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Civil society organisations and the debate on aid effectiveness

Which role do CSOs play in the current debate on aid effectiveness and what stances do they take up on recent international initiatives like the Paris Declaration and the Accra Agenda for Action?

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Content

1 Introduction

In the aftermath of the Millennium Declaration of 2000, the United Nations have worked out general and binding goals for international development. Two years later, donors and developing country governments met for the first time at an UN-hosted conference in Monterrey, Mexico, to address key funding issues with regard to development, and they committed to mobilise more financial resources in order to reduce worldwide poverty considerably in the upcoming decade. At the same time, a growing consensus among policy makers gained recognition, that in order to achieve the MDGs until 2015 it would not be sufficient to only increase aid funds, but it would be also essential to substantially improve the effectiveness of development aid.

That is why the OECD's Development Assistance Committee (DAC) started to encourage an international debate about aid effectiveness, which culminated in the "Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness" of 2005. This declaration was signed by over 90 donor- and aid receiving countries as well as 26 multi- and bilateral donor agencies, and it was the first international document that systematically addressed the deficits and quality problems of prevailing development assistance practice. Under the umbrella of 5 guiding principles (ownership, alignment, harmonisation, managing for results and mutual accountability),[1] the agreement also set up concrete timetables, targets and 12 indicators to measure concrete progress towards increased development effectiveness until 2010.

Since the Paris Declaration (PD) and its 2008 amendment, the Accra Agenda for Action (AAA), are currently the predominant paradigms in the international discussion on aid effectiveness, their guiding principles and commitments are of relevance not only for donor- and developing country governments, but also for private foundations, civil society organisations (CSOs) and NGOs, which have become important actors in development cooperation in the last three decades.

This paper wants to elaborate, which role CSOs play in the current debate on aid effectiveness and what positions they take on the Paris Declaration and the Accra Agenda for action and vice versa. The perspective of civil society organisations has been chosen, because CSOs' critique on the Paris Declaration has induced a lively and promising international debate not only on aid effectiveness but also on the future relationship between traditional and upcoming actors in development cooperation. An intensive discourse on aid effectiveness between governments and CSOs has just begun, and it might be contributing to a fundamental change of how development and effective aid will be understood in the future by

[1] Each of these five principles has a predecessor in international policy. While the concept of ownership has been already promoted in the PRSP-concept of the World Bank (Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper), harmonisation was a central point within the "Rome Declaration on Harmonisation" of 2003 and alignment had been discussed during the Monterrey Conference in 2002. The principles of results based management and mutual accountability reflect the MDGs' focus on results and a system of accountability (Meyer/Schulz 2008:4)

all participating actors, thus it is worth to portray this discourse in detail and to give an overview of the opinions that have been formulated so far.

The first paragraph will illustrate what role CSOs played in the past in the aid effectiveness literature and in the recent political debate on the issue. After that I am going to explain why civil society organisations claim to have a say in the debate on aid effectiveness. The following paragraph then summarises CSOs' main points of critique concerning their role within the Paris Declaration and afterwards the Accra Agenda analysed to find out whether it reflects CSOs' previous critique.

2 Historical background: CSOs in the scientific literature and in the political discourse on aid effectiveness

Research on aid- and development effectiveness has a long history ranging back to the 1970s. A large part of the scientific publications on the issue has been focused on the question if and how development aid does have an impact on the economic situation of aid receiving countries (e.g. Mosley 1987; Burnside/Dollar 2000). However, due to the complexity of the issue and various methodological problems, most of these studies have not been successful in establishing empirical evidence for a direct causal link between aid and economic growth (Doucouliagos/Paldam 2009). Civil society actors played almost no role in this early research on aid effectiveness for two reasons. Firstly the used scientific approach is simply not focused on the actors-dimension but on macro-economic variables, and secondly this general research on aid effectiveness has its roots in a time when civil society still played a comparatively small role in the delivery and implementation of official Western development aid.

Then, in response to the failure of former donor practices, a more practitioner-oriented international debate on the effectiveness of development aid gained momentum in the late 1990s. Although the scientific community as well as civil society organisations participated sporadically in it, this new debate on aid effectiveness was largely shaped and induced by policy makers and Western donor agencies. Hence, the main actors involved in the process have been the World Bank, the national development and foreign affairs ministries of donor nations and of course the OECD, whose Development Assistance Committee (respectively the Working Party on Aid Effectiveness (WP-EFF)) has taken the lead in framing the discourse on aid effectiveness.

Since Western governments and multilateral donor agencies have not only been the initiators but also the crucial addressees of the aid effectiveness initiative, the majority of the literature on the issue in the early 2000s reflected a rather state-centred approach towards aid delivery and -reception. This does not mean that various CSOs involved in development cooperation

had not been concerned about increasing their own aid effectiveness for years.[2] But until the mid-2000s they only sporadically engaged and coordinated in the upcoming global dialogue on aid effectiveness.

