistance; provide staff guidance on how these systems can be used; and ensure that internal incentives encourage their use. They will finalise these plans as a matter of urgency.

e) Donors recollect and reaffirm their Paris Declaration commitment to provide 66% of aid as programme-based approaches. In addition, donors will aim to channel 50% or more of government-to-government assistance through country fiduciary systems, including by increasing the percentage of assistance provided through programme-based approaches.

Building More Effective and Inclusive Partnerships for Development

16.   Aid is about building partnerships for development. Such partnerships are most effective when they fully harness the energy, skills and experience of all development actors—bilateral and multilateral donors, global funds, CSOs, and the private sector. To support developing countries' efforts to build for the future, we resolve to create partnerships that will include all these actors.

We will reduce costly fragmentation of aid

17.   The effectiveness of aid is reduced when there are too many duplicating initiatives, especially at country and sector levels. We will reduce the fragmentation of aid by improving the complementarity of donors' efforts and the division of labour among donors, including through improved allocation of resources within sectors, within countries, and across countries. To this end:

a) Developing countries will lead in determining the optimal roles of donors in supporting their development efforts at national, regional and sectoral levels. Donors will respect developing countries' priorities, ensuring that new arrangements on the division of labour will not result in individual developing countries receiving less aid.

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2. These include, but are not limited to, systems for public financial management, procurement, audit, monitoring and evaluation, and social and environmental assessment.

b) Donors and developing countries will work together with the Working Party on Aid Effectiveness to complete good practice principles on country-led division of labour. To that end, they will elaborate plans to ensure the maximum co-ordination of development co-operation. We will evaluate progress in implementation starting in 2009.

c) We will start dialogue on international division of labour across countries by June 2009.

d) We will work to address the issue of countries that receive insufficient aid.

We will increase aid's value for money

18. Since the Paris Declaration was agreed in 2005, OECD-DAC donors have made progress in untying their aid. A number of donors have already fully untied their aid, and we encourage others to do so. We will pursue, and accelerate, these efforts by taking the following actions:

a) OECD-DAC donors will extend coverage of the 2001 DAC Recommendation on Untying Aid to non-LDC HIPCs[3] and will improve their reporting on the 2001 DAC Recommendation.

b) Donors will elaborate individual plans to further untie their aid to the maximum extent.

c) Donors will promote the use of local and regional procurement by ensuring that their procurement procedures are transparent and allow local and regional firms to compete. We will build on examples of good practice to help improve local firms' capacity to compete successfully for aid-funded procurement.

d) We will respect our international agreements on corporate social responsibility.

We welcome and will work with all development actors

19. The contributions of all development actors are more effective when developing countries are in a position to manage and co-ordinate them. We welcome the role of new contributors and will improve the way all development actors work together by taking the following actions:

a) We encourage all development actors, including those engaged in South-South co-operation, to use the Paris Declaration principles as a point of reference in providing development co-operation.

b) We acknowledge the contributions made by all development actors, and in particular the role of middle-income countries as both providers and recipients of aid. We recognise the importance and particularities of South-South co-operation and acknowledge that we can learn from the experience of developing countries. We encourage further development of triangular co-operation.

c) Global funds and programmes make an important contribution to development. The programmes they fund are most effective in conjunction with complementary efforts to improve the policy environment and to strengthen the institutions in the sectors in which they operate. We call upon all global funds to support country ownership, to align and harmonise their assistance proactively, and to make good use of mutual accountability frameworks, while continuing their emphasis on achieving results. As new global challenges emerge, donors will ensure that existing channels for aid delivery are used and, if necessary, strengthened before creating separate new channels that risk further fragmentation and complicate co-ordination at country level.

d) We encourage developing countries to mobilise, manage and evaluate their international co-operation initiatives for the benefit of other developing countries.

e) South-South co-operation on development aims to observe the principle of non-interference in internal affairs, equality among developing partners and respect for their independence, national sovereignty, cultural diversity and identity and local content. It plays an important role in international development co-operation and is a valuable complement to North-South co-operation.

We will deepen our engagement with civil society organisations

20. We will deepen our engagement with CSOs as independent development actors in their own right whose efforts

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3. The 2001 DAC recommendation on Untying ODA to the Least Developed Countries (LDCs) covers 31 so-called Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPCs). The OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) at its 2008 High Level Meeting agreed to extend the 2001 Recommendation to cover the remaining eight countries that are part of the HIPC initiative: Bolivia, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Guyana, Honduras, Nicaragua and Republic of Congo.

complement those of governments and the private sector. We share an interest in ensuring that CSO contributions to development reach their full potential. To this end:

   a) We invite CSOs to reflect on how they can apply the Paris principles of aid effectiveness from a CSO perspective.

   b) We welcome the CSOs' proposal to engage with them in a CSO-led multistakeholder process to promote CSO development effectiveness. As part of that process, we will seek to i) improve co-ordination of CSO efforts with government programmes, ii) enhance CSO accountability for results, and iii) improve information on CSO activities.

   c) We will work with CSOs to provide an enabling environment that maximises their contributions to development.

We will adapt aid policies for countries in fragile situations

21.   In the Paris Declaration, we agreed that aid effectiveness principles apply equally to development co-operation in situations of fragility, including countries emerging from conflict, but that these principles need to be adapted to environments of weak ownership or capacity. Since then, Principles for Good International Engagement in Fragile States and Situations have been agreed. To further improve aid effectiveness in these environments, we will take the following actions:

   a) Donors will conduct joint assessments of governance and capacity and examine the causes of conflict, fragility and insecurity, engaging developing country authorities and other relevant stake holders to the maximum extent possible.

   b) 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. This process will be informed by international dialogue between partners and donors on these objectives as prerequisites for development.

   c) Donors will provide demand-driven, tailored and co-ordinated capacity-development support for core state functions and for early and sustained recovery. They will work with developing countries to design interim measures that are appropriately sequenced and that lead to sustainable local institutions.

   d) Donors will work on flexible, rapid and long-term funding modalities, on a pooled basis where appropriate, to i) bridge humanitarian, recovery and longer-term development phases, and ii) support stabilisation, inclusive peace building, and the building of capable, accountable and responsive states. In collaboration with developing countries, donors will foster partnerships with the UN System, international financial institutions and other donors.

   e) At country level and on a voluntary basis, donors and developing countries will monitor implementation of the Principles for Good International Engagement in Fragile States and Situations, and will share results as part of progress reports on implementing the Paris Declaration.

Delivering and Accounting for Development Results

22.   We will be judged by the impacts that our collective efforts have on the lives of poor people. We recognise that greater transparency and accountability for the use of development resources—domestic as well as external—are powerful drivers of progress.

We will focus on delivering results

23.   We will improve our management for results by taking the following actions:

   a) Developing countries will strengthen the quality of policy design, implementation and assessment by improving information systems, including, as appropriate, disaggregating data by sex, region and socioeconomic status.

   b) Developing countries and donors will work to develop cost-effective results management instruments to assess the impact of development policies and adjust them as necessary. We will better co-ordinate and link the various sources of information, including national statistical systems, budgeting, planning, monitoring and country-led evaluations of policy performance.

c) Donors will align their monitoring with country information systems. They will support, and invest in strengthening, developing countries' national statistical capacity and information systems, including those for managing aid.

d) We will strengthen incentives to improve aid effectiveness. We will systematically review and address legal or administrative impediments to implementing international commitments on aid effectiveness. Donors will pay more attention to delegating sufficient authority to country offices and to changing organisational and staff incentives to promote behaviour in line with aid effectiveness principles.

We will be more accountable and transparent to our publics for results

24.   Transparency and accountability are essential elements for development results. They lie at the heart of the Paris Declaration, in which we agreed that countries and donors would become more accountable to each other and to their citizens. We will pursue these efforts by taking the following actions:

a) We will make aid more transparent. Developing countries will facilitate parliamentary oversight by implementing greater transparency in public financial management, including public disclosure of revenues, budgets, expenditures, procurement and audits. Donors will publicly disclose 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.

b) We will step up our efforts to ensure that – as agreed in the Paris Declaration – mutual assessment reviews are in place by 2010 in all countries that have endorsed the Declaration. These reviews will be based on country results reporting and information systems complemented with available donor data and credible independent evidence. They will draw on emerging good practice with stronger parliamentary scrutiny and citizen engagement. With them we will hold each other accountable for mutually agreed results in keeping with country development and aid policies.

c) To complement mutual assessment reviews at country level and drive better performance, developing countries and donors will jointly review and strengthen existing international accountability mechanisms, including peer review with participation of developing countries. We will review proposals for strengthening the mechanisms by end 2009.

d) Effective and efficient use of development financing requires both donors and partner countries to do their utmost to fight corruption. Donors and developing countries will respect the principles to which they have agreed, including those under the UN Convention against Corruption. Developing countries will address corruption by improving systems of investigation, legal redress, accountability and transparency in the use of public funds. Donors will take steps in their own countries to combat corruption by individuals or corporations and to track, freeze, and recover illegally acquired assets.

We will continue to change the nature of conditionality to support ownership

25.   To strengthen country ownership and improve the predictability of aid flows, donors agreed in the Paris Declaration that, whenever possible, they would draw their conditions from developing countries' own development policies. We reaffirm our commitment to this principle and will continue to change the nature of conditionality by taking the following actions:

a) Donors will work with developing countries to agree on a limited set of mutually agreed conditions based on national development strategies. We will jointly assess donor and developing country performance in meeting commitments.

b) Beginning now, donors and developing countries will regularly make public all conditions linked to disbursements.

c) Developing countries and donors will work together at the international level to review, document and disseminate good practices on conditionality with a view to reinforcing country ownership and other Paris Declaration Principles by increasing emphasis on harmonised, results-based conditionality. They will be receptive to contributions from civil society.

We will increase the medium-term predictability of aid

26. In the Paris Declaration, we agreed that greater predictability in the provision of aid flows is needed to enable developing countries to effectively plan and manage their development programmes over the short and medium term. As a matter of priority, we will take the following actions to improve the predictability of aid:

a) Developing countries will strengthen budget planning processes for managing domestic and external resources and will improve the linkages between expenditures and results over the medium term.

b) Beginning now, donors will provide full and timely information on annual commitments and actual disbursements so that developing countries are in a position to accurately record all aid flows in their budget estimates and their accounting systems.

c) Beginning now, donors will provide developing countries with regular and timely information on their rolling three- to five-year forward expenditure and/or implementation plans, with at least indicative resource allocations that developing countries can integrate in their medium-term planning and macroeconomic frameworks. Donors will address any constraints to providing such information.

d) Developing countries and donors will work together at the international level on ways of further improving the medium-term predictability of aid, including by developing tools to measure it.

Looking Forward

27. The reforms we agree on today in Accra will require continued high level political support, peer pressure, and co-ordinated action at global, regional, and country levels. To achieve these reforms, we renew our commitment to the principles and targets established in the Paris Declaration, and will continue to assess progress in implementing them.

28. The commitments we agree today will need to be adapted to different country circumstances – including in middle-income countries, small states and countries in situations of fragility. To this end, we encourage developing countries to design – with active support from donors – country-based action plans that set out time-bound and monitorable proposals to implement the Paris Declaration and the Accra Agenda for Action.

29. We agree that, by 2010, each of us should meet the commitments we made on aid effectiveness in Paris and today in Accra, and to reach beyond these commitments where we can. We agree to reflect and draw upon the many valuable ideas and initiatives that have been presented at this High Level Forum. We agree that challenges such as climate change and rising food and fuel prices underline the importance of applying aid effectiveness principles. In response to the food crisis, we will develop and implement the global partnership on agriculture and food swiftly, efficiently and flexibly.

30. We ask the Working Party on Aid Effectiveness to continue monitoring progress on implementing the Paris Declaration and the Accra Agenda for Action and to report back to the Fourth High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness in 2011. We recognise that additional work will be required to improve the methodology and indicators of progress of aid effectiveness. In 2011, we will undertake the third round of monitoring that will tell us whether we have achieved the targets for 2010 agreed in Paris in 2005.[4] To carry forward this work, we will need to develop institutionalised processes for the joint and equal partnership of developing countries and the engagement of stakeholders.

31. We recognise that aid effectiveness is an integral part of the broader financing for development agenda. To achieve development outcomes and the MDGs we need to meet our commitments on both aid quality and aid volumes. We ask the Secretary General of the United Nations to transmit the conclusions of the Third High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness to the High Level Event on the MDGs in New York later this month and the Financing for Development Review meeting in Doha in November 2008. We welcome the contribution that the ECOSOC Development Co-operation Forum is making to the international dialogue and to mutual accountability on aid issues. We call upon the UN development system to further support the capacities of developing countries for effective management of development assistance.

32. Today, more than ever, we resolve to work together to help countries across the world build the successful future all of us want to see – a future based on a shared commitment to overcome poverty, a future in which no countries will depend on aid.

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4. We will have that information available for the Fourth High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness in 2011, along with comprehensive second phase evaluations of the implementation of the Paris Declaration and the Accra Agenda for Action as of 2010. Attention will also be paid to improving and developing communications on aid effectiveness for long-term development success and broad-based public support.

