



## Aid effectiveness in contexts of poor governance, conflict and fragility

A statement by UK relief, development and peacebuilding agencies ahead of Busan

September 2011

This statement draws on the experiences of UK relief, development and peacebuilding agencies in a number of contexts affected by poor governance, conflict and fragility. It highlights both the need to protect and build on existing commitments in the run up to the Fourth high Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness whilst also working to make aid more effective in contexts of poor governance, conflict and fragility.

### ***Protecting and building on gains***

The principles and reforms that have been agreed and promoted through the Paris Declaration and Accra Agenda for Action represent important efforts to make aid more effective.

In the run-up to the Fourth High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness (HLF4) in Busan, the undersigned NGOs urge the UK Government, the European Union and other actors engaged in the process to protect these gains and implement the full spirit of the Paris Declaration and Accra Agenda by:

- Ensuring that aid is designed primarily to meet the needs and aspirations of people living in developing countries, rather than the priorities of donors (in areas such as trade, migration or national security)
- Fostering sustainable domestic capacity to lead development processes and strengthening rather than bypassing countries' own systems and organisations
- Supporting national governments who are pursuing peaceful, inclusive and accountable development agendas to make the changes their people need
- Moving beyond the incoherence, competition, duplication and contradiction that stem from unharmonised aid delivery
- Pursuing greater results for the poorest and most marginalised people and improving systems for measuring and monitoring such results
- Ensuring the fullest possible accountability of all partners in the efforts of the aid community to help others.

The rationale for these reforms remains strong, and the May 2011 ['Evaluation Of The Paris Declaration'](#) calls for donors to make further effort to fulfil the commitments and the spirit of the agreements made in Paris and Accra. However, these agreements also need to be built on to improve the effectiveness of aid in contexts of poor governance, conflict and fragility.

## ***Making aid more effective in contexts of poor governance, conflict and fragility***

The World Bank estimates that around 50% of the OECD's bilateral aid programs go to conflict-affected and fragile countries – which are home to approximately 1.5 billion people – and suggests that 8 out of the 10 most aid dependent countries in 2008 were affected by conflict or fragility. Aid is often a critical source of resources in these contexts.

Despite this, not one low-income fragile or conflict-affected country has yet achieved a single MDG and the OECD classifies as 'fragile' 29 of the 42 countries at the bottom of the UNDP's human development index.

*It is crucial that the outcomes of Busan provide a commitment and a framework for making aid more effective in such contexts, where the challenges of making development work for poor and marginalised people are most severe.*

But the issues raised in doing so are also relevant in a wide range of countries where, although the risk of conflict may be low, development is still undermined by illegitimate and ineffective leadership – for instance where the government:

- Pursues plans for development that are not participatory or which ignore the interests of all or some of the public;
- Is not taking all feasible steps to respect and promote international humanitarian law and human rights;
- Perpetuates a system of state power that benefits particular rather than public interests
- Is not making genuine efforts to tackle corruption;
- Does not take action to implement the outcomes of peace negotiations or planning processes;
- Is a party in an ongoing conflict, or lacks legitimacy in the eyes of significant groups within society;
- Has systematically failed to ensure that aid benefits those it is intended for.

So in all these contexts, we need to understand and mitigate the risks of aid doing unintended harm, even when it is provided in a way which appears consistent with the Paris Declaration and Accra Agenda for Action.

For example, the Paris / Accra principles of alignment and ownership – if too narrowly interpreted – can be used as a rationale for aid that supports the state even when it is a primary actor in a live conflict. This may strengthen regimes that violate international human rights or humanitarian law, and potentially contradicts humanitarian commitments to neutrality as exemplified in the [IFRC Code of Conduct](#) and the [Principles on Good Humanitarian Donorship](#). In other cases, governments may misuse aid effectiveness principles to justify policies that reduce space for local civil society activity and / or for humanitarian response.

Similarly, the principle of harmonisation is crucial for fostering greater coherence but it is important to ensure that large, pooled funding does not shut out the local organisations necessary for pluralism and advocacy on sensitive subjects. Nor should the drive for harmonisation inhibit innovation and the ability of agencies to adapt when circumstances change.

And a focus on results should mean neither less willingness to invest in conflict-affected and fragile contexts where development needs are great but results harder to obtain, nor less willingness to stay the course throughout processes of change that can last decades. Nor should it mean focusing on short-term, visible results that are easier to measure at the expense of longer-term results that offer genuine lasting benefits. Nor should it bind donors to analysis, planning and measuring results hand-in-hand with abusive governments.

