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Preparing for the 2012 Development Cooperation Forum

Report of the Mali High-level Symposium

“Gearing development cooperation towards the MDGs: Effectiveness and results”

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I. Introduction

1. The 2005 World Summit mandated the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) to convene a biennial high-level Development Cooperation Forum (DCF) to review trends and progress in international development cooperation, including strategies, policies and financing; promote greater coherence among the development activities of different development partners and strengthen the normative and operational link in the work of the United Nations.¹
2. The biennial forum aims to promote and improve international development cooperation to attain the Internationally Agreed Development Goals (IADGs), including the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and to enhance dialogue among all stakeholders to find effective ways to support this process.²
3. The second DCF held in 2010 produced important messages on development cooperation which were shared with the High-level Plenary Meeting of the General Assembly on the MDGs, in September 2010. The forum also enabled stakeholder groups to express their position on a range of development cooperation issues. It identified good practices and standards for increasing and allocating aid, promoting policy coherence around development goals, ensuring two-way accountability between donors and programme countries and maximizing the gender impact of aid, among others.
4. The next DCF will be held in mid-2012. To facilitate dialogue among development cooperation stakeholders, UN members States and the Department of Economic and Social Affairs support the organization of high-level symposia in 2011 and 2012. The Mali symposium was the first preparatory event for the 2012 DCF.

II. Objectives of the Mali High-level Symposium

5. The main objective of the Mali High-level symposium was to facilitate a structured, interactive and open dialogue to:
 - Show how aid can achieve development results cost-effectively and how this should be measured;
 - Identify how broad-based country ownership should lead this process, in order to make results sustainable;
 - Agree on ways to enhance the quality and the results of development cooperation in least developed countries, and make proposals to strengthen existing mutual accountability between donors and LDCs as an input to the fourth United Nations Conference on least developed countries (LDC IV);
 - Reflect on how national-level accountability between donors, programme countries and other stakeholders can enhance results and impact on the lives of the poor; and
 - Analyse lessons from the education sector for improving mutual accountability for results.

¹ More information on the 2008 DCF and its preparations are available online:

<http://www.un.org/ecosoc/newfunct/2008dcf.shtml> and <http://www.un.org/ecosoc/newfunct/preparations.shtml>.

² The Doha Outcome document recognized the important contribution of the DCF in efforts to improve the quality of ODA and to increase its development impact. It also mandated the Forum to review more systematic and universal ways to follow quantity, quality and effectiveness of aid, giving due regard to existing mechanisms (A/Conf.212/L.1/REV1*).

6. The recommendations of the Mali symposium will feed into the preparations for the 2012 DCF. They also provided an immediate contribution to the Fourth United Nations Conference on Least Developed Countries held in Istanbul immediately after the symposium, and the ECOSOC Annual Ministerial Review, which will focus on education in July 2011. In addition, the discussions on national ownership, results and mutual accountability between donors and programme countries will contribute to the preparations for the Fourth High-level Forum on Aid Effectiveness (HLF-4), in Busan, Republic of Korea in November/December 2011.



7. The Symposium was attended by approximately 150 participants representing a wide range of stakeholders, including high-level and senior technical experts in aid management from over 50 developing and developed countries, parliamentarians, civil society organizations, local governments and international organizations. The involvement of such a varied group of stakeholders is frequently highlighted as one of the key strengths of the DCF.

III. Key messages from the symposium

The following key messages emanated from the symposium:

**“Citizens and tax payers in all countries hope that
efforts in the area of development will deliver tangible results”**

(H.E. Mr. Soumeylou Boubeye Maiga, Minister for foreign affairs and international cooperation of Mali)

- Aid contributes greatly to poverty reduction, if it is allocated, delivered and managed effectively
- At a time when political support for aid among tax payers seems to be waning in some donor countries, demonstrating the impact of aid on development is more than ever a joint concern of all development actors.
- The various actors define development results differently. There is agreement that development cooperation should be provided and used in a cost effective way. While short term results can help build support for development cooperation, an emphasis on medium and long-term results should be kept.
- There is a real risk that a narrow focus on aid as “investment”, short term results and “value for money” may lead donors to see development cooperation as associated with excessive “risks”. It may discourage donors from supporting changes which, albeit less “quantifiable”, can have a major impact on the ground, such as empowerment or rights-based development and capacity development.

