

# **Making governments accountable and aid transparent for women's rights and gender equality**

**Statement of the Women's Working Group on Financing for Development (WWG on FfD)<sup>1</sup>  
at the DCF High Level Symposium, Vienna, 12-13 November 2009**

The WWG on FfD considers the Development Cooperation Forum, governed by the member-states of the United Nations (UN) a universal and inclusive space for multi-stakeholder discussions on international development cooperation and its effectiveness and coherence. The DCF is and should be the central forum for contributing to democratic discussions in the United Nations around what kind of development partnerships, international cooperation and aid arrangements are needed, in order to achieve the internationally agreed development goals (IADGs) in which women's rights, gender equality and poverty reduction are at the centre.

## **1. Accountability for gender equality: rights, voice and adequate indicators**

Accountability of governments' performance in relation to aid and development assistance is essential for development effectiveness. However, making governments accountable for the advancement of women's rights and gender equality through development is still a challenge. Current accountability mechanisms in development aid planning and management are blind to the goals of gender equality and women's rights. Promises and targets set in the Beijing Platform for Action, for example, are not being put in practice. The lack of sex-disaggregated data and gender sensitive indicators remains a major weakness.

Moreover, women's organizations and gender equality advocates face the obstacle of non-access to decision-making for allocating development cooperation funds. Many donor and aid recipient countries are not able to give an accurate figure of how much funds they are allocating for the advancement of gender equality.

## **2. Gender equality blindness in accountability mechanisms: Public Fiscal Management Reforms projects**

As a proof of gender blindness in accountability mechanisms, we voice our strong concerns over Public Fiscal Management (PFM) Reform projects that donors and the International Financial Institutions (IFIs) have introduced in several developing countries. Budget reforms are usually undertaken to contain sustained deficits through expenditure compression strategies. 'Belt-tightening' measures have always been implemented by revenue-strapped governments, with little room for poverty sensitivity analysis; much less, gender analysis. Privatization of social services such as for example water, health and education have had negative impact on women's accessibility to their rights. Public policy needs to safeguard women's interest in these areas.

The indicator by which the government's performance is assessed in these reforms is not against cushioning the adverse implications to the poor, marginalized or excluded population, in which women represent a majority, but by how much government was able to 'cut back' expenditures. Moreover, non-budgeted, non-core activities are usually those that support social protection which the government could not afford to provide; priority has always been production-type activities. The non-disclosure of the non-core deliverables (and subsequently the non-funded activities) deserves critical analysis on the basis for exclusion and the potential implications in terms of service delivery, poverty reduction and gender equality.

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<sup>1</sup> The Women's Working Group on Financing for Development (WWG on FfD) is part of the DCF consultative group for this conference. We are an alliance of women's organizations and networks that advocate for the advancement of gender equality, women's empowerment and human rights in UN processes related to FfD and the global financial and economic crises. For more information, see [www.ffdngo.org/gender-financing-development](http://www.ffdngo.org/gender-financing-development)

### **3. No more double standards – governments must be committed to true mutual accountability**

True mutual accountability cannot remain a one way road and double standards must be eradicated. While developing countries are held accountable by donors, donors themselves are often unaccountable to developing countries governments and their citizens. Mutual accountability in a context of highly unequal power relationships between donors and developing countries also requires a commitment to a fundamental reform of International Financial Institutions (IFIs). In addition donor countries' interests and double standards in trade and development and in the unevenness of responses to the financial crisis through "stimulus packages" have to be more openly addressed and fairly resolved in democratic and coordinated ways.

Mutual accountability at country level must mean that donors make transparent and binding commitments to which they can be held to account. It must mean also that governments of both donor and developing countries must work with parliaments, local development actors, civil society including women's organizations, and national women's machineries in the different phases of aid allocation, sourcing, spending, monitoring, evaluation, and auditing.