OECD

The Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness (2005)
Accra Agenda for Action (2008)

BUSAN PARTNERSHIP FOR EFFECTIVE DEVELOPMENT CO-OPERATION
FOURTH HIGH LEVEL FORUM ON AID EFFECTIVENESS, BUSAN, REPUBLIC OF KOREA,
29 NOVEMBER-1 DECEMBER 2011

1.   We, Heads of State, Ministers and representatives of developing and developed countries, heads of multilateral and bilateral institutions, representatives of different types of public, civil society, private, parliamentary, local and regional organisations meeting here in Busan, Republic of Korea, recognise that we are united by a new partnership that is broader and more inclusive than ever before, founded on shared principles, common goals and differential commitments for effective international development.

2.   The nature, modalities and responsibilities that apply to South-South co-operation differ from those that apply to North-South co-operation. At the same time, we recognise that we are all part of a development agenda in which we participate on the basis of common goals and shared principles. In this context, we encourage increased efforts to support effective co-operation based on our specific country situations. The principles, commitments and actions agreed in the outcome document in Busan shall be the reference for South-South partners on a voluntary basis.

3.   The world stands at a critical juncture in global development. Poverty and inequality remain the central challenge. The Millennium Declaration sets out our universal mandate for development and, with the target date for the Millennium Development Goals less than four years away, the urgency of achieving strong, shared and sustainable growth and decent work in developing countries is paramount. Moreover, the Declaration identifies that promoting human rights, democracy and good governance are an integral part of our development efforts. Nowhere are our development goals more urgent than in fragile and conflict-affected states. Political will is vital if these challenges are to be addressed.

4.   As we reaffirm our development commitments, we realise that the world has changed profoundly since development co-operation began over 60 years ago. Economic, political, social and technological developments have revolutionised the world in which we live. Yet poverty, inequality and hunger persist. Eradicating poverty and tackling the global and regional challenges that have adverse effects on the citizens of developing countries are central to ensuring the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals and a more robust and resilient global economy for all. Our success depends on the results and impact of our joint efforts and investments as we address challenges such as health pandemics, climate change, economic downturns, food and fuel price crises, conflict, fragility and vulnerability to shocks and natural disasters.

1

5.   We also have a more complex architecture for development co-operation, characterised by a greater number of state and non-state actors, as well as co-operation among countries at different stages in their development, many of them middle-income countries. South-South and triangular co-operation, new forms of public-private partnership, and other modalities and vehicles for development have become more prominent, complementing North-South forms of co-operation.

6.   International development co-operation has achieved many positive results. When we met in Monterrey a decade ago, we recognised that increases in volumes of financing for development must be coupled with more effective action to generate sustainable and transparent results for all citizens. Our dialogue in Busan builds on the foundations laid by previous High Level Fora, which have been proven to remain relevant, and which have helped to improve the quality of development co-operation. Yet we recognise that progress has been uneven and neither fast nor far-reaching enough. We each reaffirm our respective commitments and will implement in full the actions to which we have already agreed.

7.   We can and must improve and accelerate our efforts. We commit to modernise, deepen and broaden our co-operation, involving state and non-state actors that wish to shape an agenda that has until recently been dominated by a narrower group of development actors. In Busan, we forge a new global development partnership that embraces diversity and recognises the distinct roles that all stakeholders in co-operation can play to support development.

8.   Our partnership is founded on a common set of principles that underpin all forms of development co-operation. At the same time, we recognise that the ways in which these principles are applied differ across countries at various stages of development, and among the different types of public and private stakeholders involved. Lessons should be shared by all who participate in development co-operation. We welcome the opportunities presented by diverse approaches to development co-operation, such as South-South co-operation, as well as the contribution of civil society organisations and private actors; we will work together to build on and learn from their achievements and innovations, recognising their unique characteristics and respective merits.

9.   Sustainable development results are the end goal of our commitments to effective co-operation. While development co-operation is only part of the solution, it plays a catalytic and indispensable role in supporting poverty eradication, social protection, economic growth and sustainable development. We reaffirm our respective commitments to scale up development co-operation. More effective co-operation should not lead to a reduction in resources for development. Over time, we will aim to increase independence from aid, always taking into account the consequences for the poorest people and countries. In this process, it is essential to examine the interdependence and coherence of all public policies – not just development policies – to enable countries to make full use of the opportunities presented by international investment and trade, and to expand their domestic capital markets.

10.   As we partner to increase and reinforce development results, we will take action to facilitate, leverage and strengthen the impact of diverse sources of finance to support sustainable and inclusive development, including taxation and domestic resource mobilisation, private investment, aid for trade, philanthropy, non-concessional public funding and climate change finance. At the same time, new financial instruments, investment options, technology and knowledge sharing, and public-private partnerships are called for.

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Shared principles to achieve common goals

11.　　As we embrace the diversity that underpins our partnership and the catalytic role of development co-operation, we share common principles which – consistent with our agreed international commitments on human rights, decent work, gender equality, environmental sustainability and disability – form the foundation of our co-operation for effective development:

a) *Ownership of development priorities by developing countries.* Partnerships for development can only succeed if they are led by developing countries, implementing approaches that are tailored to country-specific situations and needs.

b) *Focus on results.* Our investments and efforts must have a lasting impact on eradicating poverty and reducing inequality, on sustainable development, and on enhancing developing countries' capacities, aligned with the priorities and policies set out by developing countries themselves.

c) *Inclusive development partnerships.* Openness, trust, and mutual respect and learning lie at the core of effective partnerships in support of development goals, recognising the different and complementary roles of all actors.

d) *Transparency and accountability to each other.* Mutual accountability and accountability to the intended beneficiaries of our co-operation, as well as to our respective citizens, organisations, constituents and shareholders, is critical to delivering results. Transparent practices form the basis for enhanced accountability.

12.　　These shared principles will guide our actions to:

a) Deepen, extend and operationalise the democratic ownership of development policies and processes.

b) Strengthen our efforts to achieve concrete and sustainable results. This involves better managing for results, monitoring, evaluating and communicating progress; as well as scaling up our support, strengthening national capacities and leveraging diverse resources and initiatives in support of development results.

c) Broaden support for South-South and triangular co-operation, helping to tailor these horizontal partnerships to a greater diversity of country contexts and needs.

d) Support developing countries in their efforts to facilitate, leverage and strengthen the impact of diverse forms of development finance and activities, ensuring that these diverse forms of co-operation have a catalytic effect on development.

13.　　We recognise the urgency with which these actions must be implemented. Beginning implementation now – or accelerating efforts where they are ongoing – is essential if our renewed approach to partnership is to have the maximum possible impact on the realisation of the Millennium Development Goals by 2015, as well as on development results over the longer term. We will hold each other accountable for implementing our respective actions in developing countries and at the international level. As we focus on implementing our commitments at the country level, we will form a new, inclusive Global Partnership for Effective Development Co-operation to support implementation at the political level.

3

Realising change: Complementary actions to reach common goals

Inclusion of new actors on the basis of shared principles and differential commitments

14.   Today's complex architecture for development co-operation has evolved from the North-South paradigm. Distinct from the traditional relationship between aid providers and recipients, developing nations and a number of emerging economies have become important providers of South-South development co-operation. They remain developing countries and still face poverty at home. As such, they remain eligible to benefit from development co-operation provided by others, yet they have increasingly taken upon themselves the responsibility to share experiences and co-operate with other developing countries. The Paris Declaration did not address the complexity of these new actors, while the Accra Agenda for Action recognised their importance and specificities. While North-South co-operation remains the main form of development co-operation, South-South co-operation continues to evolve, providing additional diversity of resources for development. At Busan, we now all form an integral part of a new and more inclusive development agenda, in which these actors participate on the basis of common goals, shared principles and differential commitments. On this same basis, we welcome the inclusion of civil society, the private sector and other actors.

Improving the quality and effectiveness of development co-operation

15.   Progress has been made in advancing the aid effectiveness agenda, yet major challenges persist. Evidence has shown that – despite the challenges encountered in the implementation of our respective commitments – many of the principles underpinning the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness and Accra Agenda for Action have contributed to higher quality, more transparent and effective development co-operation.

16.   We will sustain our high-level political leadership to ensure that the commitments made here in Busan are implemented. Within this context, those of us that endorsed the mutually agreed actions set out in Paris and Accra will intensify our efforts to implement our respective commitments in full. A growing range of actors – including middle-income countries, partners of South-South and triangular co-operation and civil society organisations – have joined others to forge a broader, more inclusive agenda since Paris and Accra, embracing their respective and different commitments alongside shared principles.

17.   Drawing on the evidence generated through periodic monitoring and the independent evaluation of the Paris Declaration, we will be guided by a focus on sustainable results that meet the priority needs of developing countries, and will make the urgently needed changes to improve the effectiveness of our partnerships for development.

Ownership, results and accountability

18.   Together, we will increase our focus on development results. To this end:

   a)   Developing countries' efforts and plans to strengthen core institutions and policies will be supported through approaches that aim to manage – rather than avoid – risk, including through the development of joint risk management frameworks with providers of development co-operation.

4

b) Where initiated by the developing country, transparent, country-led and country-level results frameworks and platforms will be adopted as a common tool among all concerned actors to assess performance based on a manageable number of output and outcome indicators drawn from the development priorities and goals of the developing country. Providers of development co-operation will minimise their use of additional frameworks, refraining from requesting the introduction of performance indicators that are not consistent with countries' national development strategies.

c) We will partner to implement a global Action Plan to enhance capacity for statistics to monitor progress, evaluate impact, ensure sound, results-focused public sector management, and highlight strategic issues for policy decisions.

d) As we deepen our efforts to ensure that mutual assessment reviews are in place in all developing countries, we encourage the active participation of all development co-operation actors in these processes.

e) Pursuant to the Accra Agenda for Action, we will accelerate our efforts to untie aid. We will, in 2012, review our plans to achieve this. In addition to increasing value for money, untying can present opportunities for local procurement, business development, employment and income generation in developing countries. We will improve the quality, consistency and transparency of reporting on the tying status of aid.

19. The use and strengthening of developing countries' systems remains central to our efforts to build effective institutions. We will build on our respective commitments set out in the Paris Declaration and Accra Agenda for Action to:

a) Use country systems as the default approach for development co-operation in support of activities managed by the public sector, working with and respecting the governance structures of both the provider of development co-operation and the developing country.

b) Assess jointly country systems using mutually agreed diagnostic tools. Based on the results of these assessments, providers of development co-operation will decide on the extent to which they can use country systems. Where the full use of country systems is not possible, the provider of development co-operation will state the reasons for non-use, and will discuss with government what would be required to move towards full use, including any necessary assistance or changes for the strengthening of systems. The use and strengthening of country systems should be placed within the overall context of national capacity development for sustainable outcomes.

20. We must accelerate our efforts to achieve gender equality and the empowerment of women through development programmes grounded in country priorities, recognising that gender equality and women's empowerment are critical to achieving development results. Reducing gender inequality is both an end in its own right and a prerequisite for sustainable and inclusive growth. As we redouble our efforts to implement existing commitments we will:

a) Accelerate and deepen efforts to collect, disseminate, harmonise and make full use of data disaggregated by sex to inform policy decisions and guide investments, ensuring in turn that public expenditures are targeted appropriately to benefit both women and men.

5

b) Integrate targets for gender equality and women's empowerment in accountability mechanisms, grounded in international and regional commitments.

c) Address gender equality and women's empowerment in all aspects of our development efforts, including peacebuilding and statebuilding.

21.   Parliaments and local governments play critical roles in linking citizens with government, and in ensuring broad-based and democratic ownership of countries' development agendas. To facilitate their contribution, we will:

a) Accelerate and deepen the implementation of existing commitments to strengthen the role of parliaments in the oversight of development processes, including by supporting capacity development – backed by adequate resources and clear action plans.

b) Further support local governments to enable them to assume more fully their roles above and beyond service delivery, enhancing participation and accountability at the sub-national levels.

22.   Civil society organisations (CSOs) play a vital role in enabling people to claim their rights, in promoting rights-based approaches, in shaping development policies and partnerships, and in overseeing their implementation. They also provide services in areas that are complementary to those provided by states. Recognising this, we will:

a) Implement fully our respective commitments to enable CSOs to exercise their roles as independent development actors, with a particular focus on an enabling environment, consistent with agreed international rights, that maximises the contributions of CSOs to development.

b) Encourage CSOs to implement practices that strengthen their accountability and their contribution to development effectiveness, guided by the Istanbul Principles and the International Framework for CSO Development Effectiveness.

Transparent and responsible co-operation

23.   We will work to improve the availability and public accessibility of information on development co-operation and other development resources, building on our respective commitments in this area. To this end, we will:

a) Make the full range of information on publicly funded development activities, their financing, terms and conditions, and contribution to development results, publicly available subject to legitimate concerns about commercially sensitive information.

b) Focus, at the country level, on establishing transparent public financial management and aid information management systems, and strengthen the capacities of all relevant stakeholders to make better use of this information in decision-making and to promote accountability.

c) Implement a common, open standard for electronic publication of timely, comprehensive and forward-looking information on resources provided through development co-

6

operation, taking into account the statistical reporting of the OECD-DAC and the complementary efforts of the International Aid Transparency Initiative and others. This standard must meet the information needs of developing countries and non-state actors, consistent with national requirements. We will agree on this standard and publish our respective schedules to implement it by December 2012, with the aim of implementing it fully by December 2015.

