

Listening Project and Aid Effectiveness: Aid Recipient Perspectives on the Paris Declaration

Evidence gathered by **The Listening Project** indicates that the goals of the *Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness* are broadly consistent with the priorities and aspirations of those on the receiving end of aid efforts. The intent of the Paris Principles is, in fact, valued and supported by many people living in the countries international assistance aims to support—this is good news! People in local communities are appreciative of those who provide them with assistance. However, the effects of the Paris Declaration and the Accra Agenda for Action are not yet being felt by most people in aid recipient societies. Local people often question the motivations behind international assistance and are skeptical of the level of commitment donors and their national governments have to alleviate poverty and support long-term development. They also talk about how aid efforts could be made more effective. Following are some general observations on the principles of the Paris Declaration based on discussions with nearly 6,000 people in 20 aid recipient countries.

- 1. On the issue of *Aid Effectiveness*—People are more concerned about *how* assistance is provided than *how much* is given.** People observed that the results of aid efforts do not seem to match up with the enormous investments made by donors. They question the processes and systems through which aid is delivered. They often wonder where all of the money has gone. People referred to corruption, waste and mismanagement of resources in the international aid system and by their governments. They want donors to reduce the number of “intermediaries”, to monitor them more frequently to ensure that aid is used effectively-- and to slow down. A coordinator of a Lebanese NGO said, “We need strategic, long-term partnerships with donors. The impact doesn’t come overnight. If they want to make a change that lasts, they need to start taking longer breaths.”
- 2. On the issue of *Ownership*—People in aid recipient societies want to have a greater say in their own development.** While progress has been made on increasing participation and gathering feedback, many local government officials and community members talk about the continued imbalance of power and control when setting development agendas and determining priorities and strategies. They are often mistrustful of their government’s capacity to use aid effectively and to support their development. A local official in Sri Lanka said, “Participatory planning is just a phrase. Money and time are limited from the donor side and an agenda has already been set long before agencies go into communities.”
- 3. On the issue of *Alignment*—People say that donors still provide assistance based on outside agendas and priorities rather than local ones.** People dislike pre-packaged and pre-determined projects and approaches. They wonder why donors often do not ask them about their priorities and resources before they provide assistance. An official in Kenya commented, “Policy-makers and donors sometimes push projects from the top-down through agreements made at the national level with no local input. Donors should fund a ‘basket’ [of options] and let them propose locally from their priorities so that communities can solve their problems on their own.”
- 4. On the issue of *Harmonization*—People suggest that donors should work together more and pool their resources.** People talk about how, too often, solutions to development challenges have been “projectized.” They suggest that donors share information, coordinate better and combine their resources rather than fund individual projects or piecemeal solutions to address development challenges. A local government official in Ecuador suggested, “Coordination at the international level must be in the local area. And it must carry out the objectives from here! Agreements must be signed stipulating who does what and coordination is needed between local projects and agencies, within both the provincial and national context.”
- 5. On the issue of *Managing for Results*—People want results and say donors should monitor and verify what has been reported.** When donors arrive for unannounced visits, it can be perceived that they do not trust the government or their local partners. On the other hand, people say that things can easily be “arranged” when a donor notifies people of their visit beforehand. People talked about the importance of relationships and several in Mali noted that, “Trust does not exclude control.” People want donors to “spot check” and talk to a variety of people in and outside of the chain of delivery when monitoring their investments.
- 6. On the issue of *Mutual Accountability*—People say accountability is still weak and that there continues to be more focus by governments and aid agencies on being accountable to donors than to aid recipients.** Despite recent efforts to improve aid transparency, people say that they continue to lack access to the information needed to hold their government and aid agencies accountable. A recipient in Kosovo said, “When internationals bring their money here, they should be careful where they spend it and who they give it to. They need more internal controlling ... I have no power. I have no access to the municipality and no way to examine the financial records.”