

Busan and beyond: Statement by civil society organisations on improving aid effectiveness in situations of conflict and fragility

November 2011

This statement has been endorsed by the BetterAid Coordinating Group. BetterAid unites over 1700 development organizations from civil society worldwide, and has been working on development cooperation and challenging the aid effectiveness agenda since January 2007. BetterAid is leading many of the civil society activities including in-country consultations, studies and monitoring, in the lead up to the Fourth High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness (HLF4) in Busan in November/December 2011. www.betteraid.org

BetterAid produces a newsletter summarizing news and analysis on the Aid Effectiveness agenda. To subscribe to the newsletter, please contact comms@betteraid.org.

This statement proposes a number of steps to improve the effectiveness of aid in contexts of conflict and fragility. It is primarily focused on the statement that will be adopted at the Busan High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness in December 2011, but it is recognised throughout that this issue is relevant above and beyond Busan and will remain a pressing issue for the development community in the coming years. It builds on a broader 'Development Effectiveness' approach whereby different actors should support one vision of a sustainable change, within a democratic framework, that addresses the causes as well as the symptoms of conflict, fragility. This statement draws from consultations, as well as the collective inputs of civil society organisations working in situations of fragility and conflict around the world. It seeks to ensure that both donors and partner governments address aid effectiveness towards development effectiveness from the perspective of the ultimate Aid beneficiaries: the people.

Summary

In the run up to HLF 4, civil society urges all development actors to take the following steps in order to support sustainable development and positive change in situations of conflict and fragility:

- . Ensure that aid is designed primarily to meet the needs and aspirations of people living in conflict affected and fragile contexts;
- . Establish a genuinely game-changing, i.e. inclusive, New Deal between fragile and conflict affected states and their respective societies;
- . Support the development of inclusive and participatory processes at country level (fragility assessments, compacts, implementation and monitoring, etc.);
- . Ensure risk management processes and funding decisions are conflict-sensitive and multi stakeholder;
- . Support an enabling environment for CSOs to act as independent development actors in their own rights, and defend humanitarian principles during crises;
- . Commit to take necessary measures to translate the Fragile States Principles into behavioural and institutional changes;
- . Adopt a context-specific approach to the Paris Principles to ensure aid prevents countries from slipping into fragility and conflict;
- . Ensure the centrality of fragility and conflict in the framework of the envisaged Global Partnership on Development Effectiveness.

I. Why does conflict and fragility matter to aid effectiveness?

1.5 billion people live in areas affected by conflict, fragility and violence, yet not one low-income fragile or conflict-affected state has achieved a single Millennium Development Goal¹. 29 of the 42 countries at the bottom of the UNDP Human Development Index are classified as fragile – and aid is a crucial resource in many of these countries.

Fragility and Conflict are not only characterised by weak capacity and ownership, as highlighted in the Paris Declaration and the Accra Agenda for Action. It is critical to acknowledge that weak governance, poor leadership, illegitimate institutions are also important aspects of the challenges facing actors engaged in these contexts.

The relationship between aid on the one hand, and conflict and fragility on the other, can be considered in at least four ways:

Challenges to 'standard' aid modalities

It is more challenging to ensure that aid is effective in contexts of conflict and fragility because violence, political instability and uncertainty undermine and disrupt planning and delivery. Humanitarian aid also becomes more necessary, but more complex to provide. The causes of fragility and conflict – such as political violence, weak governance, effects of climate change – are interlinked and therefore more complex to identify. As a result, standard aid modalities may be difficult or inappropriate in such circumstances, and aid agencies risk being manipulated by conflict actors.

'Conflict-sensitive' aid to address conflict and fragility

Any large-scale injection of resources into a conflict-prone context will inevitably have an impact upon the peace and conflict environment – positive or negative, direct or indirect. Aid must therefore be provided in a 'conflict-sensitive' manner – so that at the very least, it 'does no harm'. But aid providers need to consider how they can go beyond this minimum standard to ensure, wherever possible, that aid is effective in supporting responsive institutions, local capacities for peace and addressing the causes of conflict. As such, aid can play a significant role in reducing and preventing conflict and ensuring that the world's poorest and most vulnerable communities can live more peaceful, safer lives.