**“Broad country ownership is the starting point
for determining what results are meaningful to country needs and strategies for development”**

(Antonio Tujan jr., IBON foundation and Better Aid)

- Processes to plan development activities and define their expected results should be country-owned and country led. Providers need to align their development planning to national processes.

- National ownership of development planning, aid management and coordination needs to be truly inclusive in order to achieve better development results in the medium and long run.
- National consultations thus need to be considerably strengthened and better structured to ensure broad-based participation of all relevant actors. Besides traditional donors, they need to involve the growing number of other providers of development cooperation, recognize their value added and comparative advantage in delivering results. Civil society organizations, local authorities and parliamentary committees also need to be engaged.
- Such inclusive national consultations should establish clear benchmarks to make development results measurable and evaluable while maintaining a strong focus on ensuring effective delivery of aid. They should jointly assess progress made as a result of aid and compliance with commitments. They can also be the opportunity to disclose future development cooperation plans of providers. Independent and participatory feasibility studies and impact assessments may contribute to the process.
- Common results frameworks with a limited number of joint indicators and targets for individual donors are a good instrument to align development cooperation with country priorities and to help rectify the imbalances between providers and programme country governments.
- Multiple aid conditionalities continue to hinder national ownership and leadership. Where conditionalities are unavoidable they should be realistic, rooted in national development priorities, agreed between providers and programme countries, as well as harmonized among providers.
- The focus on results is only meaningful if coupled with robust Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) and mutual accountability systems that inform development planning and evaluate the effectiveness of aid. Detailed information on aid flows is also critical to achieve better development results.

“The major challenge remains the reinforcement of capacities”

(Alimatou Zongo, Chef de service de suivi de l’efficacite de l’aide, Ministry of Economy and Finance, Burkina Faso)

- An all out effort should be launched – in partnership with developed countries – to build capacities across the board in programme countries, including in the area of policy making, monitoring and evaluation and statistics.
- The capacities of diverse national development actors also need to be reinforced to ensure their meaningful involvement and participation in such consultations.
- Without sufficient capacities, developing countries will not be able to shape the development effectiveness agenda at international level nor to influence aid levels, modalities and quality at national level. Strong institutional capacity also helps to ensure that national development priorities remain at the centre of all development activities.

“Mutual accountability is one of the key factors for enhancing aid delivery and development impact”

(Longinus Kyaruzi Rutasitara, Ministry of Finance, United Republic of Tanzania)

- Mutual accountability between providers of development cooperation and programme countries can help improve aid quality and aid coordination at country level.
- Progress in promoting national mutual accountability has been limited. Programme countries often remain more answerable to providers than to their own citizens. Some countries have however demonstrated positive change: they have introduced nationally agreed policies to guide aid allocation and management and set up high-level fora for regular consultations among providers, pro-

gramme country governments, parliaments, civil society organizations and local governments on aid management and the implementation of agreed commitments.

- Such positive change in programme countries has been triggered by: strong political vision and commitment, government reform and capacity building, international agreements, demands from donors as well as civil society advocacy. It has enhanced national planning and monitoring activities and improved transparency on aid information.
- In donor countries, demand from programme country governments, international agreements, as well as advocacy from NGOs and the general public are all critical to spur greater alignment with programme country priorities and enhanced coordination with other providers.
- Locally driven results monitoring frameworks and the easy availability of data and information on aid are the backbone for successful national mutual accountability mechanisms. Agreement on a manageable number of monitoring indicators for both developing and developed countries is also critical.
- The lack of capacity – especially at the sub-national level - remains a major impediment to strengthening both national mutual accountability and accountability between the government and their citizens. Individual and institutional capacities in this area need to be systematically built, nurtured, harnessed and utilized.
- Global level mutual accountability is vital to promote progress at country level.
- In the area of education, global accountability mechanisms are in place. But they need to become more effective. At country level, mutual accountability between donors and programme countries in the education sector is generally relatively high: countries have put in place sectoral accountability mechanisms. Budget support and sector wide approaches are also more prevalent compared to other sectors.
- Education sector plans should be supported by strong Monitoring and Evaluation and performance assessment systems, including mutually agreed indicators for both developing countries and providers
- The DCF was encouraged to continue to regularly review progress in mutual accountability on aid commitments at national and global level, with special emphasis on LDCs.

