

First High-level Meeting of the Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation

Mexico City, 15-16 April 2014

An overview from the perspective of Civil Society Organisations

The Global Partnership

The Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation was launched in Busan, South Korea in December 2011, and is meant to serve nations, local governments, parliamentarians, business and organisations to work better together to end poverty.

This High-level Meeting held in Mexico City from 15 to 16 April 2014 marks the first gathering of the Global Partnership and was attended by over 1'500 participants from 130 countries. The objective was **to discuss the progress made so far in development co-operation and to anchor the Global Partnership in a post-2015 development framework.**

From Busan to Mexico, this Global Partnership was chaired by Ministers from Indonesia, Nigeria and the United Kingdom. Netherlands, Mexico and one African country are now taking over.

Responding to the request of civil society organizations (CSO), an additional seat was given in the Steering Committee to the **Trade Unions** – who have been sharing the CSO seat so far –, as a natural counter balance to the private sector.

The prior CSO Forum

Civil society organizations (CSO) convened by the CSO Partnership for Development Effectiveness organized a one-day **CSO Forum** on 14 April, prior to the High-level Meeting.

Looking backwards, the **mounting evidences of shrinking space for civil society** are indicating that no progress has been made from Busan in promoting an enabling environment *«to maximize CSO contribution to development»*. Besides, CSO contribution appears very much limited to their contribution as co-implementors of aid agencies or government programs, not as *«independent actors in their own right»*. In this respect, hardly any space (and resources allocation) is granted for **CSO right of initiative.**

Looking forwards, one major challenge remains to achieve a **just development architecture**, linked to Post-2015. While more diverse partners are being included in this Global Partnership, there is a need to address the political dimension of the development agenda and the unbalance of power relations. Concerns were expressed that private sector led development and Public Private Partnership models will lead to further commodification of natural resources of communities, and deny access to social services for the poorest. Recommendations were made for a **transformative agenda**, inclusive, human rights-based, democratic and for a just aid architecture to redress the inequities and injustices of the current development paradigm.

Progress since Busan: where do we stand?

At the 1st High-level Meeting opening ceremony, the Mexican President Peña Nieto said: *'We have the opportunity to join forces and move together toward a new era of effective co-operation to enable us to achieve inclusive and sustainable development for the world we want. We're able to build the new architecture of international aid necessary to realize the post-2015 development agenda'*.

The United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-moon called for continued strategies of oversight, transparency and accountability. He also stated that more efforts to fight corruption and stronger commitment to reducing poverty were needed.

To monitor progress achieved so far, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) issued a report based on data from 46 countries. This progress report presents «mixed results» and generally found a **slow pace of compliance with the Busan agreement**. It reads: *«Much more needs to be done to transform cooperation practices and ensure country ownership of all development efforts, as well as transparency and accountability among development partners»*.

Few highlights from the High-level Meeting

The world is **not anymore divided between developed and developing countries** and indicators traditionally used to categorize countries are not relevant to reflect a complex reality where economic growth and disparities are increasing together. This was a key message delivered by the **Middle Income Countries** (MICs) also criticizing measures, such as the end to trade benefits for MICs, which jeopardize their development achievements.

Local government representatives do not yet feel fairly considered in the Global Partnership. It was recalled that key-public services delivery is of their responsibility and that their proximity with the people ensures a more effective and direct accountability.

Focus was put on **Domestic Resources Mobilization**, with an appeal to increase aid aimed at strengthening tax administrations in developing countries, so as to ensure they get more of their own money.

While adherence to the Busan principles for **South-South Cooperation** remains voluntary, the Arab donor co-ordination group pledged to step up development co-operation with developing countries in ways that are fully in line with the Global Partnership Principles.

Philanthropic foundations launched a set of guidelines on how the philanthropic sector can engage with governments and other stakeholders in the reality of post-2015 development.

Private sector for development

Private sector actors were definitely at the center of the Meeting. UK Secretary of State for International Development Justine Greening, Co-chair of the Global Partnership, called on participants to move beyond thinking about partnering with business as *«nice to have»*, and instead

see it as a «*must-have*». In regard to the rationale of «*harnessing private sector investments*» to justify ODA allocation to business – «*we know ODA funding on its own won't be enough to achieve eradication of poverty*» –, there are **little evidences of such input additionality**, aid providers being more interested in commercial viability or economic performance of such joint operations.

While some represented private sector players appeared genuinely committed to positively contribute to an inclusive development, there are serious fears that the **emphasis put on creating an enabling environment for business will also benefit the more problematic corporate actors**.

Entrepreneurs from Pakistan and Bhutan underlined the need to improve the business environment focusing on **local businesses** and not just multinational corporations.

