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Making Aid Effective: An Anti-Corruption Agenda

Aid flows provide developing countries with an important source of financing that can be used to help build schools, staff hospitals, construct roads and provide clean water. In 2010, aid totalled more than US\$ 128 billion, one-fifth of which went to Africa.¹ Yet aid, also known as official development assistance (ODA), has not always been effective at achieving results with the inputs provided. Corruption and mismanagement result from low levels of transparency, accountability and integrity by donor and partner countries.

In 2005, countries assembled in France and established the Paris Declaration, promising to make aid more effective within five years. Although developed and developing nations pledged to reform and change aid by 2011, official monitoring shows that only one of the original 13 targets has been met.²

Achieving aid effectiveness must remain as an active goal. Recent multiple crises — financial, economic, food and climatic — add to the imperative that aid translates into development results. All actors, from governments to civil society, share responsibility for making aid more effective and preventing one of its main breakdowns: corruption.

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Leaders of the Pack

The largest bilateral donors are the United States, United Kingdom, France, Germany and Japan.⁵ All are members of the Development Assistance Committee (DAC). As donors have increased the number of countries they fund, half of all DAC donors now give aid to more than 50 countries. However, the volume of flows has not kept pace, leading to aid that is fragmented and uneven.⁶

Following the Rules of the Game

The aid effectiveness principles adopted in Paris, Accra and Busan must extend to new, non-DAC donors if the bar is to be kept high on transparency, accountability, participation and integrity in development.

1. Aid: the current state of play

Aid is one of several factors that play a role in reducing poverty. It provides countries with financing that is needed for their development, in addition to monies secured domestically (e.g. tax revenues and natural resource wealth) and internationally (e.g. foreign direct investment). Traditionally, aid has been provided as ODA by multilateral donors and member countries of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

In recent years there has been a proliferation of new and non-traditional donors that are providing alternative sources of aid outside the official OECD structure tasked to coordinate donor efforts: the Development Assistance Committee (DAC). The new group of donors includes philanthropic foundations, non-governmental organisations and countries. Non-traditional donor countries are estimated to be more than 30.³ These countries — including Brazil, China and India — are thought to give US\$ 11 billion a year although the figure is likely to be much higher.⁴ The growing role of non-traditional donors raises questions about how the aid system will effectively incorporate them while respecting key principles such as democratic ownership, transparency and accountability.

The changing nature of aid and the aid system has occurred against a back drop of different global and national crises. These have put pressures on the system and caused many DAC donors to freeze or slash aid budgets. For example, the pledge by leading DAC donors to increase aid to Sub-Saharan Africa by 2010 has fallen short, with only 61 percent of the commitment being met.⁷

In many DAC countries, each dollar or euro given in aid is now under greater scrutiny. This emphasis on how much aid flows are provided where and for what results underscores the need to prevent and address corruption in aid. With corruption perceived as massive and endemic in several of the top ten DAC partner countries, it is imperative to ensure aid's anti-corruption approach.⁸

The Fourth High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness — to be held in Busan, South Korea — provides a rare moment to recognise the successes and limitations of current anti-corruption approaches in aid and address pending gaps. The meeting in Busan must speak to the challenges corruption and mismanagement pose to all stakeholders: donors (new and old), partner governments and other development actors (parliamentarians, private sector and civil society). The outcomes from Busan must include concrete mechanisms that target these problems by promoting the transparency, accountability and integrity of aid.

2. The connection between aid and corruption

In both donor and partner countries there is an increased awareness that aid is in danger of not fully reaching the poor unless corruption is countered. Following the Paris Declaration and a subsequent agreement in Accra (2008), the discussion of an anti-corruption agenda in aid has moved to a more open, serious and constructive search for solutions. This is welcomed and must remain the foundation of any new consensus on aid effectiveness.

The potential for corruption to compromise the results of development programmes is well known. Corruption directly diverts a percentage of aid away from intended purposes and beneficiaries. Indirectly, it promotes inappropriate uses of aid and undercuts development. Demand-side corruption by public administrations entrusted with aid resources is particularly damaging. Empirical

research points to a direct link among the quality of governance, lower levels of petty bribery and positive development outcomes in partner countries.⁹

Corruption can equally occur in the delivery of aid and in the management of resources. When disbursement pressures continue to dominate donor and partner government spending, they enter into direct conflict with efforts to identify and address corruption risks. This includes vetting suppliers and debarbing corrupt ones. Leading development banks like the World Bank now cross-debar firms although bilateral donors and multilateral organisations, such as the European Commission and United Nations system, still do not.¹⁰

Other corruption challenges arise when aid is outside the eye of public scrutiny. Despite promises made in Paris and Accra, aid from DAC donors continues to be tied and to circumvent national procurement and public finance systems in partner countries, even when these have proven more reliable and accountable.