The international debate on the issue eventually led to the Paris Declaration of 2005, which was widely recognised as an ambitious agreement of donor countries, multilateral donor agencies as well as aid receiving countries to considerably improve the effectiveness of aid until 2010. CSO perspectives were largely absent from this OECD led process and although 14 civil society organisations from the Northern and Southern hemisphere had been present at the High Level Forum II in Paris, their participation was limited to the reading of a statement (Open Forum 2010). The Paris Declaration itself explicitly mentions civil society in only one paragraph. Referring to the ownership principle it states that ”Partner countries commit to: [...] 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” (commitment 14). In addition, one can interpret the request that partner countries should include ”a broad range of development partners” into the formulation- and implementation process of their national development strategies as a reference towards civil society actors (commitment 48).

However, in general it can be said that the role which is attributed to civil society in the Paris Declaration seems to be quite a small one, at least if one considers the little space that is devoted to civil society and non-governmental actors within the text. This rather marginal mentioning of non-state civic actors in the declaration naturally caused protest of civil society representatives and was thereby one of the main reasons for the entry of various CSOs into the global debate on aid effectiveness. Although a huge majority of these CSOs welcomed the PD at least as an innovative step in the right direction (Feidieker/Kadel 2008:9), their precise attitude towards the commitment-catalogue differed considerably. The opinions ranged from general acceptance of the Paris Declaration’s commitments as a new framework to operate within up to a complete rejection of the agreement as a whole, stating that ”it does not and should not apply to CSOs because it is devaluing the unique role of civil society in development cooperation and for increasing aid effectiveness” (Steinle/Correll 2008:12). What followed were various statements, reports and articles on the PD coming from national and international CSO-networks as well as social, civic and humanitarian organisations and movements. The debate on the role of civil society for increased aid effectiveness got more intense in the advent of the High Level Forum III (September 2008), which had been planned by the WP-EFF as a first evaluation meeting to discuss the progress in the implementation of Paris Declaration.

[2]Historically, civil society has been promoting several principles for increased aid effectiveness which are also stipulated in the Paris Declaration. For instance, NGOs in the development field have been among the greatest proponents of country ownership and accountability (Nuscheler 2008:17).

In the preparation of the Accra forum the DAC responded to the critical input it had received from civil society representatives after the PD by initiating the "Advisory Group on Civil Society and Aid Effectiveness" in early 2007. The task of the Advisory Group was to provide information and to make recommendations to the DAC. It was composed of three donor countries, three partner countries as well as three Northern and three Southern CSOs.[3] In the lead-up to the Accra High Level Forum the Advisory Group initiated a global consultation process and sponsored seven regional conferences culminating in an international conference in Gatineau/Ottawa which was attended by more than 150 Northern and Southern CSOs (Open Forum 2010).

But the run-up to the Accra Agenda for Action has also brought about the formation of new CSO-networks and platforms which have been exclusively dealing with aid effectiveness. The two biggest and inter-related global initiatives worked both more or less under the auspices of the OECD. The first one, called "International Civil Society Steering Group for the Accra High Level Forum" (ISG), consisted of a wide and loose alliance of 20 international NGOs- and networks (e.g. Eurodad, CONCORD, Reality of Aid, ANND).[4] After Accra the group continued to operate under the label "Better Aid", a platform that works closely together with the "Reality of Aid" country-level consultations on implementing the AAA. It now consists of more than 700 development organisations from civil society and works primarily on monitoring and influencing the current implementation of the Paris Declaration with the ultimate aim of reforming the international aid architecture (Better Aid 2010).

The second CSO network carries the name "Open Forum for CSO Development Effectiveness" and was founded in 2007 during the exploratory meeting on CSO effectiveness in Paris. This initiative is led by CONCORD in cooperation with its international partners.[5] With regard to Better Aid it understands itself as a distinct but complementary international CSO forum. While the former is more about policy and advocacy work with regard to the PD's development agenda, the Open Forum mainly focuses on the question how CSOs can improve *their own* effectiveness as development actors.

However, what followed after the Accra Agenda in 2008 was a rather silent period in the aid effectiveness-CSO debate if measured by the pure number of very recent publications. After the OECD will have released its next monitoring report on the Paris Declaration in 2011 and

[3] The main initiative for the Advisory Group came out of the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), the Norwegian development ministry as well as the UK's Department for International Development. Interestingly enough, these three OECD countries have shown a particular interest in the inclusion of civil society into the dialogue on aid effectiveness.

[4] The work of the International Steering Group was systematically consulted in the preparation period of the Ghana High Level Forum and many of the CSO members represented in OECDs Advisory group were also members of the Steering Group (cp. ISG 2008a).

[5] The members of the Global Facilitation Group (GFG) which initiated the Open Forum are (among others): ACFID (Australian Council for International Development), BOND (British Overseas NGOs for Development), CARE International, CCIC (Canadian Council for International Cooperation), the IBON Foundation and ITUC (International Trade Union Confederation).

especially in the preparation period of the High Level Forum IV (November 2011) many new publications and statements on the role of CSOs within the aid effectiveness agenda are to be expected.