Striving for more coherence but moving away from militarisation of aid:

The first decade of the twenty first century has been characterised by aid flow priorities amongst many of the richer nations being heavily influenced by military and political objectives relating to the struggle against terrorism. While we acknowledge the needs people face in those settings, this has also created a 'boomerang' effect in increasing the need for humanitarian funding responding to the resultant human suffering and economic chaos. This risks the diversion of aid for this purpose away from poorer countries. As all actors recognise the need to strive for more coherence across strategies and programmes in situations of conflict and fragility, the focus should be on addressing people's needs and concerns in the areas of security and development, instead of humanitarian and development aid being driven by military and counterinsurgency objectives.

II. Tackling the implementation gap: from words to action

¹ World Development Report 2011: Conflict, Security, and Development.

Several processes have been launched in the last few years to inform decisions to be taken in Busan on the specific challenges of achieving aid effectiveness in situations of fragility and conflict. This mobilisation reflects the growing importance of this agenda within the broader development community. As all stakeholders share high expectations of the Busan HLF, it is critical that stronger political messages to tackle conflict and fragility are inserted in the preamble of the BOD. We also call on donors and partners to adopt the following recommendations to ensure international support in fragile and conflict-affected contexts becomes more effective:

Building on the International Dialogue process...

The Busan Outcome Document will include a section on “*Promoting sustainable development in situations of conflict, fragility and vulnerability*”. It is expected that this will draw heavily from the International Dialogue on Peacebuilding and Statebuilding (IDPS), a process that has brought together donors, the g7+ group of fragile states, and civil society representatives. The IDPS has led to the definition of five ‘Peacebuilding and Statebuilding Goals’ (PSGs), along with respective targets and indicators, which will guide and inform international engagement in situations of fragility and conflict:

- 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 service delivery.

We believe that these five objectives, worded as agreed in the Monrovia meeting of the IDPS, articulate a clear vision for effective, peaceful states and provide a potential path out of conflict and fragility. As such, these goals should be clearly endorsed in the Busan Document.

...To establish an inclusive and participatory ‘New Deal’.

The main outcome of the IDPS will be a ‘New Deal’ which sets out a new way to engage in fragile and conflict affected contexts. As this overarching framework is being finalised, we call on donors and partners to commit to a genuinely game changing ‘New Deal’, not only between donors and fragile states but also between fragile states and their respective societies, strengthening state-society relations in fragile contexts. The BOD should therefore reaffirm the importance of an inclusive and participatory New Deal where the broader society plays a role in defining, monitoring and delivering aid strategies, and in demanding better governance and service delivery to governments.

... And inclusive and participatory processes in-country

Similarly, while we welcome the intention to tackle the implementation dimension of the New Deal through ‘Compacts’ which will guide partnerships and engagement in situations of conflict and fragility, it is critical that these processes include civil society organisations to ensure the needs, concerns and expectations of the wider society are taken into account and addressed. All related mechanisms, especially the so called ‘fragility assessments’, the elaboration of a ‘common vision and plan’, and the arrangements for monitoring progress should also be inclusive and participatory. All partners should ensure these processes take into account and address the differential and disproportional impact of armed conflict on the lives and rights of women and girls, and as a result, become the opportunity to implement UNSCRs 1325, 1820, 1888 and 1889.

Defining appropriate risk management and financing procedures and mechanisms

There is a global recognition that standard operating procedures are ill-adapted to the contexts of fragility and transition. More flexibility is needed to cope with contexts where disbursements, risks and results management are challenging donors' traditional models. While we support a move to use country systems and support or build states capacities to manage aid flows, we also wish to highlight a number of issues to ensure financial support through governments achieves its desired objective, and that further developments in this area do contribute to stronger state-society relations and long term peace. For instance, there is a need to link fiduciary risk assessment with 'do no harm assessments', to ensure finances related decisions are informed by context dynamics and do not end up fuelling conflicts or undermine progress towards positive change. Similarly, risks assessments should be inclusive, to ensure they reflect the complexity of these settings.

In order to support a vibrant citizenry which will be able to play an active role in the aid and reform agendas, donors should also adopt innovative and sustainable funding mechanisms for civil society organisations. Similarly, donors should consider the benefits of local procurement and use of local capacities and supplies in order to contribute to rebuilding conflict or post-conflict economies. Finally, there is a dire need for substantial additional financial support for conflict prevention, peace building, disaster risk reduction (DRR) and the link between relief, rehabilitation and development (LRRD). Despite a recognition of the importance of such initiatives, they are still not duly prioritised in practice.