3. How to prevent corruption in aid

Political will and good governance

The effectiveness of anti-corruption strategies in development cooperation is primarily determined by the domestic political will and the ability of donors to support genuine national efforts. For example, an analysis of anti-corruption progress by accession and pre-accession countries to the European Union shows that despite the European Commission's support to countries in the design of related laws, the implementation of these measures has been insufficient. The lack of political will on the part of governments and other state actors is one of the key factors preventing laws from being put into practice.¹⁵

Donors need to assess the extent of political will and then design anti-corruption strategies accordingly with governments, parliamentarians, businesses and civil society in partner countries.¹⁶ With the assessment done, activities should focus on measures to strengthen a country's integrity system, including the institutions, structures and actors that help to effectively address corruption related issues. The UN Convention against Corruption (UNCAC) and related international agreements should form the core basis for this work to ensure the countries are also fulfilling their global commitments as pledged.

TI's position:

-  All countries must ratify, implement and monitor the UN Convention against Corruption as the principle tool for fighting corruption in developed and developing countries.
-  Donor and partner countries must ensure comprehensive and coherent support to all institutions that contribute to corruption-free poverty reduction.
-  Donor and partner countries should use aid comprehensively to strengthen governance institutions based on national assessments, identified corruption risks and development strategies.
-  Donor and partner countries should support the formulation of country-led anti-corruption strategies that involves beneficiaries, elected representatives and civil society.

The Benefits of Untied Aid and Country Systems

The tying of aid refers to the practice of linking ODA flows to developing countries with the requirement to purchase goods or services from donor countries.¹¹

Between 2005 and 2009, more than 20 countries saw the proportion of tied aid jump by more than 20 percentage points.¹² This occurred during the same period when DAC donors were supposedly moving toward having no tied aid, as pledged at Paris and Accra.

By all accounts, tied aid is a key source of ineffective and costly aid. Estimates for the mark-up from tying aid vary between 15 and 25 per cent and more than 40 per cent for food aid.¹³

Official findings also show that only 44 per cent of donors use national procurement and public financial management systems, falling short of the Paris Declaration goal.¹⁴ Failing to use country systems places aid in an accountability vacuum and outside national processes — and the oversight of everyday citizens.

Accountability in Development: the Role of Communities

Transparency International has promoted the use of different social accountability tools, including open budgeting and development pacts.

Open budgeting activities have been used in countries such as Bangladesh to get local government bodies to share and revise draft budgets with communities.

Development Pacts are public agreements between those in public office and constituencies or groups to whom they are accountable for the delivery of public goods and services.¹⁷

The establishment of nearly 80 pacts have been used in Bangladesh, India, Uganda and Zambia to get water tanks built and drains fixed, improve the distribution of fertiliser and seeds to farmers, and improve teacher and health workers attendance in schools and clinics.

With the introduction of these development pacts, public office holders have begun to more actively seek out community oversight and participation. The pacts have created a lasting change in community engagement.

Accountability and empowerment

Strengthening the accountability of aid to intended beneficiaries is part of good governance and one measure of the political will to limit abuses. A precondition for accountability to function is the empowerment of disadvantaged populations in decisions on the use of aid resources.

Accountability to beneficiaries is facilitated by their genuine rather than pro forma participation in decision-making forums, budgeting and auditing exercises, and implementation processes at the policy level. Donor and partner governments need to create central roles for beneficiaries in these activities as part of linking effective anti-corruption measures to development projects and programmes (see side bar). Mechanisms need to be promoted nationally and locally that engage beneficiaries in the formulation, implementation and monitoring of anti-corruption strategies. The principle of citizen engagement in anti-corruption is outlined clearly in the UNCAC and provides a road map for actions.

Corruption and accountability indicators must be used to track the anti-corruption strategy's implementation. These have the benefit of ensuring broad-based ownership and social accountability. While such indicators exist as part of the UNCAC and other anti-corruption agreements, they are currently not aligned with the aid frameworks used by donor and partner countries.

TI's position:

-  Donors should support national level institutions in strengthening the local government's accountability to citizens by increasing the former's financial resources, supporting participatory budgeting and establishing social auditing and redress mechanisms.
-  Citizen complaint, feed-back and follow-up mechanisms should be proactively piloted and applied to the relevant public entity to advance accountability and assist administrative effectiveness.
-  Donor and partner countries must secure meaningful civil society participation in the monitoring process including through an enabling operating environment, particularly at the local level.

Civil society space

Civil society — in its public interest and 'watchdog' roles — is a critical stakeholder in the anti-corruption and development equation. As noted, their engagement strengthens governance, promotes accountability channels and helps to address embedded corruption.