CSO are sometimes perceived as «unwilling or uninterested» to engage (no CSO representative in Building Block on Private Sector). However the difficulty to engage is linked to the fundamental paradigm that CSO are more concerned by *how* economic growth is generated, rather than how big or sustained economic growth is. While initiatives and tools are launched to better measure the effective contribution of economic operators to development, it is of utmost importance to **involve CSO as a source of information**, as they are in a better position to provide independent evidences of business effective contribution to inclusive development from a Human-Rights Based Approach perspective.

In the business agenda, the poor are so far perceived as consumers, suppliers, producers, but not yet as **workers with rights and citizens with voice**.

Swiss presence and contribution

The Swiss Delegation, headed by Martin Dahinden (Director of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, SDC), included members from SDC, the State Secretariat for Economic Affairs (SECO), one parliamentarian and one CSO representative. Martin Dahinden acted as panelist in the 14th April pre-Conference Meeting on «Progress since Busan», and as panelist in two High-level Meeting focus sessions on «Leading transitions and the New Deal» and on «Partnership in Mozambique».

Alliance Sud representative made two interventions in focus sessions on «Unleashing the Power of business» and «Public Private Cooperation», to draw attention on the diverse reality of business engagement and on the **need to address as well bad corporate behaviors** which can create poverty by making farmers landless, disrupting communities livelihoods, increasing the silent masses of working poor who cannot afford a decent life. And in this respect, voluntary solutions usually promoted (guidelines, standards...) are not enough. A point was also made that in many countries, **making the environment attractive to foreign investors translate in restrictions on basic rights** (like freedom of assembly, association, expression, access to information...) and poor legal frameworks on workers' rights and environmental safeguards.

While negotiations were on-going on the Communiqué, Switzerland made it clear that **Busan Declaration was the bottom line** and that past achievements should not be compromised.

As to further steps, Switzerland proposed to reflect on how to bring closer this Global Partnership (effective in cooperation but lacking legitimacy) and the UN Development Cooperation Forum (stronger legitimacy but weaker effectiveness), and adhered to the **Voluntary Initiative on CSO Enabling Environment** aimed at advancing inclusive development and democratic ownership in development. Main expected outcomes of this initiative are:

(1) multi-stakeholder dialogue, knowledge-sharing and action on Enabling Environment – at country, regional and global levels – to strengthen progress on *Indicator Two of the Global Partnership Monitoring Framework*;

(2) strengthened CSO efforts and multi-stakeholder support relating to the *Istanbul Principles* to implement practices strengthening accountability.

Civil Society mob action

Just before the last Plenary on Private sector, CSO representatives stepped up together, their faces covered with Mexican fighters' masks, and stood in front of the Podium while delivering the following message:

«We as civil society are fighters. We fight for social, economic and environmental justice, for human rights and decent work, for gender equality and equity, for transparency and accountability, and for inclusive development. But we don't want to fight for our place at this table. We want instead to use our energy to continue to fight for these things. To win, we need all of you, including national and local governments, parliamentarians, philanthropic foundations, trade unions and the private sector, to fight the same fight. Please join us in this struggle».

Then masks were taken off and given to the official delegates.

The Mexico High-level Meeting's Communiqué

While this Global Partnership expands in diversity, the risk is that it becomes **less concrete in shared commitments and more unbalanced in power**. This was reflected in the un-transparent negotiation process of the final Communiqué, where CSO had clearly to struggle to maintain Busan level of commitments. While the **Human Rights-based Approach is still only mentioned in relation to CSO**, greater transparency and accountability was finally re-introduced for private sector actors.

It was quite obvious that no new fundamental final document would be issued by this 1st Meeting (just two years after the Busan Meeting), but the format of a simple «Communiqué» raised questions. In addition, the structure of this Communiqué reflects the conference program and sessions, **not the inclusiveness in terms of actors**: heavy on States and private sector with dedicated chapters, and very light on parliaments, local governments and CSO who are just mentioned under the inclusive partnership heading.

In an Annex to the Communiqué, **38 new voluntary initiatives** were launched by governments, business, private foundations and civil society to push forward effective development co-operation.

Conclusion

For a truly multi-stakeholder engagement process to deliver effective development results, there is a need to **acknowledge power dimension and strive for more balanced relations**. An inclusive partnership does not ensure inclusive development. In this respect and from a civil society perspective, this 1st High-Level Meeting of the Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation is marred by the overwhelming focus to consolidate the current flawed development model which very much fosters inequality, poverty, hunger and environmental devastation.

If a clear shift has been made from Accra to Busan in focusing from «*effective aid*» to «*effective development cooperation*», more needs to be done to address **the effectiveness of development** itself, in terms of gender inclusiveness, environmental sustainability and respect of Human Rights. And to the simplistic view that the Post-2015 agenda will be «*the what*» and the Global Partnership will define «*the how*», I would like to oppose this fundamental principle of country ownership which requires that «*the what*» be defined by the people through a democratic process.

Anne-Sophie Gindroz