“Development cooperation to LDCs is often provided in ways which reduces its long-term impact”

(Aide Memoire, Mali High-level symposium)

- There has been much progress in increasing and improving aid to LDCs. They however continue to receive aid of a lesser quality than other developing countries. There was a call to provide at least 30 per cent of ODA to LDCs in the form of budget support.
- LDCs should take the lead in defining development results and ways to achieve them. This may include promoting the use of different aid modalities and outcome-based conditionalities as well as using aid to leverage other development financing.
- Country ownership is usually strengthened by the existence of a jointly agreed national development agenda and a national aid coordination platform engaging donor countries and other actors.
- The comparative advantages of different providers of development cooperation need to be better harnessed through a more collaborative approach to deliver results for LDCs.
- Aid allocation practices need to take better into account the vulnerabilities and special needs of LDCs and should be based on expected outcomes of development interventions, rather than on bilateral agendas and policy considerations. A watch list for aid orphans and an international mechanism for optimal aid allocation would be useful. Donors need to be willing to take greater calculated risks when providing aid to LDCs.

- A framework to ensure mutual accountability between donors and LDCs on aid quantity and quality would allow to better review compliance with commitments, including the implementation of the Istanbul programme of Action. Such a framework should build on existing frameworks.

IV. Detailed summary of discussions at the symposium

a) Results of aid and its impact on development

8. A forceful message from the symposium was that aid contributes greatly to poverty reduction, if it is allocated, delivered and managed effectively. This has been demonstrated by the progress of many developing countries towards long-term sustainable development results – notably the internationally agreed development goals, including the MDGs. At the same time, there is a common concern that the dependence of developing countries on aid should be reduced in the long term. Aid exit strategies should be developed by all countries.
9. There have been trends to question the impact of aid and signs that political support for aid may be waning in some donor countries in the face of budgetary austerity. Demonstrating the impact of aid on development is more than ever a joint concern of all development actors: Donors want reassurance – and evidence – that their aid is making a difference. Developing country governments and actors want to be sure that development programmes are bringing benefits to the people.
10. However, much remains to be done to better understand what “results” mean in the context of development cooperation. Results of development cooperation are defined and viewed differently by the various development cooperation actors. There has been a trend to present aid as an investment made by donor countries to reduce poverty as well as to justify development cooperation by the economic and other benefits it should bring to donors in the long run. This has however led to a focus on short-term results and cost effectiveness. Demonstrating rapid results is important to generate support for development cooperation, in particular in conflict affected countries and aid obviously needs to be delivered at minimum cost. However, a too exclusive focus on short term results and “value for money” may lead donors to see development cooperation as associated with excessive “risks”. It may also distract from providing support to areas such as capacity development, empowerment or rights-based development where progress is less quantifiable even though it can have the biggest impact on the ground.
11. The transformational impact of aid and its sustainability usually become visible in the long run only. Developing a realistic framework encompassing medium and long-term results is essential to align the activities of development actors behind such results. It was said that such a framework should build on the MDGs and promote human rights, gender equality and environmental sustainability.
12. The long-term effects of aid may not be easily attributable to individual donors. Benchmarks and evaluation findings on short term results are a useful tool to cater to the need for policy makers to justify aid expenditure by showing its impact. At the same time, an emphasis on medium- and long-term results should be kept. For impact evaluations to be meaningful, they need to be scheduled according to broad time frames, i.e. three to five years after the end of a programme. Evaluation findings need to be disclosed quickly to the general public to inform policy making and resource allocation as well as to feed into wider policy dialogue and institutional learning processes.
13. The renewed focus on development results should feed into the ongoing debate on how to enhance aid quantity and quality. There are legitimate questions on “What results?” and “Whose results?” and “Results from whom?”. They point to the need for a country-owned multi-stakeholder consultative processes to devise development strategies and plan any development activity. Such processes should in-

volve all relevant local and national actors and result in the joint definition of proper results indicators as the basis for monitoring and evaluation and mutual accountability exercises.