Civil society organisations are "development actors in their own right", as recognised by the Accra agreement.¹⁸ Through the Istanbul Principles, CSOs have outlined their own accountability and transparency frameworks as part of ensuring aid and development effectiveness.¹⁹ A key prerequisite for realising these commitments is an enabling environment that provides civil society the space and opportunities to engage in policy decisions and to work with parliamentarians and other actors.²⁰

Yet the space for engagement has been shrinking as the work of civil society is increasingly stigmatised and criminalised.²¹ Nearly 90 countries have adopted restrictions in 2009 and 2010 that limit civil society activity.²² For example,

Zambia's president signed into law in August 2009 the creation of a registration board for non-governmental organisations (NGOs) with the power to approve where NGOs can operate. The law treats NGOs as subsidiaries of the government.²³ Laws are only the beginning of intimidation. Documented cases from Brazil to Zimbabwe show how civil society activists have been arrested, unlawfully detained, and even killed.²⁴

Social media and other technologies are increasingly being used to create a virtual space for civil society action. These mediums have opened up new possibilities for engagement, which often happen outside traditional CSOs. Findings from across 35 developing countries show that informal citizen participation is surpassing membership in formal CSOs.²⁵ The broad-based social movements of the Arab world are a sharp reminder of how technology can serve as the medium to get individual citizens involved in innovative, informal ways that help to translate virtual activism into material changes.

TI's position:

- 🌐 All governments must guarantee that civil society has the space and operating environment required to take on its stakeholder role in anti-corruption and development work.
- 🌐 Donor and partner countries should work with civil society and citizens in identifying key corruption challenges that allow them to address the drivers, incentive structures and wider governance context.

Aid transparency

The agreements in Accra have made open, transparent, timely and predictable aid a common cause for donor and partner countries.²⁶ In donor countries, more transparent aid allows taxpayers to understand how poverty reduction programmes work. In partner countries, more accessible and easily understandable aid information assists citizens to engage in how the money is spent and to monitor the process. Aid transparency also helps to cross-check whether climate change financing is additional and to track levels of donor support going toward meeting the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

With information on aid, it becomes easier to have the oversight which is essential for preventing and flagging corruption and mismanagement. As has been shown in practice, corruption thrives in environments where information is too segmented or aggregated, is not comparable and prevents conclusions about how financial resources are used.

Achieving aid transparency in practice requires that a common, unified reporting standard is adopted. The International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI), launched in Accra in 2008, has produced such a standard. Nearly one-third of all ODA flows are reported with it (see side bar).²⁷ Unfortunately, certain countries are pushing back on using the standard, even as other development stakeholders, including CSOs such as TI, have adopted it for their reporting.

TI's position:

- 🌐 Governments must endorse and implement IATI as the common standard for donors to report transparently on their aid flows.

Giving Civil Society Space to Engage in Anti-Corruption Efforts

To effectively tackle development and anti-corruption issues, there are different channels for opening up participation and promoting broad-based ownership. This has been done through the use of community oversight mechanisms, engagement in programme design and cooperative agreements with local governments and parliamentarians.

Transparency International chapters have pursued such activities to monitor donor aid agreements (Georgia), safeguard conditional cash transfers (Bolivia, Guatemala and Peru), make local governments more responsive (Bangladesh and Liberia) and improve the delivery of water and sanitation services (Ghana and Kenya).

In many of these cases, TI chapters have simply served to facilitate participation, leaving communities and individuals to drive and set the scope of the work. The aim has been to ensure the community's ownership of the process as a means for making development truly accountable.

Making aid effective: an anti-corruption agenda

Aid Transparency: A New Agenda

The International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI) is a multi-donor initiative that has worked to adopt a uniform and agreed standard for reporting aid flows. More than twenty donors have signed on and the initiative is endorsed by 23 partner countries.

More than three years after the announcement of IATI, however, only eight of the donors have opened their books using the standard. There is even talk by non-signatory donors whether IATI is the only standard to use for reporting.

The growing split threatens to unravel the very objectives of aid transparency and aid effectiveness that will be debated in Busan and beyond.

The Case for Transparent Procurement

Increased transparency, such as through the use of TI's Integrity Pacts (IP) and various other anti-corruption policies and practices, encourages open, free and fair bidding and sees that intended beneficiaries receive the best value for the money.

- 🌐 Partner countries should ensure grants and loans on the revenue and expenditure side of the budget are published to guarantee that aid remains primarily accountable to its citizens.

Budget transparency

Aid transparency must be paired with concurrent actions that create accountability channels and ensure transparency by the governments receiving aid. Budget transparency serves to bring these elements together.