### **4. Transparent and accurate information on gender equality and women's rights performance**

Transparency in the provision of accurate and appropriate information on donor commitments including timelines is needed to allow citizens to participate in policy decisions from a well-informed background. Donors and IFIs should deliver timely and meaningful information, adopt a policy of automatic and full disclosure of relevant information, and submit to the norms and direction-setting of the UN. Further, discussions within the DCF must look at the direct and indirect effects of IFIs policies on women's livelihoods, rights and poverty eradication, and clarify their accountability at the national and local levels.

Developed and developing countries' governments must provide transparent information on Official Development Assistance (ODA) allocations, including ODA allocated for gender equality and women's rights. This information must be consistent with policy pronouncements and legal commitments to aid quality and quantity, and also to international human rights standards, gender equality and women's rights commitments.

Financing options are usually outside the radar of civil society, given that these are discussed non-transparently. CSOs need to undertake rigorous policy research to be able to influence policy debate including their gender dimensions. Privatization, selling of government corporations including basic utilities, and capital market reforms around regulatory reform which ensures private sector investment and confidence must be subjected to poverty sensitive and gender-based research and analyses that is not limited to mitigating impacts on gender-based needs and vulnerabilities but aimed at subjecting reforms to wider public determination through transparency.

### **Key recommendations for common standards in mutual accountability and aid transparency from an economic justice, women's rights and gender equality perspective:**

- The Beijing Platform for Action, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) as well as other human rights standards and obligations should provide binding normative and organized frameworks for accountability. Aid outcomes should be measured taking into account the official reporting concerns of these human rights frameworks and the Periodic Review under the United Nations.
- Accountability mechanisms must include gender responsive and poverty-sensitive indicators and results-based frameworks. These must however not impose any kind of policy conditionalities including those based on gender equality.

- Public finance management systems must support and build upon gender audits, gender budgeting, and monitoring of the implementation of international instruments for gender justice as an integral part of mutual accountability mechanisms. Gender responsive and poverty sensitive budget analysis for both donors and developing countries must be applied as indicator to address impact of development aid funds for women and men and on the advancement of gender equality and women's rights.
- Developed and developing countries must put sufficient and predictable resources to women's rights work and increase the participation of women's organizations in development policy formulation, monitoring and evaluation. They should strengthen the capacities, resources and authority of national women's machineries to support and monitor line ministries, other government bodies and parliaments in influencing national development planning and budget allocations for gender equality and women's rights.
- Sex disaggregated statistics are a must.
- Independent monitoring and evaluation is essential. Monitoring and evaluation must not be controlled by donors be it directly in individual countries or indirectly through the World Bank and the OECD-DAC. Governments should and finance more systematically time allocation studies, in order to document reproductive and productive women's work (non-paid and paid) and utilize the findings for developing alternative indicators to exclusively monetary ones.
- Active engagement of CSOs and gender equality and women's rights advocates in accountability frameworks and monitoring mechanisms; including participation in the development of new indicators.

### **The way forward to the next High Level Symposium and beyond**

For the upcoming High Level Symposia (HLS) II and III and the DCF itself, all in 2010, it will be key to ensure the substantive participation of women's rights organizations and other civil society groups. This includes timely information and consultation with these groups in setting the agenda as well as utilizing sufficient funding for their broad participation. While the focus on gender as a *cross-cutting issue* in the 2<sup>nd</sup> HLS in Finland was initially a clear sign of commitment, this initial proposal should be ratified and concretized in Vienna (setting a final date and clarity on the main contents of this debate without diluting the gender equality dimension to a parallel session).

It is imperative that gender equality and women's rights are thoroughly integrated in all debates and analysis, also within the main plenary, in the 3<sup>rd</sup> HLS, the 2010 DCF and beyond. Going forward it will be key to not only look at gender equality and women's rights as a mechanical issue but one that is integral to a larger political discussion.

In terms of language/communication we strongly suggest to refer to gender equality (and to human rights and environmental sustainability) as a *central development goal*, as the continued use of the term "cross-cutting" perpetuates their marginalization.