3 Why should CSOs be part of an international debate on aid effectiveness?

Some might suggest that the almost complete absence of civil society in the Paris Declaration is acceptable, because it is an agreement between donor-governments and –agencies on the one side and aid-receiving governments on the other side, simply not addressing to civil society. Also, the Paris Declaration never was and never claimed to be an all-embracing 'panacea' for development aid in general, and its clearly defined aim is limited to "reform the ways we [the donors and developing countries] deliver and manage aid" (commitment 1).
Naturally, many CSOs disagree with such an interpretation of the Paris Declaration and claim an important role for civil society in the whole debate on aid effectiveness. Their main arguments are the following.

First of all, it has to be taken into account that the role of civil society organisations and especially international NGOs in the development cooperation sector has risen exponentially throughout the last 30 years. Today many INGOs and private foundations act as donors, and the budget of some of them is even bigger than the official ODA-expenses of several DAC member countries.[6] The DAC Secretariat estimates that international CSOs raised up to 20-25 billion USD of their own resources in 2006 for developing countries, as compared to official aid flows of around 104 billion USD (OECD 2009:28). Additionally, CSOs can act as channels or recipients of ODA. For instance, a large proportion of Northern NGOs depend considerably on direct or indirect government funding,[7] whereas many civil society organisations in developing countries receive aid from Northern NGOs. Current international trends contribute to this development. The general tendency towards outsourcing and contracting development tasks leads to an international landscape where NGOs act as clients for Western donors in providing services and fulfilling tasks of development cooperation. Their activities range from providing basic welfare- and health services over improving agricultural development and contributing to peace building up to engaging in higher education and legal reform. Naturally, the donors as paying clients for these NGO-services then also set conditions concerning the way how the contracted work is done and how the results are evaluated. Ultimately, this has an impact on NGOs' organisational structures and working-objectives. While their organisational logic may change towards public sector concepts and tools (e.g. results based management), the objectives of fulfilling contractual goals and using the (public) funds they receive in an efficient way increase considerably in

[6] For instance, the evangelical relief and development NGO 'World Vision' had a revenue of 2,6 billion USD in 2008 and thus surpassed Denmark's ODA budget in the same year (Martens 2008:23).
[7] Here the reasonable question may arise to what extend these organisations still deserve the label 'non-governmental'. Unfortunately, a detailed discussion of this point lies beyond the scope of this paper.

value (Pratt/Myhrman 2009:6). Naturally, for service-providing NGOs which work on a contractual basis, the aid effectiveness debate is as important as it is for big NGOs involved in donating and channelling official development aid. Since donor governments work closely together with these civil society organisations there seems to be no logical reason why they should be excluded from an inter-governmental discussion on aid effectiveness, as this is a relevant topic for their own activities and budgets which are often even directly related to development activities and budgets of the donor governments.

But various representatives of civil society argue that it is not sufficient to include only the bigger international CSOs that act as donors or contractual service-providers in a dialogue on aid effectiveness. They doubt that private foundations and NGOs can speak for civil society in general for three reasons.

Firstly, the majority of the biggest and most influential 'donor-CSOs' in the development sector are Northern-based INGOs with subsidiaries in various countries (Pratt/Myhrman 2009:8).[8] So the question arises, to which extent an exclusive dialogue on aid effectiveness with these big NGOs would be representative for the whole international CSO-sector and especially for civil society in the Southern hemisphere.[9]

The second argument is that many 'NGOs' are dependent on the financial support of Western governments, whereas large private foundations who act as donors depend on multinational enterprises or rich individuals (e.g. Gates Foundation). Therefore they are believed to not act as independent lobbyists for civil society, since their operational logic and working-targets may always reflect the conditions and objectives of their financial supporters to some degree (see above).

The last argument is, that CSOs have various tasks and the term subsumes a broad range of actors. This is why *civil society organisations* should not be mistaken for NGOs because both terms don't necessarily mean the same thing. Although the first priority of a large share of NGOs might be to deliver services and to promote development, civil society cannot only be understood in terms of development assistance. This is why, according to this argumentation, merely including NGOs in the aid effectiveness debate would be inherently incomplete.

But if civil society organisations are not only non-governmental organisations doing development work, what are they then and to what extend is the recent discourse on aid effectiveness relevant for them?

According to the World Bank, the tem CSOs refers to "non-governmental and not-for-profit organisations that have a presence in public life, expressing the interests and values of their members or others, based on ethical, cultural, political, scientific, religious or philanthropic considerations"(World Bank 2010). So a 'CSO' can be basically anything, from hometown

[8] An exception to this may be some environmental organisations that have very decentralised organisational structures (e.g. Greenpeace, Friends of Earth).