Budget transparency, as with aid transparency, provides a key condition for having accountability: it offers information about where, for what and how funds for development are spent. To effectively use this information, citizens and other stakeholders must have entry points to participate at the policy level. There must be indicators that are agreed and monitored to prevent corruption as development resources are converted to development outcomes.

Where transparency and accountability coexist, budget transparency forms a critical element for opening fiduciary information to public scrutiny. It builds the integrity of a country's public financial management and procurement systems. Public contracting in development aid, for example, is considered to be a corruption-prone area, adding 10 to 25 per cent to procurement costs.²⁸

The global move towards opening government budgets and finances, including for aid, can help to facilitate the transparency and accountability of government budgets. The Open Government Partnership, endorsed by 46 nations, offers the chance to use individual country action plans as the implementation vehicle for ensuring government transparency and accountability to all stakeholders.²⁹

TI's position:

- 🌐 Donor and partner countries should ensure full budget transparency, by revenue source, sector and at all expenditure levels. Information should be prepared in an easily accessible format for citizens.
- 🌐 Donor and partner countries must establish indicators to track both outcomes and the integrity of processes involved in converting developmental resources (including aid) into developmental outcomes.
- 🌐 Transparency of the public financial management system should be agreed as a basic requirement for budgetary aid.
- 🌐 Donor assistance should support participatory processes for budget formulation and tracking to strengthen the accountability of public financial management.
- 🌐 Partner countries can pro-actively create platforms that allow elected representatives to review the budget with their constituency and inform them about their entitlements.

Aid modalities

The partnership model selected will be a key determinant for how aid effectiveness pledges made in Paris, Accra and Busan are advanced — or rolled back. For example, current findings show that only 40 per cent of aid is flowing

through modalities that are linked to national budgets, undermining the Paris Declaration goal of having aid aligned with national priorities.³⁰

When well-designed, budget support is a key mechanism for promoting aid predictability, institutional integrity, greater domestic accountability and ownership.³¹ However, partnerships that are based on general budget and sector support also bring clear risks when increased budgetary discretion is not accompanied by public accountability mechanisms for effective oversight.

To fulfil the principle of mutual accountability, as outlined in the Paris Declaration, there must be a transparent and open process to decide what aid modalities work best. The same principle of mutual accountability would trigger a reconfiguration of modalities or a phased disengagement when there is *serious evidence* of corruption as well as when there is *no evidence* of serious anti-corruption efforts.

TI's position:

- 🌐 Donors must assess corruption and governance risks prior to deciding to support a particular investment project or sector programme.
- 🌐 Where one partner perceives a high risk of corruption, it needs to address that risk by designing the aid project or programme and structuring financial transactions to mitigate the problem and enable cooperation.
- 🌐 Where minimum accountability standards in public financial management are not met, other options can be explored. These may include channelling funds transparently and directly to sectors meeting minimum standards, or to lower levels of government.
- 🌐 In situations of high corruption, where the only options to deliver aid lie outside the government system and support must be directly channelled to communities, donors must engage simultaneously with the partner government to address governance weaknesses in the relevant sectors.
- 🌐 All actors must reach an agreement on a monitoring and verification framework which assesses aid effectiveness through mechanisms of transparency, participation, evaluation and the use of complaints and response mechanisms.

4. Conclusion

More than five years after countries committed to the Paris Declaration, aid effectiveness is still an unfulfilled goal. Moreover, findings show that emerging donors often do not apply the Paris Declaration principles in their aid work.

As debates continue about how to recast the global aid system, it is critical that transparency, accountability and integrity are operationalised as part of any new aid agreement and structures. This process must rely on the informed participation of all stakeholders: state and local governments, parliaments, the private sector, CSOs and citizens. At the same time, donor and partner governments must proactively engage with the range of governance institutions that determine national integrity — the legislature, executive, judiciary, auditing bodies, media, etc. — and directly support them in fulfilling their roles for a corruption-free society. This is a call that all development actors must heed. 🌐

Using Aid to Address - not Run - from Corruption

Recognising the dynamic interaction between aid and corruption does not mean that flows should be stopped to corrupt countries.

Countries that are perceived as very corrupt cannot be written off — it is particularly they who need help to emerge from the corruption-poverty spiral.

If a country is believed to be corrupt, this should serve as a signal to donors that investment is needed in systemic approaches to fight corruption. This includes assessing the risks and finding the right mix of aid modalities that prevent corruption while building institutions.

This Policy Position was produced in advance of the Fourth High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness in 2011. The author is Craig Fagan of the TI Secretariat. It serves to update and compliment the TI paper on poverty, aid and corruption (2007) and resolutions by the TI movement (2011).

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