24.   We will also work to make development co-operation more predictable in its nature. To this end:

   a)   Those of us who committed, through the Accra Agenda for Action, to improve medium-term predictability will implement fully our commitments in this area, introducing reforms where needed. By 2013, they will provide available, regular, timely rolling three- to five-year indicative forward expenditure and/or implementation plans as agreed in Accra to all developing countries with which they co-operate. Other actors will aim to provide developing countries with timely and relevant information on their intentions with regard to future co-operation over the medium term.

25.   We welcome the diversity of development co-operation actors. Developing countries will lead consultation and co-ordination efforts to manage this diversity at the country level, while providers of development assistance have a responsibility to reduce fragmentation and curb the proliferation of aid channels. We will ensure that our efforts to reduce fragmentation do not lead to a reduction in the volume and quality of resources available to support development. To this end:

   a)   We will, by 2013, make greater use of country-led co-ordination arrangements, including division of labour, as well as programme-based approaches, joint programming and delegated co-operation.

   b)   We will improve the coherence of our policies on multilateral institutions, global funds and programmes. We will make effective use of existing multilateral channels, focusing on those that are performing well. We will work to reduce the proliferation of these channels and will, by the end of 2012, agree on principles and guidelines to guide our joint efforts. As they continue to implement their respective commitments on aid effectiveness, multilateral organisations, global funds and programmes will strengthen their participation in co-ordination and mutual accountability mechanisms at the country, regional and global levels.

   c)   We will accelerate efforts to address the issue of countries that receive insufficient assistance, agreeing – by the end of 2012 – on principles that will guide our actions to address this challenge. These efforts will encompass all development co-operation flows.

   d)   Providers of development co-operation will deepen and accelerate efforts to address the problem of insufficient delegation of authority to their field staff. They will review all aspects of their operations, including delegation of financial authority, staffing, and roles and responsibilities in the design and implementation of development programmes; and they will implement measures that address the remaining bottlenecks.

7

Promoting sustainable development in situations of conflict and fragility

26.   Fragile states are for the large part off-track to meet the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Achieving these goals will depend on our collective ability to understand the unique challenges facing fragile states, overcome these challenges, and promote foundations for lasting development. We welcome the New Deal developed by the International Dialogue on Peacebuilding and Statebuilding, including the g7+ group of fragile and conflict-affected states. Those of us who have endorsed the New Deal will pursue actions to implement it and, in doing so, will use:

a) The Peacebuilding and Statebuilding Goals (PSGs) – which prioritise legitimate politics, people's security, justice, economic foundations and revenues and fair services – as an important foundation to enable progress towards the MDGs to guide our work in fragile and conflict-affected states.

b) FOCUS – a new country-led and country-owned way of engaging in fragile states.

c) TRUST – a set of commitments to enhance transparency; manage risk to use country systems; strengthen national capacities; and improve the timeliness and predictability of aid – to achieve better results.

Partnering to strengthen resilience and reduce vulnerability in the face of adversity

27.   We must ensure that development strategies and programmes prioritise the building of resilience among people and societies at risk from shocks, especially in highly vulnerable settings such as small island developing states. Investing in resilience and risk reduction increases the value and sustainability of our development efforts. To this end:

a) Developing countries will lead in integrating resilience to shocks and measures for disaster management within their own policies and strategies.

b) Responding to the needs articulated by developing countries, we will work together to invest in shock resistant infrastructure and social protection systems for at-risk communities. In addition, we will increase the resources, planning and skills for disaster management at the national and regional levels.

From effective aid to co-operation for effective development

28.   Aid is only part of the solution to development. It is now time to broaden our focus and attention from aid effectiveness to the challenges of effective development. This calls for a framework within which:

  a) Development is driven by strong, sustainable and inclusive growth.

  b) Governments' own revenues play a greater role in financing their development needs. In turn, governments are more accountable to their citizens for the development results they achieve.

  c) Effective state and non-state institutions design and implement their own reforms and hold each other to account.

  d) Developing countries increasingly integrate, both regionally and globally, creating economies of scale that will help them better compete in the global economy.

     To this effect, we will rethink what aid should be spent on and how, in ways that are consistent with agreed international rights, norms and standards, so that aid catalyses development.

29.   Effective institutions and policies are essential for sustainable development. Institutions fulfilling core state functions should, where necessary, be further strengthened, alongside the policies and practices of providers of development co-operation, to facilitate the leveraging of resources by developing countries. Developing countries will lead in efforts to strengthen these institutions, adapting to local context and differing stages of development. To this end, we will:

  a) Support the implementation of institutional and policy changes led by developing countries, resulting in effective resource mobilisation and service delivery, including national and sub-national institutions, regional organisations, parliaments and civil society.

  b) Assess country institutions, systems and capacity development needs, led by developing countries.

  c) Support the development of improved evidence on institutional performance to inform policy formulation, implementation and accountability, led by developing countries.

  d) Deepen our learning on the determinants of success for institutional reform, exchanging knowledge and experience at the regional and global levels.

South-South and triangular co-operation for sustainable development

30.   The inputs to sustainable development extend well beyond financial co-operation to the knowledge and development experience of all actors and countries. South-South and triangular co-operation have the potential to transform developing countries' policies and approaches to service delivery by bringing effective, locally owned solutions that are appropriate to country contexts.

9

31.   We recognise that many countries engaged in South-South co-operation both provide and receive diverse resources and expertise at the same time, and that this should enrich co-operation without affecting a country's eligibility to receive assistance from others. We will strengthen the sharing of knowledge and mutual learning by:

a) Scaling up – where appropriate – the use of triangular approaches to development co-operation.

b) Making fuller use of South-South and triangular co-operation, recognising the success of these approaches to date and the synergies they offer.

c) Encouraging the development of networks for knowledge exchange, peer learning and co-ordination among South-South co-operation actors as a means of facilitating access to important knowledge pools by developing countries.

d) Supporting efforts to strengthen local and national capacities to engage effectively in South-South and triangular co-operation.

Private sector and development

32.   We recognise the central role of the private sector in advancing innovation, creating wealth, income and jobs, mobilising domestic resources and in turn contributing to poverty reduction. To this end, we will:

a) Engage with representative business associations, trade unions and others to improve the legal, regulatory and administrative environment for the development of private investment; and also to ensure a sound policy and regulatory environment for private sector development, increased foreign direct investment, public-private partnerships, the strengthening of value chains in an equitable manner and giving particular consideration to national and regional dimensions, and the scaling up of efforts in support of development goals.

b) Enable the participation of the private sector in the design and implementation of development policies and strategies to foster sustainable growth and poverty reduction.

c) Further develop innovative financial mechanisms to mobilise private finance for shared development goals.

d) Promote "aid for trade" as an engine of sustainable development, focusing on outcomes and impact, to build productive capacities, help address market failures, strengthen access to capital markets and to promote approaches that mitigate risk faced by private sector actors.

e) Invite representatives of the public and private sectors and related organisations to play an active role in exploring how to advance both development and business outcomes so that they are mutually reinforcing.

10

Combating corruption and illicit flows

33.   Corruption is a plague that seriously undermines development globally, diverting resources that could be harnessed to finance development, damaging the quality of governance institutions, and threatening human security. It often fuels crime and contributes to conflict and fragility. We will intensify our joint efforts to fight corruption and illicit flows, consistent with the UN Convention Against Corruption and other agreements to which we are party, such as the OECD Anti-Bribery Convention. To this end, we will:

a) Implement fully our respective commitments to eradicate corruption, enforcing our laws and promoting a culture of zero tolerance for all corrupt practices. This includes efforts to improve fiscal transparency, strengthen independent enforcement mechanisms, and extend protection for whistleblowers.

b) Accelerate our individual efforts to combat illicit financial flows by strengthening anti money laundering measures, addressing tax evasion, and strengthening national and international policies, legal frameworks and institutional arrangements for the tracing, freezing and recovery of illegal assets. This includes ensuring enactment and implementation of laws and practices that facilitate effective international co-operation.

Climate change finance

34.   Global climate change finance is expected to increase substantially in the medium term. Recognising that this resource flow brings with it new opportunities and challenges, we will endeavour to promote coherence, transparency and predictability across our approaches for effective climate finance and broader development co-operation, including to:

a) Continue to support national climate change policy and planning as an integral part of developing countries' overall national development plans, and ensure that – where appropriate – these measures are financed, delivered and monitored through developing countries' systems in a transparent manner.

b) Continue to share lessons learned in development effectiveness with those entities engaged in climate activities and ensure that broader development co-operation is also informed by innovations in climate finance.

The road ahead: Partnering for progress towards and beyond the MDGs

35.   We will hold each other accountable for making progress against the commitments and actions agreed in Busan, alongside those set out in the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness and Accra Agenda for Action. To this end, we will:

  a) At the level of individual developing countries, agree on frameworks based on national needs and priorities for monitoring progress and promoting mutual accountability in our efforts to improve the effectiveness of our co-operation and, in turn, development results. Developing countries will lead in the elaboration of such frameworks which, together with any indicators and targets agreed, will respond to their specific needs and will be grounded in their aid and development policies. The results of these exercises will be made public.

  b) Agree, by June 2012, on a selective and relevant set of indicators and targets through which we will monitor progress on a rolling basis, supporting international and regional accountability for the implementation of our commitments. We will build on the initiatives led by developing countries and learn from existing international efforts to monitor aid effectiveness. We will review these arrangements in the context of the post-MDG framework. We will periodically publish the results of these exercises.

  c) Support initiatives at the national and regional levels led by developing countries that strengthen capacities to monitor progress and evaluate the impact of efforts to improve development effectiveness.

36.   We accept that the strengthening of our co-operation and the adherence to both common goals and differential commitments calls for continued high-level political support, as well as an inclusive space for dialogue, mutual learning and accountability at the global level. Regional organisations can and should play an important role in supporting implementation at the country level, and in linking country priorities with global efforts. The UN Development Cooperation Forum is also invited to play a role in consulting on the implementation of agreements reached in Busan. To this end, we will:

  a) Establish a new, inclusive and representative Global Partnership for Effective Development Co-operation to support and ensure accountability for the implementation of commitments at the political level. This Partnership will offer an open platform that embraces diversity, providing a forum for the exchange of knowledge and the regular review of progress.

  b) Agree, by June 2012, on light working arrangements for this Global Partnership, including its membership and opportunities for regular ministerial-level engagement that complements, and is undertaken in conjunction with, other fora.

  c) Call on the Working Party on Aid Effectiveness (WP-EFF) to convene representatives of all countries and stakeholders endorsing this document with a view to reaching agreement on the working arrangements for the Global Partnership – and the indicators and channels through which global monitoring and accountability will be supported – in preparation for the phasing out of the WP-EFF and its associated structures in June 2012.

  d) Invite the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development and the United Nations Development Programme to support the effective functioning of the Global Partnership, building on their collaboration to date and their respective mandates and areas of comparative advantage.
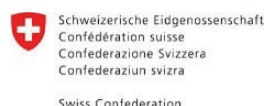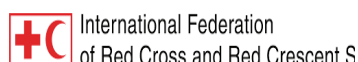
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The Grand Bargain –

A Shared Commitment to Better Serve People in Need
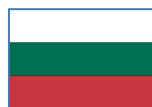
Istanbul, Turkey

23 May 2016

We live in a world where conflicts, natural disasters and disease are driving ever greater numbers of people to seek desperate remedies for their hunger, safety and survival. The world has never been so wealthy and yet on the frontline of humanitarian action, where courageous work is taking place daily, the lack of available resources to save lives is a constantly growing risk. This massive, deepening deficit requires an ambitious, global and collective response.

The Grand Bargain is about harnessing the vast experience and expertise from across the humanitarian ecosystem and bringing it into a realignment which is better prepared for tackling the emergency needs of more than 125 million people, fully recognising the diverse needs defined by their age, gender and abilities.

Its purpose is to ensure that we are able to anticipate and prepare for crises, that we can deliver protection and assistance better to the most vulnerable and that we can restore opportunity and dignity to them. The Grand Bargain recognises that, faced with the reality of our woefully under-resourced humanitarian response, the status quo is no longer an option. We have to do much more far better. We need to find and create efficiency - while also doing more to shrink overall needs and deepen the resource base for funding humanitarian action.

Above all, the Grand Bargain is about the need to work together efficiently, transparently and harmoniously with new and existing partners, including the private sector, individuals and non-traditional sources of funding. This requires us to innovate, collaborate and adapt mind-sets.

We commit to support local and national responders on the frontline, improve the use of cash and increase flexible funding – just three of the ways in which the Grand Bargain will make a difference to the lives of people in need. Setting targets which are global, aggregate and aspirational will keep these changes to our business model on course and allow us to track progress. In the same spirit, an understanding inherent to the Grand Bargain is that benefits are for all partners, not just the big organisations.

By optimising the comparative advantages which exist throughout the humanitarian ecosystem – by playing to our respective strengths and using them collectively as efficiently and effectively as possible - we want to increase the range and diversity of partners willing to contribute. The Grand Bargain is a level playing field where we all meet as equals. It is rooted in the humanitarian principles as well as respect for one another as peers.