[9] This argument is closely tied to the general criticism that the entire debate on aid effectiveness is a donor and Western based discourse which is at risk of not appropriately representing actors from the 'South' (cp. para. 4.5).

church groups and burial societies to social movements, NGOs and labour unions. A large share of CSOs in developing countries consists of community-based or 'self-help' organisations which are serving and representing their members (Pratt/Myhrman 2009:9). Many of them may not even know that they are part of a "global CSO community" (GFG 2009:4), but still their work is not only very relevant to the people they help and represent but also to the development and progress of the communities they operate in.

Since this type of small civil society organisations are crucial actors and partners for a development-process in any society, no Western donor would argue that they can be excluded from effective development cooperation. Therefore the CSO-argument concerning the aid effectiveness debate is, that the Paris Declaration can not only be a limited technical agreement dealing with the donor-recipient relationship, but it has to be a comprehensive framework which also takes account of all kinds of civil society organisations and not only of those who act as donors, recipients or conductors of ODA. But the demand of CSOs goes beyond that, they also ask for a real voice and influence in shaping the discourse on aid effectiveness. The idea behind this is that all CSOs can contribute something to the understanding and conceptualisation of effective development aid due to their closeness to development processes and to the people on the ground, so their consultation would be ultimately in the interest of all participating actors in development cooperation.

The specific insights of CSOs and their particular ways of interpreting aid effectiveness are reflected in their critique on the Paris Declaration. The following paragraph will elaborate this critique in detail.

4 Criticism of civil society organisations on the Paris Declaration

The Paris Declaration has been criticised by CSOs for various reasons. The following paragraph just specifies the points of criticism which are related to the role of civil society organisations within the aid effectiveness agenda. The four paragraphs reflect the four main areas of concern upon which the major civil society networks agree.[10] After illustrating every point of constructive critique, the related concrete demands of CSOs towards an amendment of the Declaration are summarised, so that later it can be evaluated if the Accra Agenda for Action was able to fulfil these demands.

4.1 Narrow definition of aid effectiveness

CSOs do not fully agree with the concept of aid effectiveness as it is elaborated in the Paris Declaration, although for many actors engaged in the discourse, the principles and commitments of the Paris Declaration have already become the self-referential definition of 'aid effectiveness'. But the declaration itself neither explains nor describes the term in detail (Stern 2008:19). However, if one looks at the commitments formulated in the PD one can see

[10] The publications of the following forums and networks have been considered: Better Aid, the International Steering Group, the Advisory Group on Civil Society and Aid Effectiveness as well as the German federation of development NGOs "VENRO".

that it contains a mix of demands for increasing efficiency, effectiveness as well as impact.[11] However, CSOs claim that the relative weight of these three categories is rather imbalanced in the declaration. For instance, the declaration contains one general statement towards impact at the beginning (commitment 2), whereas considerations about increasing the efficiency of aid play a major role. Especially the principles of alignment and harmonisation, which can be interpreted as core areas of the PD since 9 of its 12 indicators are devoted to them, are mostly dealing with efficiency concerns (Steinle/Correll 2008:10). Whether they are about a reduction of parallel implementation units, untying aid or achieving a better division of labour between donors, one of the goals behind this is always to reduce transaction costs, to make a better use of comparative advantages and to use financial resources in the best way possible, which are clearly concerns for improving *efficiency*.

The big CSO platforms and also the Advisory Group on Civil Society and Aid Effectiveness consider this efficiency-focused approach of the Paris Declaration to be not sufficient in order to achieve the MDGs, which are also the general operational framework of the Paris Declaration (cp. commitments 1,2). CSOs state, that the ultimate measures of aid's effectiveness can only be its contribution to a sustainable reduction of poverty and socioeconomic inequalities, and this has to happen in respect of human rights as well as gender equality and environmental sustainability (ISG 2008a:2). Whereas poverty reduction and global environmental issues were at least mentioned in the PD, the other factors are completely absent from the agreement. Therefore CSOs asked for:

Ia. A recognition of the centrality of gender equality, human rights and social justice in the agenda for increasing aid effectiveness and a stronger focus on poverty reduction within future agreements.

Furthermore they argue in favour of:

Ib. The formulation of an absolute priority for aid to go to the people who need it the most.

4.2 State-centred approach and absence of democratic ownership

The concept of ownership as it is understood in the Paris Declaration has always been in the focus of CSOs' critique on the agreement. What is being criticised is the mainly state- and government centred concept of ownership which pervades the whole declaration (Better Aid 2010). The main addressees of the PD on the side of developing countries are clearly their governing elites and bureaucracies. The term "partner countries", which is often used in the PD, thereby is a euphemism for developing country governments. The latter are supposed to identify the main development challenges of their respective nations and to elaborate

[11] According to the DAC's standard criteria-catalogue for evaluating development assistance, *effectiveness* is defined as the extent to which an aid activity attains its objectives. *Efficiency* refers to the input/output relation whereas *impact* describes the real changes that have been achieved on the local social, economic, environmental and other levels due to development assistance (cp. OECD 2010).