14. Such a dynamic country-level debate needs to capture local needs and consult parliamentary committees – given the importance of parliaments as oversight bodies. It should also involve civil society organizations as well as the private sector actors as a key constituency and an important engine of growth. Mechanisms are needed within countries to identify the legitimate representatives of some stakeholder groups, in particular from civil society and the private sector. Development cooperation providers need to build on these debates in their planning processes and establish strong consultative relationships with civil society, including at the local level with women and marginalized groups.
15. Country-led common results frameworks with clear indicators that capture national development priorities should be in place in each programme country to align development cooperation with national priorities. Under such frameworks, providers, programme country governments and other actors jointly define medium and long-term development objectives and harmonized reporting requirements among all actors, aligned with national development priorities. Such frameworks are essential to reconcile various approaches, including regarding short term goals, and ways to measure results. It was said that they should be based on the internationally agreed development goals and rooted in agreed principles, including good governance and cost effectiveness.
16. In reality, results frameworks remain fragmented and focused on individual projects. Political leadership and clear incentives from providers and programme country governments are missing which hinders the early development of such long-term frameworks. While good examples exist in the education and health sectors, such frameworks are especially hard to agree on for cross-cutting areas such as gender equality or good governance,.
17. Maintaining a continued emphasis on results is only meaningful if coupled with a robust monitoring and evaluation and mutual accountability framework that informs development planning and evaluates the effectiveness of aid. Monitoring indicators should be based on agreed results, not on mere inputs or outputs. Yet, they should be simple and small in number. A culture of monitoring and evaluation can best be promoted if good results visibly lead to change in development cooperation behaviours of donors and e.g. impact on funding decisions.
18. To achieve better development results, timely and comprehensive information on aid needs to be made available – both on the available funds (to allow early budget planning) and on relevant evaluation findings (to feed into future planning cycles). More support should be provided to data collection systems.
19. Due to their limited evaluative capacity, programme country governments often need to rely on donors to develop the M&E framework, which may not correspond to national development priorities nor to a common understanding of the scope and nature of development results. The evaluative and statistical capacity of programme country governments needs to be strengthened. Impact assessments should be conducted jointly or preferably as independent evaluations (including by civil society). They should be funded from the government budget. This raises the question of how a percentage of aid can be earmarked for impact evaluations irrespective of the funding modality.
20. A challenge is to harmonize national monitoring standards for specific results with the multiple donor frameworks in place, for example in the area of procurement.
21. Given the variety of solutions different countries may pursue, it would be useful to collect and share information on how the definition of common results frameworks and evaluation practices have been encouraged.

22. It was said that the United Nations system engages actively in results-based development cooperation with long-term results. It also provides policy space to promote inclusive, rights-based development cooperation and conduct a mutually enriching dialogue with other global platforms on this subject. It continuously invests in the simplification and harmonization of its business practices and builds on successes such as the “Delivering as one” initiative.

b) Ownership and inclusiveness for greater impact and sustainability

23. Truly inclusive national ownership and leadership of development planning, aid management and coordination is fundamental for achieving better development results in the medium and long run. A culture of dialogue is important, notably between governing and opposition political parties, when discussing proposals for projects and programmes.
24. National consultations need to be considerably strengthened and better structured to ensure broad-based participation to empower relevant actors, while keeping a strong focus on aid issues. They need to be more extensive, inclusive and continuous. They should involve local communities, civil society organizations, local governments, parliamentary committees, and the array of public and private providers of development cooperation in dedicated national fora, led by relevant Ministries responsible for aid management and coordination.
25. Such assessments should be participatory and keep the needs of local communities as a central focus. To ensure an informed debate, consultations need to draw on independent feasibility and impact evaluation studies. Independent tracking and assessment of development outcomes by citizens (e.g. citizen monitoring groups) has shown tremendous results in promoting awareness, broad-based ownership, and enhanced service delivery. In this regard, information campaigns to sensitize citizens about their rights are also vital - as is the creation of civil society networks.
26. Overall, broad-based consultations are vital to ensure truly inclusive ownership of any national development process, including the identification of the most adequate monitoring and evaluation (M&E) arrangements, or the definition of a national development vision or a strategic development framework. Such approaches are becoming even more important to assess how growing amounts of aid should be better used to catalyze domestic resources.
27. Donors also need to reform their country planning, programming and monitoring and evaluation activities by aligning them to national processes. Such change may contribute to building joint ownership and responsibility of donors and recipients for achieving results of development cooperation. Structures to promote such joint leadership seem to be in place, particularly in the education and health sectors of many countries.
28. Aid negotiations and M&E arrangements vary from country to country. However, in many countries there is a mix of policy debate in sectoral and thematic working groups, senior-level discussions on aid effectiveness in joint review mechanisms (for example on General Budget Support), and, increasingly, independent assessments of the impact of aid. Civil society groups increasingly organize themselves to best influence these structures.
29. Depending on the national aid architecture, these consultations can also serve to enable donor and programme countries to jointly assess progress made in achieving results, hold each other accountable for commitments made and disclose future disbursement plans. Precise indicators need to be agreed upon to measure the performance of individual donors with regard to development outcomes. This is already done in some countries (in the form of Development Partner-Performance Assessment Frame-