CSOs enabling environment in situations of conflict and fragility

There must also be a commitment to maintaining a safe and enabling environment for civil society organisations, including the full participation of women's groups, not only to perform service delivery functions, but also to participate fully in planning, monitoring and evaluation of development activities. Civil society, as independent development actors in their own right, should have the space to hold their own governments to account, and to demand improvements in the policies and behaviour of their own governments and of the donors that operate in their country. Donors should contribute to the development and sustainability of a vibrant civil society through direct funding, by establishing mechanisms of dialogue and coordination with CSOs, and by ensuring that partner country governments respect and protect civil society's independence and safety. Donors should encourage and provide incentives to states in order to honour this commitment.

Towards a sustained engagement in situations of conflict and fragility

Lastly, it must also be recognised that moving away from conflict and fragility is a long-term process. In addition, in fragile and conflict affected states, recent history and future trends indicate an increase in protracted and repeated events, or a complex mixture of natural and human crises and vulnerabilities. While every context is different, it can take a generation – 15-30 years – to move from a situation of extreme fragility or serious conflict to conditions whereby peaceful social and economic development is entrenched, and a return to violence and insecurity becomes highly unlikely. Expectations of results must be realistic: while it is legitimate to expect visible progress over much shorter time periods (e.g. 2-3 years), change is incremental and non-linear. Therefore results-based management systems must recognise these factors. In addition, specific sustained support, partnership and funding will be required with long term engagement.

Reaffirming the Fragile States Principles

The Principles for Good International Engagement in Fragile States (so called "Fragile States Principles"), which were endorsed in 2007, provide a set of guidelines to enhance effectiveness of all actors engaged in situations of fragility and conflict. However, as the '2011 Fragile States Principles Monitoring Survey' reports, "*International performance*

against these *Fragile States Principles* is seriously off-track". The Busan Outcome Document should re-affirm the importance of the Fragile States Principles, and call all actors to take the necessary measures to translate them into effective behavioural and institutional changes both at Headquarter and in-country levels.

III. Preventing conflict and fragility: towards context specific interpretation of Paris Principles

We welcome the increased engagement at the global level to ensure effective support for countries which are transitioning out of fragility and conflict. However, most of this attention does not deal with the downward spiral of countries slipping into conflict and fragility in the first place. There have been many examples over the last twenty years of countries considered as stable and regional economic powers where tensions and conflict have ruined decades of international support and development progress. It is therefore fundamental to use the potential of aid to prevent conflict and fragility and to support peaceful democratic change in situations that are too often considered as stable. In these contexts, donors should therefore acknowledge that stability does not always equate with sustainability, unless when it is based on social justice and democracy. As a result, and as we're moving towards the establishment of Global Partnership for Development Effectiveness, the Paris Declaration Principles should be interpreted and implemented in a way that ensures not only that aid is an effective contribution to development, but also that all aid is conflict-sensitive, i.e. that it does no harm and wherever possible makes a positive contribution towards sustainable peace and stability.

In particular, we advocate for a balanced interpretation of the Paris Principles that does not equate aid effectiveness and 'statebuilding' solely with support for the institutions of the state. Sustainable peace is the bedrock for development, but it cannot be built by states alone: viable states have a strong and active citizenry, thriving civil society and healthy state-society relations.

In practice, with reference to specific principles, we believe that the Busan Outcome Document should address the following issues:

Ownership

When talking of ownership, the Busan Outcome Document should be explicit that the ultimate beneficiaries are the people whose lives are affected by poverty, conflict, fragility and marginalisation – not (only) the state. This is especially important in contexts where the state is a direct or indirect actor in a conflict, or is perceived as such by conflict-affected, vulnerable communities, when the central government is incapable or unwilling to ensure the rights of its citizens. In such circumstances, the tendency to equate 'ownership' with the state (and particularly with only the central government or head of state) can be highly problematic and counterproductive. We therefore support the use of the term *democratic ownership*, which should be interpreted as *inclusive and broad based*, not simply 'partner country' ownership. Such an approach requires, for instance, that donors and partners go beyond one time consultations and adopt on-going, structured participatory processes and dialogue with actors who are genuinely representative of wider society.