We recognise that enhanced trust amongst donors and aid organisations[1] can be achieved by holding ourselves and one another accountable for delivering on the Grand Bargain policy commitments. And we acknowledge that we need to move from the present supply-driven model dominated by aid providers to a demand-driven model more responsive to the people we are assisting.

True to its origins in the UN Secretary-General's High-Level Panel (HLP) Report on Humanitarian Financing, "Too Important to Fail: addressing the humanitarian financing gap", the Grand Bargain's purpose is to get more means into the hands of people in need. By increasing efficiency, we can shift resources away from draining backroom activities to frontline delivery. The HLP estimated the

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[1] The term "organisations" refers to all humanitarian aid providers including the UN, its agencies, funds and programmes, IOM, national and international NGOs, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement.

2

funding gap for humanitarian action to be US$15 billion: we believe that greater efficiency and collaboration will create a virtuous circle, drawing in more resources from a wider range of stakeholders.

The Grand Bargain is not a panacea for all the problems of the humanitarian ecosystem. We do not claim to have all the solutions but we believe that by coming together in a small but broadly representative group of the sector we have negotiated a serious and realistic way forward. This should be seen as the first stage of an ongoing process. We hope that it will be widely discussed and we earnestly encourage interested parties – including current partners in humanitarian action but also those who wish to join our collective endeavour – to endorse it and offer their support. The World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul, where the Grand Bargain will be presented, is one of the opportunities for making a commitment to its principles and their implementation.

1.   Greater transparency

The Grand Bargain commits us to identifying and implementing a shared open-data standard and common digital platform which will enhance transparency and decision-making. This will demonstrate how funding moves from donors down the transaction chain until it reaches the final responders and, where feasible, affected people. The 'do no harm' principle will be safeguarded, both in terms of politicised context and protection concerns. The International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI) is currently the most advanced option for a shared open-data standard. Consideration will be given to concerns expressed by partners regarding its functionality, but we recognise that it is better to develop an existing standard than to start a parallel process. The Financial Tracking Service (FTS) is a well-established, voluntary information platform for recording international humanitarian aid contributions, which we accept needs further improvements.

Aid organisations and donors commit to:

(1) Publish timely, transparent, harmonised and open high-quality data on humanitarian funding within two years of the World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul. We consider IATI to provide a basis for the purpose of a common standard.

(2) Make use of appropriate data analysis, explaining the distinctiveness of activities, organisations, environments and circumstances (for example, protection, conflict-zones).

(3) Improve the digital platform and engage with the open-data standard community to help ensure:

- accountability of donors and responders with open data for retrieval and analysis;
- improvements in decision-making, based upon the best possible information;
- a reduced workload over time as a result of donors accepting common standard data for some reporting purposes; and
- traceability of donors' funding throughout the transaction chain as far as the final responders and, where feasible, affected people.

(4) Support the capacity of all partners to access and publish data.

2.   More support and funding tools for local and national responders

National and local responders comprising governments, communities, Red Cross and Red Crescent National Societies and local civil society are often the first to respond to crises, remaining in the communities they serve before, after and during emergencies. We are committed to making principled humanitarian action as local as possible and as international as necessary recognising that international humanitarian actors play a vital role particularly in situations of armed conflict. We engage with local and national responders in a spirit of partnership and aim to reinforce rather than replace local and national capacities.

Aid organisations and donors commit to:

(1) Increase and support multi-year investment in the institutional capacities of local and national responders, including preparedness, response and coordination capacities, especially in fragile contexts and where communities are vulnerable to armed conflicts, disasters, recurrent outbreaks and the effects of climate change. We should achieve this through collaboration with development partners and incorporate capacity strengthening in partnership agreements.

(2) Understand better and work to remove or reduce barriers that prevent organisations and donors from partnering with local and national responders in order to lessen their administrative burden.

(3) Support and complement national coordination mechanisms where they exist and include local and national responders in international coordination mechanisms as appropriate and in keeping with humanitarian principles.

(4) Achieve by 2020 a global, aggregated target of at least 25 per cent of humanitarian funding to local and national responders as directly as possible to improve outcomes for affected people and reduce transactional costs.

(5) Develop, with the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), and apply a 'localisation' marker to measure direct and indirect funding to local and national responders**.**

(6) Make greater use of funding tools which increase and improve assistance delivered by local and national responders, such as UN-led country-based pooled funds (CBPF), IFRC Disaster Relief Emergency Fund (DREF) and NGO- led and other pooled funds.

5

3.   Increase the use and coordination of cash-based programming

Using cash helps deliver greater choice and empowerment to affected people and strengthens local markets, but remains underutilised. While it is not a panacea, and the context will ultimately define which tool to use, donors and aid organisations should routinely consider cash when evaluating response options and some donors may wish to scale up significantly. Cash cannot meet all needs: investment in public goods, including protection, education and health will still be needed. Delivering cash should, where possible and appropriate, use, link or align with local and national mechanisms such as social protection systems. It can have the greatest impact when delivered as a single multi-sector transfer, rather than broken into components for shelter, household goods etc. and may be complemented by in-kind assistance, specialised interventions, specific technical support and vouchers. It should include new partnerships, be coordinated across aid organisations and be delivered through common mechanisms. Preparedness, planning and mapping measures are essential to ensuring that cash-based programming can be used to best effect.

Aid organisations and donors commit to:

(1) Increase the routine use of cash alongside other tools, including in-kind assistance, service delivery (such as health and nutrition) and vouchers. Employ markers to measure increase and outcomes.

(2) Invest in new delivery models which can be increased in scale while identifying best practice and mitigating risks in each context. Employ markers to track their evolution.

(3) Build an evidence base to assess the costs, benefits, impacts, and risks of cash (including on protection) relative to in-kind assistance, service delivery interventions and vouchers, and combinations thereof.

(4) Collaborate, share information and develop standards and guidelines for cash programming in order to better understand its risks and benefits.

(5) Ensure that coordination, delivery, and monitoring and evaluation mechanisms are put in place for cash transfers.

(6) Aim to increase use of cash programming beyond current low levels, where appropriate. Some organisations and donors may wish to set targets.

4.   Reduce duplication and management costs with periodic functional reviews

Reducing management costs will increase the proportion of funding used for the direct benefit of affected people. This may only be demonstrated over time, since measuring efficiency and effectiveness requires baseline information. Reducing management costs depends upon reducing donors' and aid organisations' individual reporting requirements and oversight mechanisms.

Aid organisations and donors commit to:

(1) Reduce the costs and measure the gained efficiencies of delivering assistance with technology (including green) and innovation. Aid organisations will provide the detailed steps to be taken by the end of 2017.
   Examples where use of technology can be expanded:
   - Mobile technology for needs assessments/post-distribution monitoring;
   - Digital platforms and mobile devices for financial transactions;
   - Communication with affected people via call centres and other feedback mechanisms such as SMS text messaging;
   - Biometrics; and
   - Sustainable energy.

(2) Harmonise partnership agreements and share partner assessment information as well as data about affected people, after data protection safeguards have been met by the end of 2017, in order to save time and avoid duplication in operations.

Aid organisations commit to:

(3) Provide transparent and comparable cost structures by the end of 2017. We acknowledge that operational management of the Grand Bargain signatories - the United Nations, International Organization for Migration (IOM), the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and the NGO sector may require different approaches.

(4) Reduce duplication of management and other costs through maximising efficiencies in procurement and logistics for commonly required goods and services. Shared procurement should leverage the comparative advantage of the aid organisations and promote innovation.
   Suggested areas for initial focus:
   - Transportation/Travel;
   - Vehicles and fleet management;
   - Insurance;
   - Shipment tracking systems;
   - Inter-agency/common procurement pipelines (non-food items, shelter, WASH, food);
   - IT services and equipment;
   - Commercial consultancies; and
   - Common support services.

Donors commit to:

(5) Make joint regular functional monitoring and performance reviews and reduce individual donor assessments, evaluations, verifications, risk management and oversight processes.

7

5.   Improve joint and impartial needs assessments[2]

Significant efforts have been made in the past few years to strengthen the quality and coordination of humanitarian needs assessments used for strategic decision-making. This complements state efforts where appropriate. Yet there remains a lack of shared understanding, expectations and commitment to the collective endeavour. The application of current approaches and tools falls short of meeting the decision-making requirements for various stakeholders for both programming and funding. The proliferation of uncoordinated needs assessments leads to duplication, wasted resources and putting a burden on affected populations.

We require needs assessments that are impartial, unbiased, comprehensive, context-sensitive, timely and up-to-date. Needs assessments must provide a sound evidence base for humanitarian response plans and prioritised appeals with due regard for specific accountabilities of mandated agencies. In order to increase the confidence and the relevance of needs assessments for all humanitarian stakeholders, the needs assessment process must be coordinated, impartial, collaborative and fully transparent with a clear distinction between the analysis of data and the subsequent prioritisation and decision-making. The involvement of specialists supporting data collection and analysis can strengthen the collective process. Independent reviews and evaluations can contribute to learning and improvement of practice.

Aid organisations and donors commit to:

(1) Provide a single, comprehensive, cross-sectoral, methodologically sound and impartial overall assessment of needs for each crisis to inform strategic decisions on how to respond and fund thereby reducing the number of assessments and appeals produced by individual organisations.

(2) Coordinate and streamline data collection to ensure compatibility, quality and comparability and minimising intrusion into the lives of affected people. Conduct the overall assessment in a transparent, collaborative process led by the Humanitarian Coordinator/Resident Coordinator with full involvement of the Humanitarian Country Team and the clusters/sectors and in the case of sudden onset disasters, where possible, by the government. Ensure sector-specific assessments for operational planning are undertaken under the umbrella of a coordinated plan of assessments at inter-cluster/sector level.

(3) Share needs assessment data in a timely manner, with the appropriate mitigation of protection and privacy risks. Jointly decide on assumptions and analytical methods used for projections and estimates.

(4) Dedicate resources and involve independent specialists within the clusters to strengthen data collection and analysis in a fully transparent, collaborative process, which includes a brief summary of the methodological and analytical limitations of the assessment.

(5) Prioritise humanitarian response across sectors based on evidence established by the analysis. As part of the IASC Humanitarian Response Plan process on the ground, it is the

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[2] The below applies to those entities participating in the IASC humanitarian response planning process.

8

responsibility of the empowered Humanitarian Coordinator/Resident Coordinator to ensure the development of the prioritised, evidence-based response plans.

(6) Commission independent reviews and evaluations of the quality of needs assessment findings and their use in prioritisation to strengthen the confidence of all stakeholders in the needs assessment.

(7) Conduct risk and vulnerability analysis with development partners and local authorities, in adherence to humanitarian principles, to ensure the alignment of humanitarian and development programming.

6.   A participation revolution: include people receiving aid in making the decisions which affect their lives

We need to include the people affected by humanitarian crises and their communities in our decisions to be certain that the humanitarian response is relevant, timely, effective and efficient. We need to provide accessible information, ensure that an effective process for participation and feedback is in place and that design and management decisions are responsive to the views of affected communities and people.

Donors and aid organisations should work to ensure that the voices of the most vulnerable groups considering gender, age, ethnicity, language and special needs are heard and acted upon. This will create an environment of greater trust, transparency and accountability. The following commitments will help promote the Core Humanitarian Standard[3] and the IASC Commitments to Accountability to Affected Populations.

Aid organisations and donors commit to:

(1) Improve leadership and governance mechanisms at the level of the humanitarian country team and cluster/sector mechanisms to ensure engagement with and accountability to people and communities affected by crises.

(2) Develop common standards and a coordinated approach for community engagement and participation, with the emphasis on inclusion of the most vulnerable, supported by a common platform for sharing and analysing data to strengthen decision-making, transparency, accountability and limit duplication.

(3) Strengthen local dialogue and harness technologies to support more agile, transparent but appropriately secure feedback.

(4) Build systematic links between feedback and corrective action to adjust programming.

Donors commit to:

(5) Fund flexibly to facilitate programme adaptation in response to community feedback.

(6) Invest time and resources to fund these activities.

Aid organisations commit to:

(7) Ensure that, by the end of 2017, all humanitarian response plans – and strategic monitoring of them - demonstrate analysis and consideration of inputs from affected communities.

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[3] http://www.corehumanitarianstandard.org/

7.   Increase collaborative humanitarian multi-year planning and funding

Multi-year planning and funding lowers administrative costs and catalyses more responsive programming, notably where humanitarian needs are protracted or recurrent and where livelihood needs and local markets can be analysed and monitored. Multi-year planning must be based on shared analysis and understanding needs and risks as they evolve. Collaborative planning and funding mechanisms for longer programme horizons that are incrementally funded can produce better results and minimise administrative costs for both donors and aid organisations. They can identify results which highlight the linkages between humanitarian, development, stabilisation and conflict management initiatives that are fundamental to decreasing humanitarian needs.

Aid organisations and donors commit to:

(1) Increase multi-year, collaborative and flexible planning and multi-year funding instruments and document the impacts on programme efficiency and effectiveness, ensuring that recipients apply the same funding arrangements with their implementing partners.

(2) Support in at least five countries by the end of 2017 multi-year collaborative planning and response plans through multi-year funding and monitor and evaluate the outcomes of these responses.