works, or DP-PAFs). Overall, there is however a lack of such indicators for individual providers of aid, including governments, NGOs and the private sector. Such indicators should be clearly specified in national aid policies or relevant aid documents, such as poverty reduction strategies or evaluation frameworks. Country examples have shown that such common assessments may attract donor support, especially if there is robust political buy-in from programme country governments and donors alike.

30. Financial and technical support is often necessary to support the organization of effective and inclusive consultations, especially in countries where the government has a limited capacity. This includes the need to develop the capacities of national institutions to produce and release timely statistical information on MDG progress and aid, to analyze this information, plan strategically and contribute actively to national and sectoral dialogue fora on aid. It is also important to further sensitize communities about their role in promoting reform to improve aid quality locally. The lack of capacity in these and other areas are among the main reasons for limited progress in country-led M&E and accountability processes.
31. Some participants found that aid conditionalities can be useful to ensure that agreed objectives are pursued and to promote government reform. Yet, especially when imposed unilaterally by donors, conditionalities are generally perceived as harmful and as undermining national ownership. For instance, conditionalities associated with budget support may lead to shortages in service delivery.
32. Conditionalities have to be realistic and based on national development priorities. They should be adjusted to a country's implementation capacity and thus be gradual in nature. Broad based and country-led negotiations are again vital to agree on a (reduced) set of necessary conditionalities and possibly also on a (small) set of development indicators that are useful to facilitate donor coordination. It is indispensable that aid is made available in a timely manner and that providers honour their commitments with regard to aid predictability.
33. Civil society organizations (CSOs) felt that some aid conditionalities can lead to excluding them from national debates on aid and its effectiveness. The existence of genuine and open national policy dialogues and the provision of capacity development support for CSOs are helping to improve governance and social cohesion. Still, legal restrictions, lack of financial support, limitations on information access and bureaucratic administrative procedures and requirements continue to prevent many organizations from effectively engaging in development cooperation activities. There is a continuing strong need to promote an enabling environment that maximizes civil society contributions to development, as outlined in the Accra Agenda for Action.
34. Many participants were in favour of continuing the dialogue on the evolving global aid architecture and the shift from aid towards development effectiveness in the context of the UN Development Cooperation Forum. Such a dialogue would allow to build on the dynamism stemming from the diversity of actors and sources of development cooperation, including South-South and triangular cooperation.

c) Effectiveness and results of development cooperation in Least Developed Countries (LDCs)

35. Some progress has been made in providing more aid - and notably more country programmable aid (CPA) - to Least Developed Countries (LDCs) over the past years, although the target of devoting 0.15-0.2% of GDP to LDCs has not been reached. The bulk of aid to LDCs is provided as grants and most bilateral ODA to LDCs is untied today. This is noteworthy in light of the role aid plays in the budget of many LDCs. A number of special funds have also been set up for LDCs, both at sectoral and regional level.
36. Yet, it was felt that, while LDCs face the greatest structural challenges to development, they also receive aid of a lesser quality than other developing countries. It is less aligned with national strategies, less predictable, fragmented, often channelled through donor systems - with limited availability of budget

support and pooled or basket funding – as well as burdened with numerous conditionalities. This is especially true for countries in post conflict situations. With this in mind, some participants called for providing at least 30% of ODA to LDCs in form of budget support.