"national development strategies" in order to solve these problems. They also have to take the lead in coordinating the actions of all relevant development-actors according to a country's development objectives.

For CSOs, strengthening state-responsibility in the South is a valuable goal as well. But they stress that if national development policies ought to reflect the needs of the citizens, these citizens also have to be crucial actors for formulating and implementing these policies. The logic behind this is that the interests of governing elites are not always identical with the interests of the people. While this may be partly the case in any state, it is especially true for developing countries where national governments often seem to be out of touch or insensitive to the needs of their citizens, since democratic checks and balances as well as institutionalised "bottom-up" mechanisms for civic participation are generally weak or inexistent. To close the gap between community needs and national policies, parliaments and CSOs can be the crucial intermediating actors (Steinle/Correll 2008:9)). Therefore, CSOs believe that it is not sufficient, if the PD vaguely calls for "broad consultative processes" (commitment 14, clause 1) during the elaboration of a nations development strategies or when the governments of developing countries, who ultimately plan and coordinate the aid, are only loosely asked to "encourag[e] the participation of civil society and the private sector" without any further obligation (PD: commitment 14, clause 3). Rather, from a CSO-point of view, developing country governments should be obliged to "incorporate citizens, civil society and parliaments in deciding, planning, implementing and assessing national plans, policies, programmes and budgets" (AWID 2008:3). This is perceived as a fundamental condition for achieving the MDGs also because if a strong civil society including the poorest parts of the population actively contributes to the formulation of the national development strategies, these strategies are more likely to be aligned with social- and health related issues as well as poverty reduction (Bornhorst 2008:14). The CSO-ideal of a broad participation of civil society actors in development policy is called "democratic ownership".

To sum up, CSOs believe that state-ownership cannot stand at the beginning of the development process as implicated in the PD, but it has to be one of the goals of development programmes and projects as well as an outcome of a broad dialogue within every society.

Generally speaking, the civil society demand is to:

IIa. Change the understanding of ownership towards a perspective of 'democratic ownership', in which CSOs, citizens and parliaments are equal partners for increasing development effectiveness and state responsibility.

IIb. Introduce concrete indicators which measure the involvement of civil society in the formulation, implementation and assessment of national development strategies.

4.3 Misunderstanding the role of CSOs

In their critique of the Paris Declaration CSOs not only demand that further agreements towards aid effectiveness would take greater notice of them as crucial actors for development, they also want that their particularity, which distinguishes their way of working from inter-governmental development cooperation, is being recognised and appreciated. For instance, an often cited strength of civil society organisations is their *diversity*, which naturally comes about in a pluralistic society with various interests and groups that search for representation. A declaration which is concerned with the efficiency of aid dispersal and therefore pleads for specialisation and a reduction of parallel-working development actors has to take into account, that a multitude of civil society organisations is not per se a bad thing, even if they do comparable work or provide similar services.

A second particular difference of how CSOs work in developing countries in comparison to other development actors is their addressee. Their main 'partners' are not the governments or elites of their respective countries but the local people themselves. So CSOs get their main input from citizens and their output is directly addressed to citizens as well. Thus, they want donors to realise that they are particular actors in development cooperation which partly apply a different logic and style of working and often operate towards other short-term outcomes than official development agencies. Thus, CSOs ask for the acknowledgement that they can be way more than just "implementing servants" (Post/Roll 2008:3) of donors' aid effectiveness agenda. They therefore demand to:

IIIa. Recognize that civil society organisations are development actors in their own right.

But CSOs can only fulfil their various tasks effectively if the legal frameworks in their operating countries allow them to do so. This includes the freedom of association, the possibility to engage in public discourse (e.g. free press) and legal opportunities to participate in decision making (ISG 2008a:5). So according to CSOs, the aid effectiveness agenda must:

IIIb. Call for the concrete conditions which enable CSOs to play an effective role in development.

4.4 Weak mutual accountability with regard to citizens

Corruption and the intransparent use of development aid are major obstacles on the way to increased aid effectiveness. The Paris Declaration is taking notice of this (e.g. commitment 4, para.v) and the document is dedicated to "enhance mutual accountability and transparency in the use of development resources" (commitment 47). However, CSOs criticise that the PD is mainly referring to the relation between donor country governments and developing country governments when speaking about 'mutual accountability' and increased 'transparency'. Of course mutual government accountability is an important point, because obviously donors want aid-receiving administrations to give account of how they have used the given funds and vice versa partner governments want to count on predictable and transparent information

about future aid flows for being able to plan their prospective budgets. And admittedly the declaration also contains an overall call upon partner countries to strengthen the role of parliaments and other development partners in assessing budgets and implementation progress of the national development strategies (cp. commitment 48, para.1,2).
But although this has been well received by civil society as a "positive start" (Bornhorst 2008:17), they demand that transparency with regard to citizens and parliaments is explicitly added to the mutual accountability clause. Also, the only indicator for 'mutual accountability' (indicator 12) is focusing on the mutual assessment of agreed commitments between donors and partner governments. This does not ensure that commitments about the use of development aid between governments and citizens are appropriately assessed as well. Also, substantially increasing the accountability of governments towards their citizens is not only an issue in developing countries but also in the donor states, where the public wants to be informed as well on how their tax money (development aid) is used. Therefore CSOs ask the participating actors to:

IV. Introduce mechanisms, clauses and indicators for holding governments more accountable to their citizens and ensuring transparency with regard to parliaments and civil society organisations.