(3) Strengthen existing coordination efforts to share analysis of needs and risks between the humanitarian and development sectors and to better align humanitarian and development planning tools and interventions while respecting the principles of both.

11

8.   Reduce the earmarking of donor contributions

Flexible funding facilitates swifter response to urgent needs and investment in fragile, potentially volatile situations, emergencies and disaster preparedness, as well enables response to needs in situations of protracted and neglected conflicts. It strengthens decision-making bodies which include key stakeholders such as affected and refugee-hosting states as well as donors. It supports management systems and the use of cost-efficient tools as well as reduces the amount of resources spent on grant-specific administration, notably procurement and reporting.

Flexible funding requires accountability throughout the length of the transaction chain from donor to the field. Reducing earmarking should be considered as a means to achieving humanitarian collective outcomes. Increasing donors' confidence in the quality of aid organisations' own prioritisation processes will encourage donors to increase the flexibility of their contributions.

The Secretary General's recommendation to double the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) to USD$1 billion and to increase the portion of appeal funding to the UN Country-Based Pooled Funds (CBPF) to 15 per cent, including through new and additional sources, is recognised as important for increasing the amount of unearmarked and softly earmarked funding. The possibility of opening the CERF for direct funding to civil society organisations should be explored.

Aid organisations and donors commit to:

(1) Jointly determine, on an annual basis, the most effective and efficient way of reporting on unearmarked and softly earmarked funding and to initiate this reporting by the end of 2017.

(2) Reduce the degree of earmarking of funds contributed by governments and regional groups who currently provide low levels of flexible finance. Aid organisations in turn commit to do the same with their funding when channelling it through partners.

Aid organisations commit to:

(3) Be transparent and regularly share information with donors outlining the criteria for how core and unearmarked funding is allocated (for example, urgent needs, emergency preparedness, forgotten contexts, improved management)

(4) Increase the visibility of unearmarked and softly earmarked funding, thereby recognising the contribution made by donors.

Donors commit to:

(5) Progressively reduce the earmarking of their humanitarian contributions. The aim is to aspire to achieve a global target of 30 per cent of humanitarian contributions that is non-earmarked or softly earmarked[4] by 2020.

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[4] See annex on earmark definition

9.   Harmonise and simplify reporting requirements

Reporting requirements have grown over the years for specific and valid reasons including legal requirements associated with accountability and managing risk, to build trust, raise funds, for diplomatic purposes and to improve quality. A wide range of sectors and organisations report to one another, including institutional donors, UN agencies, IOM, international and national NGOs and the Red Cross Red Crescent Movement. We have a common interest in ensuring that programmatic reporting is substantive and qualitative while also lean enough to allow for the most efficient use of resources to assist people in need

Aid organisations and donors commit to:

(1) Simplify and harmonise reporting requirements by the end of 2018 by reducing its volume, jointly deciding on common terminology, identifying core requirements and developing a common report structure.

(2) Invest in technology and reporting systems to enable better access to information.

(3) Enhance the quality of reporting to better capture results, enable learning and increase the efficiency of reporting.

13

10.   Enhance engagement between humanitarian and development actors[5]

The High-Level Panel on Humanitarian Financing and Core Responsibility Four of the Secretary-General's Report (change people's lives – from delivering aid to ending need) both articulate the importance of shrinking humanitarian needs while also recognising the humanitarian financing gap. This is particularly important in situations of fragility and protracted crises.

A better way of working is not about shifting funding from development to humanitarian programmes or from humanitarian to development actors. Rather, it is about working collaboratively across institutional boundaries on the basis of comparative advantage. This way of working does also not deviate from the primacy of humanitarian principles.

Aid organisations and donors commit to:

(1) Use existing resources and capabilities better to shrink humanitarian needs over the long term with the view of contributing to the outcomes of the Sustainable Development Goals. Significantly increase prevention, mitigation and preparedness for early action to anticipate and secure resources for recovery. This will need to be the focus not only of aid organisations and donors but also of national governments at all levels, civil society, and the private sector.

(2) Invest in durable solutions for refugees, internally displaced people and sustainable support to migrants, returnees and host/receiving communities, as well as for other situations of recurring vulnerabilities.

(3) Increase social protection programmes and strengthen national and local systems and coping mechanisms in order to build resilience in fragile contexts.

(4) Perform joint multi-hazard risk and vulnerability analysis, and multi-year planning where feasible and relevant, with national, regional and local coordination in order to achieve a shared vision for outcomes. Such a shared vision for outcomes will be developed on the basis of shared risk analysis between humanitarian, development, stabilisation and peacebuilding communities.

(5) Galvanise new partnerships that bring additional capabilities and resources to crisis affected states through Multilateral Development Banks within their mandate and foster innovative partnerships with the private sector.

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[5] While being unable to make these commitments in their entirety, the Red Cross Red Crescent Movement commits to enhancing its engagement with development actors

14

The following donors and aid organisations endorse the Grand Bargain:

1. Australia
2. Belgium
3. Bulgaria
4. Canada
5. Czech Republic
6. Denmark
7. European Commission
8. Germany
9. Italy
10. Japan
11. Luxembourg
12. The Netherlands
13. Norway
14. Poland
15. Sweden
16. Switzerland
17. United Kingdom
18. United States of America

1. Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)
2. InterAction
3. International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)
4. International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA)
5. International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC)
6. International Organization for Migration (IOM)
7. Steering Committee for Humanitarian Response (SCHR)
8. United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)
9. United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)
10. United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women)
11. United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)
12. United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)
13. United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA)
14. United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA)
15. World Bank
16. World Food Programme (WFP)

Note: The World Health Organization (WHO) will lead a discussion on the Grand Bargain commitments with its Member States.

15

Annex I. Earmarking modalities

		Terminology	Definition	Remarks
Unearmarked	A	Fully flexible core contribution	Financial contribution to the aid organisation budget, fully flexible (within the boundaries set in mandates, governing body regulations etc.)	
	B	Fully flexible core contribution to the CERF	Financial contribution to CERF budget, fully flexible within the CERF regulations.	
	C	Core contribution	Financial contribution to a significant part of the aid organisation's mandate, e.g. restricted to the humanitarian operations of a double-mandated organisation.	The aid organisation can be instructed to distribute at its discretion – on several strategic objectives/regions/crises so as to avoid the entire contribution being used in one context.
Softly earmarked	D	Core contribution with limitations	Financial contribution, but with exclusions pertaining to a small number of specific countries.	The aid organisation can be instructed to only use funding outside of certain areas or countries.
	E	Directed to a geographical region or a strategic objective	Financial contribution, fully flexible within the boundaries of the strategic objective (e.g. health or education) or region (e.g. Africa).	Should reflect priorities in the Strategic Plan approved by the relevant governing body.
	F	Directed to a Country-Based Pooled Fund	Financial contribution directed to a specific Country-Based Pooled Fund, otherwise fully flexible.	
Earmarked	G	Directed to an aid organiastion's country operations	Financial contribution, directed to a specific country, otherwise fully flexible.	Should reflect priorities set by the relevant governing body with regard to country operations.
	H	Directed to sub-objective/target	Financial contribution, directed to subcategories of strategic objectives, e.g. health/malaria or education /teacher training, but without geographical limitations.	Should reflect priorities in the Strategic Plan approved by the relevant governing body.
	I	Directed to a specific project	Financial contribution directed to a specific project in a specific country.	
Tightly earmarked	J	Directed geographically and thematically, tied financial	Financial contribution, tied to certain conditions in terms of purchase restrictions, directed to a specific country/region *and* to a specific objective. E.g. financial contribution for *purchase of ABC for school feeding in X-land.*	
	K	Directed geographically and thematically, in kind.	In-kind contribution directed to a specific country/region *and* to a specific objective. E.g. *rice for school feeding in X-land.*	
	L	Donor-initiated projects/directed contributions	Financial contribution coupled with the demand for a specific project in a specific country fulfilling donor priorities.	Not reflecting Strategic Plan of the aid organisation i.e. it becomes a service provider. This will also put strain on non-project support costs (overhead costs

Annex II. Grand Bargain 3.0 outcomes and monitoring indicators for donors

Grand Bargain 3.0 outcomes	Indicators (as revised for the 2024 self-reporting cycle)
1.1 Multi-year funding	1.2.1 Volumes and % of multi-year funding provided to all partners
	1.2.1 Volumes of multi-year funding provided to local and national actors, as included as part of the total multi-year funding to all partners
1.2 Flexible funding	1.2.2 Volumes and % of humanitarian funding provided to partners as unearmarked
	1.2.2 Volumes and % of humanitarian funding provided to partners as softly earmarked
	1.2.2 Volumes and % of humanitarian funding provided to partners as tightly earmarked
	1.2.2 Which of the following flexibility provisions do you provide as standard practice to your partners, including local and national actors? • Simplified procedures to adapt programming to changes in the context • Budget flexibility of at least 10% • Pre-financing or simplified release of funds • Simplified procedures for no-cost extensions and carryover • Other
2.1 Humanitarian funding awarded as directly as possible to local and national responders	2.1.1 Volume and % of humanitarian funding provided directly to local and national non state actors

Grand Bargain 3.0 outcomes	Indicators (as revised for the 2024 self-reporting cycle)
	2.1.2 Total volume and % of humanitarian funding provided through one intermediary to local and national non state actors
2.2 Equitable partnerships	2.2.1 Do you have an organisational policy or strategy in place that promotes equitable partnerships?
	2.2.2 Do you cover overheads/indirect costs of your local and national partners?
2.3 Participation of and (co-) leadership by local and national actors in national coordination bodies	2.3.1 How are you supporting and incentivising the participation and leadership of local and national actors, including local WROs/WLOs, in coordination mechanisms?
3.1 Participation of affected people in programme planning and design	3.1.1 Do you incentivise your partners to implement or promote the participation of crisis-affected people in their activities?
3.2 Accountability to affected populations	**No indicator**
4. Cross-cutting: Gender	4.1 Volume and % of humanitarian funding provided directly to local or national women-led and/or women's rights organisations
	4.2 Volume and % of humanitarian funding provided through one intermediaryto local or national women-led and/or women's rights organisations
5. Cross-cutting: Risk sharing	5.1 Have you taken any steps to progress risk sharing in your partnerships, e.g., by adopting internal policies or guidance on this, or by piloting the Risk Sharing Framework in operationalizing partnerships in specic contexts?

Grand Bargain 3.0 outcomes	Indicators (as revised for the 2024 self-reporting cycle)
6. GB caucuses	6.1 Did you endorse and take steps to implement any of the outcome statements of the following Grand Bargain caucuses?
	6.1.1 Cash coordination
	6.1.2 Quality funding
	6.1.3 Role of intermediaries
	6.1.4 Funding for localisation

Source: Author's creation based on GB (no date a).

Annex III.

Donor accountability for implementing the Global Compact on Refugees

I have included my publication *Will it make a difference? Towards a Global Compact on Refugees that actually works* (2018) as an annex to this thesis to triangulate my findings on donor accountability to aid recipients within the GPEDC and GB. While GPEDC and GB address system-wide aid effectiveness issues, the GCR narrows its focus on international assistance to the specific population groups of refugees and their host communities. I wrote *Will It Make a Difference?* on behalf of the International Rescue Committee (IRC) six months before the UN General Assembly endorsed the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR), a global agreement reaffirming international solidarity towards refugees. The GCR does not exclusively address the quality of international refugee assistance but it includes a number of provisions that are highly relevant to my research topic. The paper was meant to suggest *ex-ante* what is required to build robust accountability for international assistance to refugees and their host communities. It argues that a credible accountability system must be multi-stakeholder, inclusive and based on measurable long-term outcomes, targets and indicators, rather than short-term outputs.

In *Will It Make a Difference?* I integrate the lessons learned on donor accountability from both GPEDC and GB processes and suggest a bespoke outcome framework to ensure the future GCR is aligned with the SDG follow-up and review process. Building on my experience negotiating GPEDC indicators with individual donor governments and the OECD-DAC six years earlier, I called for a robust GCR indicator framework around key SDGs for refugee well-being, including gender equality, decent work and education. I considered, and still do, this framework an essential tool to hold GCR stakeholders mutually accountable for their commitments. The paper also called for additional quality funding to support adequate refugee responses.

The final GCR text endorsed by the UN General Assembly only partly responded to the expectations set out in my paper. Although the GCR does not focus on aid effectiveness, it commits donor governments to improve their financial assistance to refugees and host

communities in ways that are similar to GPEDC and GB's founding documents. In particular, paragraph 32 of the GCR underlines the need to secure

> timely, adequate and needs-driven humanitarian assistance, both for the emergency response and protracted situations, including predictable, flexible, unearmarked, and multi-year funding whenever possible.
>
> (GCR, 2018:12).

Later in the same paragraph, it says:

> [e]fforts will be made to ensure that development assistance is effective, in a spirit of partnership and respecting the primacy of country ownership and leadership
>
> (GCR, ibid.).

Accountability to affected populations is not explicitly mentioned in the GCR. Paragraph 34 says:

> [R]esponses are most effective when they actively and meaningfully engage those they are intended to protect and assist.
>
> (GCR, 2018:14).