37. In LDCs, as in other countries, development results need to be defined, monitored and evaluated under the leadership of the national authorities. It is also a priority to create an enabling environment for LDCs to use aid to leverage other long-term development financing. This may require reducing the costs to transfer remittances, promoting Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in infrastructure development and productive capacity as well as strengthening national tax collection. Aid can have a stabilizing effect, and thereby help LDCs to come out of the “LDC trap”. In this regard, it is vital to strengthen the nexus between development and statebuilding and peacebuilding and therefore to better support capacity development.
38. Irrespective of the different country contexts, accelerating development in LDCs requires the existence of a common shared national agenda, agreed with all development actors, to promote alignment of development cooperation behind specific goals. Experience shows that progress in reforming aid management and coordination in LDCs benefits from setting up a joint, country-owned national aid platform and aid policy, with sectoral and thematic working groups, improved national and local capacities as well as a national budget process that is linked to the overall development vision and plan of a country.
39. Non-DAC development cooperation providers have been assuming a growing and important role in supporting the development of LDCs. The different comparative advantages of DAC donors (e.g. efforts towards promoting more effective aid), non-DAC providers (fewer conditionalities, predictability and cost-effectiveness in achieving results), vertical funds (targeted support), NGOs (proximity to beneficiaries) need to be harnessed through a more collaborative approach to deliver results for LDCs. Such an approach can also help to outweigh possible disadvantages associated with each type of cooperation and to overcome institutional differences. It is important to understand better the different approaches that have worked to support LDCs and to move towards a global aid paradigm cognizant of needs of LDCs. International fora can facilitate such an exchange of experience.
40. Performance-based aid allocations and the focus on short-term “value for money” risk to lead to a further decline in aid to countries with the greatest needs, including aid orphans. Virtually no DAC-donor uses the LDC category as a criterion in their aid allocation decisions at the moment. It is thus important to avoid that aid allocation be based on expected short-term gains/return on investment. Donor countries should be encouraged to take what they sometimes perceive as “risks” and provide assistance to LDCs.
41. There was broad support to the need to develop a new approach to aid allocation. Aid allocation principles should take into account country vulnerabilities and needs and be based on expected outcomes of development interventions, rather than on bilateral agendas and policy considerations. It would be necessary to better communicate how development cooperation agencies try to ensure long-term development results and combat misappropriation of funds. Some concerns remained on how to include the issue of good governance in aid allocation decisions and how to avoid applying a uniform set of allocation criteria for LDCs despite vastly different country contexts and specificities.

42. Outcome-based conditionalities³ could promote country ownership and alignment and justify more favourable aid modalities, such as direct or sectoral budget support, in LDCs. As they link aid disbursement to achieved or pledged development results, they could be used as a nuanced way to cater for LDCs' specific development needs.
43. Aid to LDCs is currently highly fragmented. According to the OECD-DAC, 18 out of 20 under-aided countries are LDCs, 12 of which are countries in a post-conflict situation or with special development needs. The OECD-DAC is proposing to develop a watch list of aid orphans as important guidance for supporting aid allocation decisions. Participants also called for an international mechanism to promote optimal aid allocations. At the same time, it was recognized that final allocation decisions remain at the discretion of the providers, ideally in consultation with the programme countries.
44. The proposed framework to monitor progress on quantity, allocation and quality of aid in LDCs (see LDC background study for the symposium) was found to be an important initiative. It could strengthen the position of the United Nations as a global watchdog for commitments to LDCs. Its rigorous focus on aid quantity and quality commitments was widely appreciated as was its potential role as a review tool under the auspices of the UN.
45. At the same time it was noted that such a framework should not lead to duplication and needs to build on existing commitments and accountability processes, notably the Istanbul Programme of Action. Mutual accountability is genuinely rooted in change on the ground and a global mechanism can only bring together what has happened at country and local levels. It was also suggested that the proposed accountability framework could draw on lessons from the Paris Declaration Monitoring survey, including its working methods. One challenge for such a framework is that it is difficult to treat LDCs as one homogeneous group.
46. International dialogue, as organized in the g7+⁴, but also more broadly within the United Nations, is vital to make progress in addressing concerns specific to LDCs. It is important that donors and programme countries feel jointly responsible for development successes and failures. The debate on aid quality at the upcoming High-level Forum on Aid Effectiveness in Busan as well as in the UN DCF process, should pave the way towards universally acceptable, monitorable indicators to achieve broad-based development outcomes in line with the IADGs, with special consideration for LDC concerns.

d) Mutual accountability for development results: What works at national level and why?

47. National mutual accountability between donors and programme countries is not an end in itself. Rather, it helps to strengthen mutual trust and partnerships between development cooperation actors by demonstrating the impact of aid on development and the lives of the poor. Successful national mutual accountability processes can help improve dialogue between the programme country government, providers of aid, civil society and parliamentarians. It has the potential to lead to more predictable support and more favourable aid modalities which in turn can boost development planning and budgeting.