## ***Key elements for a Busan Agreement sensitive to the challenges in contexts of poor governance, conflict and fragility***

For aid to achieve positive results in contexts affected by poor governance, conflict or fragility, the aspects of the Accra Agenda for Action that uphold human rights and the role of communities and civil

society in development processes need to be reinforced and taken further. Such contexts require aid that supports democratisation processes and the efforts of civil society to promote better governance.

Therefore, in addition to protecting and reaffirming existing gains, we urge the UK government and others involved in the discussions in HLF4 to adopt the following key messages in relation to these contexts:

**Align first and foremost with the poor and marginalised**

Reaffirm an aid agenda that focuses on ownership by and empowerment of broader societal actors beyond the state, especially the poor and the marginalised. Where governments fail to represent the interests of some members of the population, align first and foremost behind priorities identified by the public.

**Align only with governments that pursue peace and human rights**

Uphold the Accra Agenda for Action pledges to pursue development policies in a way that is consistent with international human rights commitments by reserving alignment for governments demonstrating through their actions progress towards:

- Inclusive planning and dialogue
- Respect for HR and IHL
- Better governance
- Addressing corruption
- Implementation of peace agreements
- Ensuring aid reaches communities

Be more willing to act when predatory governance is revealed: be flexible and ready to shift towards 'off-budget' support and 'shadow alignment' when there is no concrete progress on the above.

**Be accountable to the poor and marginalised rather than to abusive governments**

Ensure that both donors and national governments renew and strengthen their commitments to greater communication, consultation and accountability to the public, especially the vulnerable and marginalised.

Ensure that the pressure on donors and CSOs to ensure transparency is not used to exert pressure to stop them meeting humanitarian imperatives and supporting progress on sensitive human rights and peacebuilding issues.

**Ensure aid reinforces pluralism**

Uphold and affirm Accra Agenda for Action commitments to broadening country-level policy dialogue and deepening engagement with CSOs.

Ensure that 'off-budget' support to civil society (including media, academia, international and local NGOs), political parties, parliaments and the private sector is not threatened in any country by pressure for alignment with and ownership by national governments.

Make funding instruments more relevant and accessible to local organisations in conflict-affected and fragile contexts. Retain smaller grants to more local organisations. Invest in managing more complex aid portfolios in these contexts by ensuring more staff who understand conflict issues are on the ground to manage and monitor them.

**Use realistic timeframes and focus on the right mix of results to make aid more effective**

In conflict-affected and fragile contexts, avoid being satisfied only with addressing symptoms of crisis with short-term interventions. Engage with the knowledge that while successes are urgently needed, resolution of underlying problems can take generations, and easy shortcuts are seldom available.

**Use realistic timeframes and focus on the right mix of results to make aid more effective (cont.)**

Establish robust mechanisms to measure success in terms of:

1. Progress towards addressing the causes and drivers of conflict, as identified through conflict analysis
2. Cross-societal participation in decision-making and accountability mechanisms
3. Public perceptions of:
  - a. safety, access to justice and rights fulfilment
  - b. government effectiveness and accountability
  - c. access to resources, services and livelihoods
  - d. the equity of resource allocation and service delivery

Avoid being put under pressure to do joint assessments / use national performance systems when the state is unwilling to end violations of human rights and international humanitarian law and address drivers of conflict.

**Ensure progress on sensitive issues**

In conflict-affected contexts, be prepared to do more through agencies prepared to bear witness, ensure protection, uphold humanitarian principles, work for sustainable community capacity to advocate for rights and resolve problems, using conflict-sensitive approaches.

When needed, put coordinated mechanisms in place to ensure that aid still reaches the poor and marginalised in spite of opposition from authorities.

To support this sensitive work, acknowledge that more bilateral and off-budget programming may be appropriate in conflict-affected and fragile contexts.

**Conflict in the Busan outcomes document**

In reflecting on the draft Busan outcomes document, we urge the UK Government and other actors to ensure the Busan declaration builds on the International Dialogue on Peacebuilding and Statebuilding by committing to address the five international peacebuilding and statebuilding objectives to improve the effectiveness of aid in contexts of poor governance, conflict and fragility.

The five objectives are:

- Legitimate politics - foster inclusive political settlements and conflict resolution
- Security - establish and strengthen people's security
- Justice - address injustices and increase people's access to justice
- Economic foundations - Generate employment and improve livelihoods
- Revenues and services - Manage revenues and build capacity for accountable and fair social service delivery

Implementation of these objectives should be tracked through the development - in an inclusive process - of indicators of progress in pursuing them and a monitoring process.

We also believe that the Busan declaration should include commitments to follow-up on multi-stakeholder monitoring of the fragile states principles, as implemented through the Accra Agenda for Action. The fragile states principles provide a useful focus in donor aid policy on issues such as conflict sensitivity and support for inclusive politics. Sustained monitoring and accountability after Busan against these commitments would be helpful.