The same paragraph talks about consulting refugees and host community members to assist in response design and including them 'in key forums and processes, as well as diaspora, where relevant' (ibid.). The only mention of the word 'accountability' in the entire text is unattributed:

> [m]echanisms to receive complaints, and investigate and prevent fraud, abuse and corruption help to ensure *accountability* (italics mine).
>
> (GCR, ibid.).

There are a few references to broader accountability in terms of 'follow-up and review' of the GCR in paragraphs 101-106 (GCR, 2018:41-42). The main mechanism to ensure follow-up is to hold ministerial-level Global Refugee Fora (GRFs) every four years, with high-level officials' meetings taking place every two years in between. Monitoring of progress is documented through an annual report to the UN General Assembly by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, a mid-term review around the high-level officials' meetings and the development of GCR monitoring indicators.

The GCR indicator framework published by UNHCR in July 2019 reflected a limited interpretation of donor accountability to refugees (UNHCR, 2019). Indeed, even though the GCR had been heralded as a multi-stakeholder process, the indicator framework was designed to draw on government data only, to be managed by 'custodian' intergovernmental agencies, such as the OECD and ILO (UNHCR, 2019:6). Civil society and refugee representatives were excluded from data collection and analysis. This disconnect between theory and practice of multi-stakeholder partnerships unveils the hidden power dynamics between providers and receivers of assistance, as in the case of GPEDC and GB.

The GCR indicator framework informed the production of the first GCR indicator report in November 2021 (UNHCR, 2021). By then, three INGOs, including the organisation for which I was working at the time, had resorted to producing a 'shadow GCR report' (DRC, IRC and NRC, 2021) to get a clearer picture of GCR accountability at the country level within the same timeframe. The report assessed progress on the GCR commitments in three host countries: Bangladesh, Colombia and Uganda. While UNHCR's report found 'tangible progress towards the GCR objectives' evidenced by incremental ODA increases in refugee assistance, refugees' enhanced legal access to decent work and other measures, the INGOs' cross-regional analysis concluded that GCR accountability was lacking. Two out of three countries – Bangladesh and Colombia – did not consider the GCR as a model for improved refugee assistance and the domestic refugee policies of the four donors analysed (Denmark, the EU, Germany and the US) was found to be inconsistent with their accountability to host countries.

UNHCR's second GCR indicator report, released in 2023, was based on a revised GCR indicator framework (UNHCR, 2023b). Accountability to refugees was more prominent in this edition, which included stories of refugee struggles and richer data collected through multistakeholder consultations. However, the production of more data has not been used to inform a regular accountability dialogue since the report launch – a trend similar to what has happened within GPEDC and GB over the years. Report findings also portrayed a concerning picture of donor behaviour since donors had spent considerable funding to manage refugee arrivals on their shores (the so-called 'in-donor country refugee costs') instead of sharing the responsibility for supporting refugee self-reliance in the global South. Increases in refugee ODA were therefore potentially misleading.

In addition to promoting accountability for GCR commitments, UNHCR has established a parallel pledging process in the lead up to each Global Refugee Forum (GRF). Like the dozens of Voluntary Initiatives made at GPEDC's First High-Level Meeting in 2014, GCR stakeholders can make pledges in support of refugees and their host communities. There are no formal linkages between GRF pledges and GCR objectives although, in theory, pledges should contribute to achieving at least one GCR objective and ideally match progressive refugee policies by hosting countries. Pledging entities 'are encouraged' to report on progress twice a year by submitting a basic form to an online dashboard (UNHCR, n.d. a).

Having two parallel processes to track progress against GCR objectives and GRF pledges has led to a proliferation of initiatives without clear accountability to refugees, their host communities or host countries. Over 1,750 pledges were recorded around the time of the 2019 GRF and about 1,900 were announced by the second GRF in December 2023 (UNHCR, 2023c). By summer 2024, however, UNHCR had 'archived' over 384 pledges from the first GRF (equivalent to 22% of the total) due to lack of reporting and withdrawn them from the online dashboard. For all intents and purposes, it was like these pledges had *never* been made. Apart from the apparent accountability gap, there has been no opportunity to discuss what went wrong with those archived pledges. As

in the case of GPEDC and GB, without institutional memory, there has been no learning but a high chance the same thing will happen again after each GRF.

Will it make a difference?

Towards a Global Compact on Refugees that actually works

International Rescue Committee | June 2018

Will it make a difference?

Towards a Global Compact on Refugees that actually works

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Table of Contents

Executive Summary

UN Member States are entering the final stages of consultations to agree on a Global Compact on Refugees (GCR). Two years after the 2016 New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants, we fear the international community is walking away from a rare opportunity to take concrete steps to improve the lives of refugees and support the communities hosting them. As consultations reach their final stage in Geneva, the International Rescue Committee (IRC) has three key recommendations on how to improve the text before the UN General Assembly endorses the GCR in New York in late 2018.

The fundamental question is: will the GCR concretely improve the lives of refugees? As the text stands, the answer is: we will never know. The current GCR text (Draft Three) is not heading in the right direction. A key gap is the fact there is no shared commitment to the progress the international community wants to achieve collectively. All we have are the four admirable objectives of the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF)[1], the new approach launched with the New York Declaration. Committing to a multi-stakeholder process to define collective outcomes, targets and indicators, and then holding each other accountable for them, will determine the success of the Global Compact in the long run. It will determine if a refugee girl can go back to school, can learn and develop, and can play an active role in her community.

At this stage, host countries still have no indication that the adoption of the GCR will lead to more adequate support, particularly in terms of planning and funding an effective response to protracted refugee situations. It is no surprise then that many host countries see the GCR as a list of new obligations with no equivalent benefits for their citizens' well-being.

Meanwhile, conflicts around the world continue to displace evermore people, in a context where several governments are stepping back from their responsibility to protect and assist. In order to shift the paradigm of refugee response, the final draft of the GCR outcome document must clearly state that stakeholders will:

1) define together a set of shared outcomes, targets and indicators against which we can measure concrete improvements in the lives of refugees and their hosts, and hold each other to account;
2) align proposed and existing responsibility-sharing mechanisms around these collective outcomes and targets, with the CRRF as the centerpiece of an improved international refugee response; and
3) ensure that additional, more predictable and flexible financing is provided to help achieve collective outcomes.

Without these three fundamental steps, the GCR will miss the opportunity to make a real breakthrough in international refugee response.

A Critical Moment for the World – and for the GCR

Today, 65.6 million people are displaced, having fled from their homes due to conflict or humanitarian crises. About one third of them—22.5 million people—crossed a border during their journey, becoming refugees.[2] These numbers signal a massive global displacement crisis with no end in sight. Behind these numbers is the harsh reality of disrupted lives: families without a home, children without education, and youths without a job, all struggling to survive in a new country that is often already grappling with its own poverty and lack of opportunities. With 84 percent of displaced people living in developing regions[3], hosting refugees may frequently lead to overwhelmed public institutions and services.

How is the GCR addressing these challenges? Some constructive proposals have been made, such as convening regular Global Refugee Forums to catalyse pledges, take stock of the progress made and maintain political momentum; establishing an asylum capacity support group of experts to provide technical support to national authorities; and devising a three-year strategy to enlarge the pool of resettlement countries. However, nowhere in the document do we find agreement on what the Global Compact will mean for refugees, nor specific commitments that can be attributed to individual stakeholders. There are still no agreed targets that can

help translate the inspiring narrative of the New York Declaration into concrete action in support of the people who are at the heart of the GCR itself— refugees and the communities hosting them.

Without a concerted effort to agree what will improve in the daily lives of refugees –in terms of their health, education, income, safety, etc.– we will be left with a Global Compact that proposes more meetings and processes rather than substantive commitments to positive change. However, we still have time to make the GCR work, if we focus on the right priorities.

ABOVE: Silte zone, Ethiopia: Keyriya Yasin (12) writes notes as she attentively watches class instruction. Mulugeta Ayene/IRC

Will It Make a Difference? Towards a Global Compact on Refugees that actually works | 5

Page 322 of 348

Why Collective Outcomes Are Important

Collective outcomes —the results of our joint action that can be observed in the daily lives of people and can be measured by meaningful indicators and targets— are the fundamental premise of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The UN Secretary General's *One Humanity: Shared Responsibility* report for the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit calls for "agreement on collective outcomes that are strategic, clear, quantifiable and measurable."[4]

Nevertheless, the SDGs, while outcome-driven, leave refugees behind, with only a handful of indicators calling for disaggregation by status. At the country level, refugees are usually not included in national development or sector plans. Even in program implementation, the majority of donors continue to measure the impact of resources based on outputs and activities, like the number of work permits and books distributed, rather than outcomes, like increased income and literacy rates.

ABOVE: Majdal Anjar, Lebanon: Children listen to a teacher read a 'Sesame Street' themed story in a class at an International Rescue Committee classroom in an informal tented settlement for Syrian refugees. Jacob Russell/IRC

Defining and Measuring Success in the GCR: What Will It Take?

The international community now has the opportunity to address these shortcomings through the GCR process. The latest GCR draft does mention collective outcomes several times. In particular, it envisages that future Global Refugee Forums will be the main vehicle for, among other tasks, "taking stock, reviewing and measuring progress against the objectives of the global compact and ensuring the achievement of collective outcomes".[5] However, the more concrete language on how to measure this progress has been removed. The latest GCR draft no longer mentions indicators, nor the multi-stakeholder process that had been previously proposed to develop them.[6] The words 'target' or 'benchmark' are not included once in the current GCR draft nor is there an explanation of what GCR outcomes should be for refugees and their host communities.

An ideal scenario would be to already agree on a broad set of outcomes and targets in the final GCR text. Table 1 in the Annex to this paper is an example of how the SDGs can inspire a set of outcomes and targets for refugees in the GCR in key outcome areas, such as health, education and gender equality. Targets may be agreed at regional and national levels, depending on the specific context of a given refugee situation, but derived from globally agreed outcomes. In practice, this approach means looking beyond and measuring more than outputs. For too long we have quantified our support for refugees in terms of schools built or teachers trained. We must shift our focus to and align support against outcomes —has a child actually learned something while in school, and is she able to put what she has learned to good use?[7]

While the details can be agreed at a later stage, the final GCR draft could already mention the language above as a concrete step towards agreeing collective outcomes, targets and indicators.

A meaningful GCR outcome framework will require robust data, monitoring and accountability. One cannot happen without the other. Unless outcomes are defined and agreed collectively, the follow-up phase will have no clear sense of direction. In turn, even the best outcomes will be meaningless if there is no system in place to track progress towards them. The new World Bank-UNHCR joint Data Center for Forced Displacement, established to improve the collection, analysis and dissemination of data around refugees, is a natural institution to drive the monitoring process forward. Moreover, we will need to review both *what kind* of change is happening, through regular monitoring exercises, and *why* it is or is not happening, through periodic evaluations. Comparative analyses

> At a minimum, the GCR should say that UNHCR will soon establish an inclusive follow-up process engaging humanitarian and development actors, host countries, donors, civil society and other key stakeholders to define and agree a set of outcomes, country- or context-specific targets and indicators. These outcomes, targets and indicators should be aligned to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and become part of the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework.

Will it make a difference? Towards a Global Compact on Refugees that actually works | 7

Page 324 of 348

would be useful to learn about progress across regions or funding instruments.

An inclusive, multi-stakeholder process will also be required to ensure both GCR collective outcomes and the accountability system are credible. Unfortunately, this inclusive process is under threat in the latest GCR draft, which leaves civil society and other non-governmental stakeholders out of important discussions on impact measurement.[8]

ABOVE: Margaret Laker with the IRC's health team distributes oral vaccines and vitamins to displaced children near the Ocettoke transit camp in the war-torn northern province of Kitgum. Peter Biro/IRC

Building Blocks for Success

Defining collective outcomes for refugees and host communities is essential to the success of the Global Compact. Nevertheless, it will not be enough unless it is coupled with improved mechanisms to share the responsibility for protecting, hosting and assisting refugees, which is at the core of the GCR.

Drafts of the GCR have made strides towards ensuring that responsibility-sharing is more predictable and equitable, and yet much remains uncertain. Two areas require particular attention: the refugee response architecture proposed by UNHCR and the financing that would make it work. If supported by clearer commitments and concrete actions, they could become the main avenues to make collective outcomes a reality.

Building block 1: aligning refugee response to shared outcomes

Draft Three of the GCR describes the different mechanisms proposed by UNHCR to improve global responsibility-sharing. Several suggestions are promising, including the proposal to convene Global Refugee Forums or the activation of one or more Support Platforms in response to significant refugee situations.

In practice, this architecture will not essentially change the dynamics when a refugee crisis erupts, particularly in terms of planning a timely response that helps achieve agreed outcomes. We are still relying on a fundamentally reactive model that seems to ignore the central role the CRRF should play in coordinating refugee interventions at local, national, regional and global levels. Instead, the current GCR text proposes multiple structures — Global Refugee Forums, Support Platforms, national arrangements and solidarity conferences — with little information on how they are supposed to work together. There is a risk that these mechanisms will overlap and add confusion, rather than reduce it.