³ Broadly speaking, outcome based conditionalities link aid disbursement to achieved or pledged development results

⁴ The g7+ is an independent and autonomous forum of fragile and conflict affected countries and regions that have united to form one collective voice on the global stage.

48. Mutual accountability has helped to increase budget support and aid coordination which in turn has allowed actors to better track aid flows and ensure their efficient use. As such, mutual accountability can help to reduce aid fragmentation and transaction costs. It can also promote progress towards untying aid, timely disbursement of pledges made and provision of adequate information thereon.
49. The correlation of mutual accountability and better development results is however neither always direct nor intuitive. The incentives for strengthening mutual accountability mechanisms therefore often remain weak. Hence, despite the proven positive impact of national mutual accountability mechanisms, surveys and studies conducted for the DCF have shown that there has been little progress in ensuring accountability on aid commitments between donor and programme countries at national or global level.
50. A main challenge is to feed the findings of monitoring and evaluation frameworks effectively into mutual accountability processes to assess whether commitments are being met and trigger behaviour change among all development cooperation actors.
51. The symposium called upon all actors to accelerate efforts to define a joint agenda to improve mutual accountability at country level, building on good practice in the small number of countries that have set up effective two-way mutual accountability mechanisms with donors. This should take place through an open, transparent and inclusive process taking national development policy and monitoring frameworks as a point of departure.
52. Factors triggering change in behaviour of programme country governments – as identified in the latest 2011 survey on mutual accountability conducted for the DCF– include strong political vision and commitment; government reform and capacity building; international agreements and peer pressure from providers as well as internal advocacy by civil society. Evidence of such change is greater emphasis on reporting and publishing of information and increased planning and monitoring activities.
53. Factors influencing behavioural change among providers include demand from programme country governments, international agreements, advocacy from NGOs and the general public and increased transparency. Evidence of such change is greater alignment with programme country systems and greater coordination and division of labour with recipients and other donors.
54. One promising building block for greater mutual accountability between programme and donor countries appears to be the use of national aid policies that clearly define the roles and responsibilities of each actor. Such policies, which should be inspired by the long-term national development plan and budget, help strengthen national ownership and can serve as important points of reference for the assessment of development results. So far, only a small number of programme countries has adopted such policies or integrated them in other relevant documents. Programme country governments were encouraged to work towards the adoption of such aid policies in the near future.
55. Periodic consultations among donors, programme country governments, parliaments and civil society on how to manage aid should not be left to “technocrats”. Instead, countries should develop effective channels for both technical and high-level policy dialogue building on existing dialogue structures.
56. Inclusive dialogue on commitments related to aid management and coordination is vital to build confidence and strengthen commitments among the broad group of stakeholders. Mutual accountability frameworks backed by a strong coordination mechanism (including within the cabinet) and headed by a senior policy maker have proven particularly effective.
57. The success of national mutual accountability mechanisms also hinges upon the development of locally driven results monitoring frameworks and comprehensive databases with easily accessible information

on aid issues. It is critical for all actors to agree on a manageable number of monitoring indicators for both developing and developed countries.