Results, transparency and accountability

Similarly, mutual accountability mechanisms should not be established between the donor and the partner country only. They should first and foremost focus on accountability towards people on the ground, which also involves helping states to build states' accountability to their society. People everywhere want aid to be effective and to demonstrate results – but

local people want to be able to say what success means for them and whether current aid programmes are achieving lasting results for them. Both throughout the Outcome Document and specifically in the section on conflict and fragility, there must be a clear and specific commitment to delivering aid in a way that guarantees people a greater say in their own development and the kind of state that they wish to live in.

Transparency requirements are critical in that respect so that the public can enjoy democratic ownership of development processes and are able to hold state institutions to account. It is fundamental that international standards like IATI are systematically adopted. In-country, it is equally important to ensure that CSOs participate fully in official dialogue mechanisms and that people on the ground have access to information on aid-funded projects, such as budgets and plans, as well as, for example, top-ups to government salaries.

Alignment and use of country systems

It is crucial that the Busan Outcome Document reaffirms 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, donors should align first and foremost behind priorities identified by the public. Similarly, donors and partners must uphold the Accra Agenda for Action pledge to pursue development policies in ways that are consistent with international human rights commitments. Alignment with country priorities should therefore be considered as an incentive for the national government to genuinely commit to:

- Peace (including implementation of peace agreements)
- Good governance
- Human rights, including women's rights, and international humanitarian law
- Inclusive planning and dialogue
- Addressing corruption
- Ensuring aid reaches communities

Country systems should not mean the central budget solely. Donors should be able to support subnational/local levels capacities as well. As highlighted in the Fragile State Principles 2011 monitoring Survey, more attention is required at these sub-national levels in order to respond to issues that can constitute risk factors if left unaddressed.

IV. Action after Busan:

This statement has focused on the deliberations expected in Busan, but we recognise that the Outcome Document itself is only a small step towards more effective aid in contexts of fragility and conflict. In the months following Busan, we wish to see progress in the following areas:

- Greater recognition of the relevance of conflict and fragility: Busan represents a step forward in terms of highlighting and responding to the challenges surrounding aid effectiveness in contexts of conflict and fragility. However, there is still the sense among both donors and civil society that this is a 'side' issue and its centrality to aid effectiveness discussions has not been fully realised. Greater engagement on this topic is therefore required, especially within the envisaged Global Partnership for Development Effectiveness.
- Operationalization of an inclusive 'New Deal': The adoption of five PSGs and the 'New Deal' document provide a potentially firm foundation, provided it is effectively inclusive, participatory and context-sensitive. Much work needs to be done to

translate these objectives into concrete commitments and indicators, to monitor them and ensure progress, with timelines, capacity and resources; and to ensure civil society has a role to play in each of these processes. The IDPS should be seen as the beginning of a process – not the end, in which civil society is a stakeholder in its own right.

- Greater commitment to conflict sensitivity: the concept of ‘conflict sensitivity’ should be central to any engagement in contexts affected by conflict and fragility. Although it is now relatively well-known, it is rarely implemented systematically either by donors, governments or civil society actors. Rhetorical commitment must be increasingly translated into practical steps to ensure that aid is making a genuine contribution to peace is “doing no harm”.
- Translating policies into behavioural changes: there is a need to challenge traditional approaches in situations of fragility and conflict. Donors should set out their own respective agenda, drawing on the outcomes of the various processes which informed the Busan Declaration on fragility & conflict aspects, to ensure lessons are learned and acted upon.
- Engaging emerging donors on fragility & conflict: the Busan HLF should be marked by the increasing engagement of a wider array of emerging donors in the development agenda. Taking into account the growing importance non OECD-DAC members as actors in situations of fragility and conflict, it is crucial that all development actors engage in a constructive and progressive dialogue after Busan, to reflect openly on the lessons of all actors’ past engagement in conflict affected and fragile contexts. Based on this, it will be important to achieve a shared understanding of the challenges and identify how to achieve the best possible collective support to positive change in these contexts, without diluting the consensus and commitments achieved in Paris, Accra and Busan and within the IDPS framework