Also, the current GCR draft addresses emergency preparedness and contingency planning only as generic priorities of the reception and admission phase of forced displacement,[9] when in fact lessons learned by IRC on the ground tell us they should be seen as core functions of the overall responsibility-sharing architecture. Addressing refugee situations more quickly and sustainably; carrying out speedier joint needs assessments; building capacity --particularly at national and regional levels– would go a long way towards that paradigm shift the GCR is supposed to produce.

Going forward, it will be particularly important to draw on the forthcoming Year One CRRF Progress report in order to operationalise better responsibility-sharing mechanisms.

Building block 2: financing collective outcomes

Refugee responses are chronically underfunded. In 2017, UNHCR reported budget needs of nearly US$8 billion to meet the needs of the populations it serves; yet, the agency received only US$4.5 billion in contributions.[10] These funding shortages exist worldwide, and span both protracted and emergency refugee crises. Even as the international community makes rhetorical commitments to greater support for protracted displacement, Uganda's Solidarity Summit in June 2017 raised just $350 million of the $2 billion required to meet the needs of more than a million refugees residing within the country's borders; almost all of that assistance related to emergency needs.[11] Meanwhile, the joint response plan to provide life-saving support to Rohingya refugees and their local host communities is only 18 percent funded.[12]

Funding an effective and efficient use of resources is a key responsibility-sharing tool, as recognised in the current GCR draft[13]. More importantly, it is an essential prerequisite for supporting host countries in achieving collective outcomes for refugees and their host communities. On funding, too, there have been several improvements as the text has evolved, especially in highlighting the need to explore innovative financing mechanisms to expand the donor base, and in calling for additional development resources to ensure effective long-term support. At the same time, nothing in the

The final GCR text should align proposed and existing responsibility-sharing mechanisms around agreed outcomes and targets, with the CRRF as the centerpiece of an improved international refugee response. Responsibility-sharing mechanisms should also prioritise coordinating early warning, contingency planning and emergency response capacity-building, particularly at national and regional levels.

current draft of the GCR points to concrete new pledges by any specific stakeholder. It is no surprise that many host countries remain skeptical.

A recurring lesson from IRC's operations across regions, country programmes and intervention sectors is that an efficient and effective use of resources relies on three main factors:

a) The funding is additional. The current GCR text only mentions additional development funding[14], without considering the need for new humanitarian financing, as clearly outlined in the UN High Level Panel report on this issue.[15]

b) There is more funding at the regional level. Historically, resourcing refugee responses has followed bilateral channels involving donors and host countries mostly. Funding needs to be channeled at regional level to reflect the impact of displacement across neighbouring countries.

c) The funding is multi-year, flexible and unearmarked. The short-term nature of annual funding ignores the fact that the duration of crises and refugee interventions is becoming increasingly long-term. Donors, including UNHCR, should shift to more flexible, multi-year funding as their standard financing model to help achieve GCR objectives. Similarly, promoting more ad hoc solidarity conferences[16] may inadvertently lead to more funding tied to a specific country or situation, making it challenging to ensure the kind of flexibility that is needed in fluctuating refugee situations. There is also a risk of repackaging existing commitments by announcing already allocated aid as new.

> The final GCR text should clearly state that additional humanitarian and development financing will be required. Multi-year, flexible and unearmarked funding should be agreed as the standard financing mechanism to meet GCR objectives. Solidarity conferences should not result in more earmarking and thereby less flexibility.

Ultimately, the GCR should promote a more effective way of financing refugee responses, in terms of both quantity and quality of the funding provided.

Seizing the Opportunity

Time is running out for the GCR consultation process. As the current text stands, we are moving backwards instead of ensuring the agreement delivers tangible improvements in the lives of refugees and their host communities. Now is the time for the international community to take bold action by agreeing shared outcomes, aligning our interventions around them, and holding each other accountable against our commitments. This is what will allow us to say the GCR has achieved a real breakthrough in international refugee response – and no less than a breakthrough is needed.[17]

ABOVE: Shops and markets in Hammam al-Alil are starting to reopen. The streets are beginning to bustle with children making their way to school. But many families are still struggling to get back on their feet and are not able to afford the basics. The IRC has provided Iqbal's family and more than 850 others here with emergency cash. Aurelie Marrier d'Unienville/IRC.

Annex

Table 1: a proposed GCR outcome framework

Table 1 is an example of how the SDGs can inspire a set of outcomes and targets for refugees in the GCR in select outcome areas. These demonstrative outcome areas have been selected because they are among the most critical to enhancing self-reliance among refugees, as envisaged by the GCR objectives. The table is not meant to be exhaustive; rather, it aims to provide an illustrative example of what a collective agreement might look like.

If we consider education, for example, a proposed GCR outcome would focus on children's attendance and completion of schooling, and improved learning of refugee and host community children. Learning outcomes should be defined as gains in foundational academic skills, such as literacy and numeracy, as well as social-emotional skills. Targets can be linked to children's developmental stage. For example, primary school-aged children would be expected to acquire developmentally appropriate literacy skills, such as fluency, comprehension, writing, print concepts, and ability to understand and differentiate sounds and associate them with letters. The GCR could call for these outcomes to be defined in education sector plans.

The table purposefully omits detailed targets at this stage, as they would need to be:

- Based on baseline data. Targets should seek to improve on the current situation in a given context and country.
- Time-bound. Targets should have "achieve-by" dates. These could align with 2030 Agenda deadline, as well as its periodical review process and Global Refugee Forum stock-taking exercise.
- Sensitive to length of displacement. There should be different benchmarks in each outcome area based on how long refugees have been displaced. Targets should reflect different stages of displacement, such as survival (e.g. first 6 months), recovery (e.g. 6 months to 1 year), thriving (e.g. 2 to 5 years) and regaining control (e.g. more than 5 years).
- Consistent with targets set for host populations. For example, if a country's national plan includes a commitment to halve poverty among its citizens by 2030, it should also set a target to halve poverty among the refugees it hosts by 2030.

Will It Make a Difference? Towards a Global Compact on Refugees that actually works | 12

Page 329 of 348

Sustainable Development Goal	SDG Target (by 2030)	SDG Indicator(s)	Proposed GCR Outcome	Proposed GCR Target (consistent with those set for host populations; time-bound; based on baseline data)	Proposed GCR Indicator(s)
1. NO POVERTY	Eradicate extreme poverty for all people everywhere, measured as people living on less than $1.25 a day	Proportion of population below the international poverty line, by sex, age, employment status and geographical location (urban/rural)	People in displacement contexts generate sufficient income to meet basic needs	Reduction in poverty rates	% of households with income below national poverty lines; % of households receiving livelihoods support within 2 weeks of a crisis
	Reduce at least by half the proportion of men, women, children of all ages living in poverty in all its dimensions according to national definitions	Proportion of population living below the national poverty line, by sex, age; Proportion of men, women, children of all ages living in poverty in all its dimensions according to the national definition			
8. DECENT WORK & ECONOMIC WELLBEING	Achieve full, productive employment and decent work for all women and men, including for young people and persons with disabilities, and equal pay for work of equal value	Average hourly earnings of female and male employees, by occupation, age, persons with disabilities; Unemployment rate, by sex, age, persons with disabilities	Women, men and youth in displacement contexts can access local labor markets and obtain safe and decent work (equal pay for work of equal value)	Increase in available jobs; Increase in employment, including self-employment	% of people with legal right to work, able to realize it; Unemployment rate by sex, age, status, disability; Avg. hourly earnings by job, sex, age, status, disability
	Protect labor rights and promote safe and secure working environments for all workers, including migrant workers, in particular women migrants, and those in precarious employment	Frequency rates of fatal/non-fatal occupational injuries, by sex, migrant status; Level of national compliance with labor rights based on ILO and national legislation, by sex, migrant status			
4. QUALITY EDUCATION	Ensure all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes	Proportion of children and young people: in grades 2/3; at the end of primary; and at the end of lower secondary achieving at least a minimum proficiency level in reading and math, by sex	Girls & boys in displacement contexts enroll in and attend safe, functioning and responsive education services	Increase in enrollment and attendance	% of children between ages 6-18 in conflict settings who participate in 25 hours per week, 32 weeks per year of structured and safe learning
	Eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and children in vulnerable situations	Parity indices (female/male, rural/urban, bottom/top wealth quintile and others such as disability status, indigenous peoples and conflict-affected, as data become available) for all education indicators on this list that can be disaggregated			
	Ensure all youth and a substantial proportion of adults, both men and women, achieve literacy and numeracy	Proportion of population in a given age group achieving at least a fixed level of proficiency in functional literacy and numeracy skills, by sex	Girls & boys in displacement contexts demonstrate literacy, numeracy, SEL skills according to development potential	Improved learning outcomes in literacy, numeracy, and social-emotional (SEL) skills	% of students with developmentally appropriate literacy, numeracy, and social-emotional (SEL) skills

Sustainable Development Goal	SDG Target *(by 2030)*	SDG Indicator(s)	Proposed GCR Outcome	Proposed GCR Target *(consistent with those set for host populations; time-bound; based on baseline data)*	Proposed GCR Indicator(s)
2. END HUNGER	End all forms of malnutrition, including achieving, by 2025, the internationally agreed targets on stunting and wasting in children under 5 years of age	Prevalence of stunting among children under 5 years of age;\n\nPrevalence of malnutrition among children under 5 years of age, by type	Children in displacement contexts have optimal age-appropriate dietary intake	Reduced malnutrition rates	% of children under 5 years of age with moderate and severe acute malnutrition
5. GENDER EQUALITY	Eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation	Proportion of ever-partnered women and girls aged 15 years and older subjected to physical, sexual or psychological violence by a current or former intimate partner in the previous 12 months, by form of violence and by age % of women and girls who report an ability to make decisions about their safety;\n\nProportion of women and girls aged 15 years and older subjected to sexual violence by persons other than an intimate partner in the previous 12 months, by age and place of occurrence	Women and girls in displacement contexts are protected from and treated for the consequences of GBV	Reduced incidence of GBV;\n\nIncrease in availability, speed of services for survivors of GBV	% of women and girls who experience GBV, who receive at least 1 supportive service within 48 hours of reporting their experience;\n\n% of women and girls who report an ability to make decisions about their safety
11. SUSTAINABLE CITIES & COMMUNITIES	Ensure access for all to adequate, safe and affordable housing and basic services and upgrade slums	Proportion of urban population living in slums, informal settlements or inadequate housing	People in displacement contexts exercise free, informed choices about where and how to live	Increased freedom of movement, access to work, school	# of laws, policies, practices developed, changed, or adopted to facilitate people's choices of where and how to live (e.g. freedom of movement)

Will It Make a Difference? Towards a Global Compact on Refugees that actually works | 14

Page 331 of 348

References

1 See *The global compact on refugees*, Draft Three (as at 4 June 2018), para. 7.

2 UNHCR Figures at a Glance. http://www.unhcr.org/figures-at-a-glance.html#

3 UNHCR. Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2016, 21 June 2017. http://www.unhcr.org/globaltrends2016/

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5 *The global compact on refugees*, Draft Three (as at 4 June 2018), para. 102.

6 Draft Three, section IV. Follow-up and review.

7 See illustrative example on education in the Annex for more details.

8 Draft Three, para. 48.

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13 Draft Three, paras. 31-32.

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16 *Ibid*., para. 28.

The International Rescue Committee (IRC) responds to the world's worst humanitarian crises and helps people to survive and rebuild their lives. Founded in 1933 at the request of Albert Einstein, the IRC offers life-saving care and life-changing assistance to refugees forced to flee from war, persecution or natural disaster. At work today in over 40 countries and 29 cities in the United States, we restore safety, dignity and hope to millions who are uprooted and struggling to endure. The IRC leads the way from harm to home.

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Page 333 of 348

Annex V.

Interview request template and Participant Information Sheet

Dear [*name of prospective interviewee*],

I am writing to ask if you would be willing to sit for an interview as part of the research I am doing for my PhD in International Development at the University of Reading, UK.

Having worked both on the GPEDC and its humanitarian equivalent, the Grand Bargain, I have decided to compare and contrast the two initiatives to garner lessons learned for the way forward. Specifically, I am comparing the accountability systems established by the two fora in order to better understand if they have been effective in ensuring donor accountability to aid recipients over time.

My main questions to you are:

a) Which elements have turned out to be most useful in ensuring donor accountability in the GPEDC/Grand Bargain?

b) In retrospect, which missing piece, if any, has turned out to be particularly important and should have been included in the GPEDC/Grand Bargain from the start?

The interview will likely last 45 minutes and I can work around your schedule to agree on a mutually convenient date and time. Also, I may need to get back to you with a few clarification questions in the coming months, once I start finalizing my thesis.

I hope you will agree to this request.

Looking forward to your reply, warm regards,

Farida Bena

Participant Information Sheet

Student's name: Ms. Farida Bena

Supervisor's name: Dr. Jo Davies, Associate Professor of International Development

                         School of Agriculture, Policy and Development

                         University of Reading, UK

The author secured ethical clearance from the University of Reading to conduct semi-structured interviews with key informants.

Participants were selected based on their expert knowledge of either the GPEDC or the GB. Each interviewee was informed about the research scope and how their data would be collected, managed and stored. They were also offered the possibility to retain anonymity and confidentiality. In cases where the author decided to quote a passage from an interview, she contacted the informant again to secure their written permission to quote. All interviewees gave their informed consent prior to the interview. Some interviewees expressed an interest to follow the author's research, in which case the author kept them posted on her thesis development.