4.5 Controversial Indicators and Western Dominance

Several civil society organisations remark that some indicators of progress towards increased aid effectiveness within the PD are not neutral but reflect ideological views of some Western donors to some extent. They claim that particularly the indicators for public financial management (2a) and procurement (2b) reflect a certain neoliberal agenda. For instance, progress in public management is measured by the "Country Policy and Institutional Assessment" of the World Bank, which evaluates fiscal- and trade policy issues. Tariffs, capital flow regulations and state interventions into the market are generally judged as negative.
Additionally, a number of international CSOs state that "some indicators are constructed in ways which make it difficult to assess donor and government performance" (Eurodad 2008:14).[12] During case studies they found out, that donor and recipient governments were able to positively influence their own performances because some indicators are just too easy to cheat upon.[13]So CSOs generally ask to:

Va. Undertake a critical review and reassessment of the indicators for aid effectiveness in a participatory process with all relevant actors including CSOs.

[12] The report named "Turning the Tables" is based on case studies carried out by the African Network on Debt and Development, Oxfam, Ibis and Cordaid.
[13] For instance, donor officials observed that "donors are able to claim that they are undertaking joint research simply by adding other donors' logos to their own reports, with no reduction in transaction costs for the recipient government" (Eurodad 2008:14).

Furthermore, Southern and Northern CSO-networks brought up the more general objection that there seems to be a significant political imbalance within the dialogue on aid effectiveness not only between CSOs and donors in general but also between Northern and Southern development actors. This in turn raises concerns that Western donors may not be appropriately held accountable for their non-adherence to commitments, since the main institution for monitoring and evaluating progress is OECD's DAC which is basically a forum of traditional Western donors (Martens 2008:23).[14] As a solution, CSOs propose to continue the whole debate about aid effectiveness either in existing forums with greater legitimacy like ECOSOC's Development Cooperation Forum or to initiate a new international platform for the discussion and coordination of development aid outside the OECD, which then would allow to include the realities of the current donor landscape and assure an appropriate inclusion of civil society organisations and private donor foundations.[15] To sum up, CSOs propose to:

Vb. Relocate the discourse on aid effectiveness to an international forum with greater representativeness than the DAC and introduce an independent institutional body outside of the OECD to monitor and evaluate progress.

5 The Accra Agenda for Action

3 years after the adoption of the Paris Declaration, a comparable high number of development actors attended the High Level Forum III to adopt an amendment of the PD which would not only help to accelerate progress towards increasing aid effectiveness but also take account of previous shortcomings within the Paris Declaration. In preparation of the Accra Agenda, critical contributions from the International Steering Group and the Advisory Group were systematically consulted. This section will assess to what extend CSOs' critique on the Paris Declaration has been included into the final draft of the accord and if the result is satisfactory from a CSO point of view.

5.1 Adjustments and changes in the Accra Agenda for Action reflecting CSO criticism

When it comes to demand **Ia.**, the Accra Agenda for Action clearly brings about important improvements. Factors like inequalities of income and opportunity, gender parity and the respect for human rights, which were not mentioned in the PD, are introduced as "cornerstones for achieving impact" (para. 3), and it is admitted that development actors'

[14] Actually, none of the 24 DAC member states are developing countries, and new donors like the IBSA-countries (India, Brazil, South Africa), China, Malaysia or some Eastern European nations are not included either. Although all non-DAC countries mentioned above have signed the legally non-binding PD and DAC's WP-EFF also involves 24 developing countries, the new Southern donors provide bilateral aid mostly outside of the existing structures and frameworks (Brown/Morton 2008:1).

[15] A study estimated in 2005 that the share of development aid coming from non-DAC members amounts to about 12% of worldwide ODA. However, this varies largely between states and in some countries like Angola more than 33% of development aid are coming from donors outside the DAC (Deutscher/Fyson 2008:17).

policies should “address these issues in a more systematic and coherent way” (ibid.). However, concrete commitments to use aid primarily for poverty reduction or for the people most in need are absent (demand **Ib.**).