58. Recommendations arising from monitoring and evaluation exercises should serve as the basis for a constructive dialogue among development cooperation stakeholders to identify relevant follow-up action within the context of mutual accountability activities. Where possible, monitoring frameworks should be streamlined for example by ensuring that sectoral reviews feed into national performance reviews.
59. Regular reporting by programme country governments to parliament and other actors is essential to promote a culture of accountabilities. It largely depends on whether providers are able to publish information on funds that have been committed and disbursed.
60. Monitoring the performance of donor countries, both individually and collectively, constitutes a major challenge. While programme country governments often remain more answerable to providers than to their own citizens, providers of development cooperation are rarely subject to performance assessment frameworks.
61. The design of “Development Partner-Performance Assessment Frameworks (PAFs)” can help address the power imbalance between providers and programme country governments. Performance assessment frameworks should empower programme country governments to clearly lead decision-making on development policy of their providers. Countries have made best progress in strengthening national ownership and leadership when providers have been systematically involved in national mutual accountability processes and when those processes featured a limited number of clear targets for individual donors.
62. Empowered development cooperation actors deliver better development results. Progress has been made in including parliaments, civil society organizations and other key national stakeholders in national mutual accountability processes. However, more needs to be done to ensure greater and more systematic involvement of these non-executive stakeholders in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of national development policies. Peer pressure can serve as a catalyst for change.
63. Local governments have a critical role to deliver and monitor progress on aid issues. To ensure effective national monitoring frameworks on aid issues, the experience of local governments should be better recognized at national level and integrated in such reviews. It should also be ensured that local governments have the necessary capacities to carry out this role effectively.
64. The lack of capacity remains a major impediment in the strengthening of local and domestic accountability mechanisms. In addition, programmes are needed to ensure that individual and institutional capacities for mutual accountability – between providers and the programme country government – are systematically built, nurtured, harnessed and utilized. Capacity building has proven to be particularly effective where it has been integrated into national and regional development plans and processes.
65. It is in this spirit that African Leaders endorsed the AU-NEPAD Common Capacity Development Strategic Framework (CDSF) as Africa’s common reference and policy guiding framework on capacity building. NEPAD also set up an Africa Platform for Development Effectiveness in conjunction with the African Union. This regional multi-stakeholder platform on development effectiveness is poised to develop a common African position on ODA reform. It will provide a consolidated contribution to the Fourth High-Level Forum in Busan (HLF-4) to be prepared at a Summit in August/September 2011, following the AU summit in June/July 2011.
66. Progress on mutual accountability between programme countries and development cooperation providers can also be enhanced by fostering regional South-South exchange on how to enhance mutual accountability. Independent analysis is another important driver, as it provides strong arguments for aid

negotiations. Encouraging efforts have been made to strengthen regional and global cooperation among parliamentarian organizations which should be further enhanced.

67. Global level mutual accountability between donor and programme countries is vital to promote progress at country level. The DCF was encouraged to continue to regularly review progress in mutual accountability on aid commitments at national and global level, with special emphasis on LDCs. There is scope to further deepen the analysis and to showcase country level experiences in the DCF.

e) Strengthened accountability for better results in education

68. The Education for All (EFA) goals emanating from the United Nations World Conference on Education for All held in Jomtien, Thailand in 1990 – and the EFA Fast track initiative – provide a global framework for accountability between donor and programme countries on EFA commitments.
69. Over the past five years, several developing countries have made significant progress in terms of increasing access to education. However, education quality remains a major concern.
70. The independent annual EFA Global Monitoring Report produced by UNESCO and the School Report produced by the Global Campaign for Education track progress on commitments related to the EFA goals. To increase the impact of the reports, their findings should be shared and followed-up more systematically, especially at the national level. Providers of development cooperation could volunteer to prepare national monitoring reports. Programme countries could conduct public expenditure tracking surveys.
71. In terms of the quantity and allocation of aid for education, there is a major shortfall of funding compared to amounts needed to achieve the EFA Goals. Aid allocation is also not sufficiently based on countries' needs. Countries affected by conflict and countries with special development needs are particularly under-aided in the area of education.
72. With regard to aid quality, less than half of aid for education is channeled through national systems. Moreover, aid for education is not sufficiently aligned with countries' priorities, resulting in increased fragmentation. Integrated financial management systems can help countries to hold donors to account and to demonstrate that resources are being used effectively.
73. At the national level, strengthened mutual accountability frameworks between donors and programme countries can help deliver better education outcomes. However, mutual accountability should not be reduced to a review of effective management of public finance. The focus should be on development results measured against short, medium, and long term benchmarks defined by all relevant stakeholders, including beneficiaries.
74. National mutual accountability between donor and programme countries in the education sector is generally relatively high because education often constitutes a significant part of a country's budget. The frequent use of budget support and sector wide approaches in the education sector as compared to other sectors has also helped to ensure greater mutual accountability.
75. Education sector plans are most effective when they are linked to overall national development plans as well as the national budget processes. It is thus important to ensure coherence between sectoral and overall budgetary planning. Adopting one national strategy which serves as a point of reference for all sector plans has helped countries to strengthen mutual accountability.
76. Education sector plans should be supported by strong monitoring and evaluation and performance assessment systems. As at the national level, the performance assessment systems should include mutually agreed indicators for both developing countries and donors to help reduce power asymmetries.

77. Parliamentarians, CSOs and non-DAC-providers should be more thoroughly involved in mutual accountability mechanisms in the education sector. Schools should be seen as communities and innovative ways should be considered and platforms established to involve these communities both in the policy formulation and the evaluation process.