Participant Information Sheet

Title of the Research Project

Donor accountability to aid recipients for the effectiveness and efficiency of their international assistance: a comparative analysis of the Global Partnership for Effective Development Co-operation and the Grand Bargain.

Introduction

Thank you for considering participation in this research project. This information sheet is designed to provide you with all the necessary details about the study, so you can make an informed decision about whether to participate.

2

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research is to compare and contrast the accountability of donor governments for the commitments they have made to aid recipients through two multi-stakeholder initiatives: the Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation (GPEDC) and the Grand Bargain (GB). Your participation will help me understand if GPEDC/GB has promoted donor accountability and whether there are any lessons learned that can be garnered to improve donor accountability practices going forward.

What Will Happen During the Interview?

- You will be asked to participate in a key informant interview, which will last approximately 45 minutes.
- The interview will be conducted by Farida Bena, PhD student, School of Agriculture, Policy and Development, University of Reading.
- The interview will take place via video conference (Teams or Zoom).
- During the interview, you will be asked a series of questions related to migrant remittances.

Confidentiality and Anonymity

- All information collected during the interview will be kept confidential.
- To preserve anonymity, your name and organisation will not be included in the final list of interviewees. Instead, only a generic description of your role will be mentioned (for example, Executive Director, International NGO, UK).
- Any recordings or transcripts of the interview will be stored securely and in accordance with EU data protection regulations (GDPR) for up to five years, after which time they will be destroyed.

Risks and Benefits

- There are no known risks associated with participating in this study.

3

- The benefits of participating include contributing to the advancement of knowledge in aid effectiveness literature and helping to inform donor accountability policy and practice.

Voluntary Participation

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time before 30 November 2024 without any consequences.

Informed Consent

By participating in this interview, you are giving your informed consent to the following:
- To be interviewed as described above.
- For the data collected to be used for the purposes of this research project.
- To have your data stored and managed in accordance with GDPR data protection regulations.

Contact Information

If you have any questions or concerns about this study, please do not hesitate to contact:

Farida Bena

School of Agriculture, Policy and Development

University of Reading, UK

Email: f.bena@pgr.reading.ac.uk

Tel.: +33 761 57 79 82

Right to Withdraw

You have the right to withdraw from the study. If you decide to withdraw, please inform the researcher before 30 November 2024, and any data collected from you will be destroyed.

4

Data Protection

Your data will be handled in accordance with the GDPR data protection regulations. For more information on how your data will be managed, please refer to the university's data protection policy.

Thank You.

5

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GLOBAL VIEWS | DEVEX IMPACT | FARIDA BENA ON GPEDC

3 things I have learned from working on the Global Partnership for Effective Development Co-operation

Farida Bena recently left her post working on the Global Partnership for Effective Development Co-operation. In this guest column she shares some of the lessons she learned through her work as the global development community embraces this pivotal year for international development.

By *Farida Bena* // *12 March 2015*

Canadian Minister for International Development and La Francophonie Christian Paradis meets with the Mozambique delegation during a high-level meeting of the Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation held April 15-16, 2014, in Mexico City. Photo by: Daniela Castillejos Chévez / DFAT | MAECD / CC BY-NC-ND

When I first started working on the Global Partnership for

Effective Development Co-operation, or GPEDC, I must admit it felt a bit overwhelming. After all, this was an alliance that aims to make a positive impact on the lives of millions of people — "helping nations, business and organizations work better together to end poverty," as the tagline says.

It can be easy when faced with lofty goals to feel that way and I still do sometimes but I've learned some key lessons through my work on the GPEDC. I know from personal experience just how much collective effort goes into this agenda so I would like to share a few learnings as we embrace this pivotal year for international development.

1. Look deep into what happens at country level.

The GPEDC's original mandate had the country-level implementation of the Busan commitments at its core. Yet, balancing global and local is quite the challenge. Over the years, I have often seen a missing link between the dynamic conversations held at GPEDC events and the little awareness of the Busan Partnership Agreement in many developing countries. What will it take to fill this gap?

I have become convinced the answer lies in developing countries themselves. I look forward to the day when the steering committee mostly meets in recipient countries and focuses on hearing their perspectives on GPEDC's work. I would like to know whether it is making an impact on country-level dialogue dynamics, whether the global effective development cooperation agenda resonates with national development strategies, and how GPEDC can help if this is not the case.

In turn, developing countries could offer precious advice on good and not-so-good development cooperation practices that would feed back into the global agenda, providing much-needed evidence for more effective policies. Convening decision-making

Page 341 of 348

meetings around regional development effectiveness events would also go a long way in taking the dialogue closer to where the action is, connecting the dots across countries and regions.

2. Apply the Busan principles.

It is often said that the future sustainable development goals are the "what" of post-2015 development, while the GPEDC helps answer "how" we are going to achieve them. GPEDC does so by focusing on improving the quality of development partnerships.

In practice, quality may mean different things to different stakeholders, to the point where it is almost impossible to define. In these cases, I have found it crucial to go back to the founding principles of the GPEDC agreed in Busan and use them as a guide.

These principles — ownership of development priorities by developing countries, focus on results, inclusive development partnerships, and transparency and accountability to each other — are cross-cutting and underpin all forms of effective development cooperation. They have been endorsed by 161 countries and 56 organizations. In my view, they remain our best allies to determine the added value of any GPEDC initiative and substantive work.

Take, for example, development cooperation's role in domestic resource mobilization, which is one of GPEDC's thematic priorities. The Busan principles can tell us how a specific development cooperation tool is contributing to better domestic resource mobilization policies in a developing country in terms of:

● Country ownership — Is the government leading this work?

● Focus on results — Are domestic resource mobilization policies making an impact on eradicating poverty and reducing

Page 342 of 348

inequality?

● Inclusive development partnerships — Are all development actors engaged in an open dialogue on domestic resource mobilization? Do they trust each other?

● Transparency and mutual accountability — Are stakeholders interacting in a transparent and accountable fashion? If not, what can development cooperation do to push for behavior change?

This simple analysis can help decide how to move forward without replicating existing efforts made through other forums.

3. Broaden accountability.

One of the distinctive traits of the GPEDC is its global monitoring framework. To date, it continues to be a top priority for the partnership, attracting most of the attention from providers and recipients alike — and rightly so. With its 10 indicators, the monitoring framework is a useful tool in assessing the performance of development cooperation actors, both at a global and at a country level, and it has the potential to become even more important in the post-2015 context.

But GPEDC accountability is broader than monitoring. It also encompasses the other commitments made in Busan and Mexico City, including those with an already expired delivery date — for example, agreeing by 2012 on principles to address the issue of aid orphans.

It would be good to have a comprehensive discussion about these pledges soon. In so doing, the GPEDC could set a positive example of an alliance that walks the talk and helps drive post-2015 accountability efforts, particularly around the proposed sustainable development goal 17, which focuses on the means of implementation and the global partnership for

Page 343 of 348

sustainable development.

I have also learned you need to be creative if you want to promote stronger accountability. Let's ask, for instance, the representatives of GPEDC initiatives like those launched at the first high-level meeting to also champion a related Busan or Mexico City commitment and lead by example. This would be a pragmatic way to promote progress by identifying driving forces among GPEDC stakeholders and by ensuring consistency between shared commitments and individual undertakings.

Similarly, providers from the "global south" could tell us what the Busan principles mean to their development cooperation and how they have been turned into action so far. Or, we could start inviting some of these players to identify areas where they feel they have a comparative advantage and concrete examples of successful development cooperation to share — perhaps highlighting their different approaches to partnerships or the speed of their service delivery.

Same goes for business. Supportive executives could be invited to show how they are helping advance both business and development outcomes, including through innovation. They could pave the way to similar exercises engaging the wider business community in consultation with other development actors.

At the end of the day, the most important thing I have learned from working on the GPEDC is to stay focused and be consistent. You can manage an ambitious agenda if the foundations of your work are solid. You can still make that positive impact on the lives of millions of people if you stay true to your principles, mandate and commitments.

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*The views in this opinion piece do not necessarily reflect
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in a variety of management and technical roles in about
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Southeast Asia.

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Both donor and recipient must be accountable for international aid

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Published by 👤 Farida Tchaitchian Bena at 🕐 November 13, 2023

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Vitalice Meja (or simply Meja, as he likes to be called) is the Executive Director of **Reality of Aid Africa**, a pan-African civil society initiative to contribute to more effective development cooperation and international aid. Founded in 2000, Reality of Aid Africa is part of the global **Reality of Aid Network**. I have collaborated with Meja for many years and find him to be one of the sharpest minds when it comes to analysing the impact of international assistance on receiving countries. Here we talk about how to improve accountability for the aid donor governments give to recipient countries and Civil Society Associations (CSOs), particularly in Africa.

Meja, since we last worked together a few years ago there has been a major push to 'localise' humanitarian and development responses, that is, to move funding and leadership to local actors, who are closest to action on the ground. What is your view on this trend?

Localisation is good as long as the risk involved in localising is shared by both donors and recipients. Donor grants continue to include strict compliance [...] and they are simply too tough for national CSOs to meet. We must find another way to comply with these fiduciary obligations if [...] alisation. An example of what I'm talking about is when CSOs are asked to frontload the money to keep operations runn[...] [...]t to be formally approved. This process can last months. It is not realistic to expect a national CSO to continue to pay its [...] period.

As the representative of a national NGO network, I believe our approach to localisation shouldn't just focus on getting more resources to local actors. It should also be about co-leading the design, monitoring and evaluation of each project. In reality, this never happens. You always need to meet donor specifications in the end.

Please explain.

Transparency and clarity should guide each proposal-drafting process. Donors may share the guidelines they use to evaluate project proposals, but they do not include all the criteria they actually use. This means you never know what other elements donors consider when choosing one proposal over the other. This lack of transparency complicates things.

Another example of what I'm saying is when a donor comes back with the good news that your project proposal has been approved but you now must carry out the same proposed activities with a lower budget. Little or no explanation is given and usually, the contact person in the donor agency is not the ultimate decision-maker on your proposal. So you never really know what happened in the process. There's no accountability there.

What can be done to improve donor accountability then?

A solution would be to have a political discussion on how the project proposal would benefit the donor. What is the return on their investment in development? Emphasising public policy over political considerations has its limitations. We know, for example, that donors seek visibility through the projects they fund in at least 60%-70% of all interventions. At the same time, it is important to distinguish foreign policy interests from development interests.

On a broader level, middle-income country governments can find alternatives to this logic by securing other sources of funding, for instance through public-private partnerships. Low-income countries, on the other hand, have a more serious challenge. Their options are more limited.

Moving from civil society to government recipients, how do you recommend improving accountability in international cooperation?

Real accountability for effective development cooperation happens on two levels. At the global level, it means agreeing good development policies and honouring international commitments. Once you have these two elements in place, you need to monitor donors' behaviour change. If donor governments start indeed to change their behaviour to fulfill their commitments, you will start seeing deep reforms in the international aid system. You will start seeing profound changes in how the system is structured.

At the local level, **accountability is based on the results of your intervention** on the ground. If the intervention is effective, it will make a positive impact on local communities and then gradually at national level. This step requires that recipient governments change their administrative and financial systems to adapt to the new situation.

Vitalice Meja

Some international Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) argue that direct financial support to governments' budgets – or 'budget support' – is the most effective way to provide government-to-government development funding. In your view, how does this approach impact accountability?

Unless budget support is meant to cover social expenditures, such as national health and education systems, it must include a whole set of requirements to ensure the democratic governance of the funds. Citizens need to be able to monitor how these funds are spent – it is an issue of democratic ownership.

A way to improve accountability is to carry out citizen surveys in donor countries on how donor money is spent. Currently, there is very limited awareness in the EU and the US of the implications of international aid on the ground, except when there's a scandal. Donor evaluations may only happen at the end of a project, usually in Year 3. Meanwhile, most recipient governments' systems are not geared towards citizen-led accountability, so we must find another way to channel citizen views into public policy on the receiving end.

How can we address resistance to this kind of accountability by either donor or recipient countries?

Use a different strategy. We must address policy issues at the macro level instead of criticizing specific solutions proposed by an individual government. We must speak in broader terms and then bring in evidence to the government resisting change. Our job as civil society is to gather facts and monitor government behaviour. Ultimately, donor accountability is not enough without recipient government accountability. The fundamental questions we should ask ourselves when we monitor the effectiveness of development cooperation should be: do citizens have a voice in this intervention? Do citizens have access to information?

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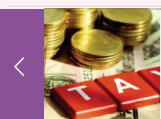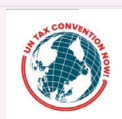
Farida Tchaitchian Bena

Farida T. Bena is an aid and development effectiveness expert, humanitarian and campaigner with 20 years' experience with non-governmental organisations (Oxfam, International Rescue Committee, CSO Partnership for Development Effectiveness) and international organisations (UNICEF, OECD, European Commission). Farida's interests include citizen participation, social accountability and innovation in the global South. After having worked in about twenty countries in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, Farida is now based in Geneva, Switzerland.

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