Concerning CSOs’ demand for a shift towards ‘democratic ownership’ in the aid effectiveness discourse, the AAA can be interpreted as a step in the right direction, at least rhetorically. The declarations of intent by developing country governments contain promises that they will engage in dialogue with parliaments, local authorities and civil society organisations when “preparing, implementing and monitoring” (para. 13; 13a) national development policies (demand **IIa.**). In return, donors affirm that they are willing to strengthen the capacities of all development actors, ranging from parliaments and local governments over research institutes and the media up to CSOs and the private sector (para. 13b). It is also remarkable that the term “partner countries”, which was the main euphemism for Southern governments in the PD, has been completely dispelled from its follow-up agreement. Instead, the Accra Agenda is only using the word “partner” when it is referring to all development actors. Aid-receiving states are addressed as “developing country governments”.

So it is quite obvious, that the authors of the AAA have learned their lesson from the past and adjusted the formulations of the agenda to former CSO criticism. Nevertheless this does not automatically mean that the new wording also reflects a new way of thinking and acting by donors and Southern governments towards “democratic ownership". But since the Accra Agenda contains no clear commitments and indicators to measure and monitor progress in the involvement of civil society- and other actors (demand **IIb.**) or to verify the actual capacity-support of CSOs, media and research institutes by donors, there remains at least reasonable doubt that the role of these actors will experience and enormous short-term valorisation in the development process due to the Agenda.

But still, the AAAs biggest merit from a CSO point of view may be, that it accepts “CSOs as independent development actors in their own right” (para 20) and that it assures to “provide an enabling environment that maximises their [CSOs] contributions to development” (para. 20c). Although some may criticise these statements as being too vague and imprecise (ISG 2008b), they are clearly reflecting two of the major CSO demands which had been articulated before the HLF III (demand **IIIa.** and **IIIb.**) and the fact that they were included in the agreement can be definitely interpreted as a considerable success for civil society organisations’ lobbying activities and gives proof of their increased right of co-determination within the aid effectiveness debate.

Concerning the last two demands the real progress of the AAA compared to the PD is rather weak and limited to some slight improvements, mostly mirrored in different formulations and little supplements. Although transparency is now mentioned in the same breath as accountability towards parliaments, citizens and CSOs are still not formally included in the understanding of mutual accountability (demand **IV.**). With regard to the “Western

dominance" argument made by CSOs, it is obvious that a mere amendment like the Accra Agenda has neither the mandate in international law to install and enforce a completely new forum for the aid effectiveness dialogue nor was this within the scope of purposes of the HLF III. However, the AAA takes account of new realities in the donor landscape when it recognises the importance of middle-income countries as new partners for international development aid and when it encourages South-South co-operation (cp. para. 19). Additionally, the contribution of ECOSOC's Development Cooperation Forum (DCF) to the international dialogue on aid issues is welcomed (cp. para 31), which is maybe not the first step in relocating the aid effectiveness debate to another forum (demand **Vb.**) but still shows that a future cooperation between DAC and DCF is possible.

Very disappointing not only form a CSO point of view is, that the AAA does not establish a working plan or even formulates a concrete intent to review the indicators for aid effectiveness which were formulated in the PD (demand **Va.**). Instead, the Accra Agenda leaves this point open for future High Level Forums and simply settles for recognizing that "additional work will be required to improve the methodology and indicators of progress of aid effectiveness" after 2011 (para. 30).

5.2 The Accra Agenda for Action – a disappointing result for CSOs?

Since the Accra Agenda for Action was not supposed to be a new declaration on aid effectiveness but an evaluation of the Paris Declaration's so far achievements, its scope of influence and its potential to eventually improve and adjust the roadmap towards increased aid effectiveness were quite limited right from the start.

Looking at the Accra Agenda from this angle one is able to put the high expectations which accompanied the preparation-period of the agreement into perspective. From a CSO point of view, the picture regarding real improvements in Accra is quite mixed. Some demands were accommodated, others were just marginally considered. However, none of the central points of criticism mentioned above has been completely left out. Generally speaking, it is just fair to say that in the three years since the Paris Declaration a substantial effort has been made to include the views and perceptions of other actors than the official donor- and developing country governments. This indeed is reflected in the Accra Agenda and that definitely is its main achievement. Because the agreement places stronger emphasis on development partners like CSOs, parliaments and middle-income donors, it makes clear that the strictly state-centred understanding of ownership pervading the Paris Declaration can be at least substantially complemented.

However, as long as there are no clear-cut indicators which measure the inclusion of civil society, citizens and parliaments into the development process, the vision of "democratic ownership" remains wishful thinking. The same is true for the recognition of human rights, gender equality and social justice within the aid effectiveness debate. Maybe Accra was not yet the right place and time to formulate concrete commitments towards these issues. But the

agenda surely made a step in the right direction from a CSO perspective, especially with regard to the broad consultative processes that led to its formulation. If the DAC and especially the Working Party on Aid Effectiveness stick to this style of working and CSOs continue to have an increasing say in the whole discourse on aid effectiveness, there is a chance that at the 4th High Level Forum, which will take place in November 2011 in South Korea, clear and measurable commitments towards democratic ownership and other CSO-related demands will be made. So a final judgement on the Accra Agenda depends crucially on the future pathway which the whole aid effectiveness discourse will take. In some years it will be possible to evaluate if the AAA has been a real rung up the ladder for improving aid effectiveness or if it was just another well-intentioned but meaningless statement of intent without tangible consequences.

6 Conclusion - Civil society organisations and the aid effectiveness debate

This paper not only wanted to reveal potential shortcomings of the PD or the AAA with regard to CSOs, the aim was also to show why CSOs can and have to play an important role within any debate on development cooperation in general and aid effectiveness in particular. First of all they are not only important donors themselves but also crucial actors for providing services and for delivering and channelling official development aid. Secondly they pursue particular strategies of working and dispose of specific expertise and insights into development processes which can bring about important suggestions on how effective aid should be spend and to whom. But their most important task is that they serve and represent the interests of the citizens, and neither a national development strategy nor the deployment of development aid can be effective without considering the views and opinions of the people who are supposed to be the main addressees of these strategies and aid flows.Therefore, the critique of CSOs on the Paris Declaration is an important and fruitful contribution to the discourse on aid effectiveness. Of course some points of the critique may go too far. For instance, CSOs' demands to embed precise monetary commitments and a shift in the allocation of development aid within the PD (e.g. minimum 50% for poverty reduction) are not realistic, since concrete financial commitments are discussed in other forums like the big UN donor conferences or the MDG-meetings. Also the critique that many PD-indicators for aid effectiveness are only measuring 'aid efficiency' and not general effectiveness and long-term impacts of development aid has to be put into perspective. Of course the ultimate goal for evaluating development aid should be its contribution to poverty reduction and the achievement of overall goals like the MDGs. But there are major difficulties if one tries to establishing a direct empirical link between aid and long-term development achievements (cp. para. 2), since development is a complex process with many influencing factors. Therefore the 'limited approach' of the PD to only assess if aid is used in the agreed ways and according to agreed strategies and mechanisms seems to be reasonable.

But in general, CSOs have a valuable point with their basic criticism of the way how the Paris Declaration understands 'ownership'. If donors continue to interpret ownership primarily in terms of 'state-ownership' and mainly address their aid talks to governments of developing countries which are often recruited out of small and corrupted elites, they tend to strengthen the same undemocratic structures that are in many cases one major obstacle for real development. Additionally, a state-centred understanding of ownership runs the risk of following a 'top down' approach which has proven to be not very successful in the past. Real economic and social development is always a 'bottom-up' process to some extent, and for this process CSOs as addressees of ownership are indispensable. Since they provide a diversity of perspectives, represent a diversity of needs and often help the poor to organise, their role for development is not only important but unique. So if the recent donor commitments for increasing development aid are being translated mainly into more budget support for development country governments, it is neither sufficient that these financial commitments are accompanied by improvements in donor- recipient government mutual accountability, nor is it sufficient to introduce general statements towards democratic ownership like they can be found in the Accra Agenda for Action. Rather, it is essential to include CSOs as real partners in the whole process of planning, implementing and assessing development aid and this can only be achieved by introducing clear commitments and measurable indicators into a future declaration on aid effectiveness.

On another note there remains the question, whether and to what degree the Paris Declaration's principles should apply to CSOs. This is a different debate which has just begun.[16] The simple conclusion that if non-state actors want to be equal partners in the aid effectiveness debate, they also have to fully adopt the agreed principles and short-term goals of the PD in order to increase their own effectiveness, is premature. It implies that all CSOs follow the same operational logic and have the same working-objectives as inter-state development cooperation, which is clearly not the case. Furthermore, if CSOs are compelled to completely align their work with the national development strategies, there remains little room for diversity in development cooperation, and CSOs as main sources of ideas for adjustments and alternatives to the dominant aid strategies and practices would lose their independence to some degree. On the other hand it is also obvious, that aid-receiving CSOs have to use their funding in a transparent way and that they also have to be held accountable by donors as well as citizens. Today NGOs and CSOs are facing increasing pressure to demonstrate their own accountability, legitimacy and effectiveness (Lingán et al.). Future will show, if the various self-regulation initiatives of CSOs and the working-results of the Open Forum for CSO effectiveness can be added to the Paris Declaration's follow up agreements or if a new forum for CSO effectiveness has to be introduced parallel to the DAC's platform.

[16] The Open Forum for CSO effectiveness is currently working on that question, but so far no broad consensus on how the PD's commitments should apply to CSOs has been achieved.

Finally it remains to say, that no matter how accurate and inclusive future agreements on aid effectiveness might be, they cannot make up for a comprehensive approach towards development. Aid is just one contribution to economic and social development and it operates within multifaceted domestic contexts and a complex international environment. Thus, only if other factors like trade relations, financial dependencies, good governance as well as the domestic and international governance system are included in the political decisions on development aid, real improvements towards improving aid's effectiveness and impact will be achieved on the long run.

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