

Policy Management Brief

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Partnership in the 1990's: How to Make it Work Better

"Partnership" is the politically correct description for most forms of development cooperation. It refers to a shared commitment to tackle development problems on the basis of an agreed division of tasks and responsibilities. Through partnership, it is claimed that southern partners are responsible for their own development and that donor agencies have supportive roles only. Donors and recipients alike preach its benefits, and all claim to practise it.

Partnership has turned out to be very difficult to implement. It is often not clear what it really means and who should be responsible for what. Recipient ownership is hard to combine with donor accountability. Donors look at their partners and observe weak commitment to development, institutional decline, poor accountability systems, and aid addiction. They respond with hands-on approaches, despite evidence of their limitations. Developing countries see little sympathy for political realities, many conditionalities, too much bureaucracy and too little policy coherence.

In the current political climate, aid agencies are under pressure to re-think the nature of their development cooperation. Their electorates expect value for money, efficient management, and evidence of impact. There are numerous reports and evaluations on how to improve aid effectiveness, but the aid sector has generally been reluctant to learn from past failures and best practice. The credibility crisis in development cooperation is reflected in the decline of aid budgets.

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ECDPM invited 45 participants from developing countries, donor agencies, parliaments, non-governmental organisations, and the research community to attend a Round Table. Three questions were on the agenda. Is partnership still a useful approach, how can both recipient ownership and donor accountability be combined, and how can changes in the aid system be achieved?

This brief summarises the discussions. It reviews the pressures on partnership and contradictions in the aid system. It argues that there is no alternative to partnership, but that the concept needs redefining. Suggestions are made on how this can be done in the management of development programmes. Finally, it analyses strategies to accelerate the desired

Pressures on Partnership

The traditional concept of partnership is under pressure. Confusion and conflict reign. Donor agencies, in particular, are nervous. At home, they face strong political demands to achieve value for money. In the field, they often work with governments that have poor governance and/or administrative capacities. The net result is a trend towards more control-oriented styles of operation. Three examples illustrate this.

On paper, the Lomé Convention between the European Union (EU) and countries in Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific (ACP) provides a good framework for development cooperation. In this partnership, ACP countries take the lead in decision-making and implementation of development programmes, while the EU provides necessary funds and other support. In practice however, the ACP partners often lack the political will and/or capacity to effectively perform their roles. Too much power and money is concentrated in too few hands. Authority and accountability are not clearly delineated. The EU is now pushing to re-define the Lomé partnership so that its priorities will be better reflected in spending. One of their aims is to accelerate implementation, perhaps by re-allocating some responsibilities between the partners -- in this case, from ACP countries to the EU.

During the 1980's, the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA) introduced recipient-led approaches to the management of its aid. In its "changing roles" policy, emphasis was on institution building and capacity development to ensure local ownership of projects and programmes. This had a profound impact on SIDA's working methods. Within two years, procurement of goods and services by SIDA was cut in half and transferred to its partners along with training packages and manuals; long-term technical cooperation dropped by 75%, and management authority was delegated to the field. As SIDA tries to deal with demands for more aid efficiency and recipient transparency, this type of partnership is now being questioned. The forces seem to be leading SIDA towards more control-oriented approaches in which recipient roles in the partnership will be altered, and perhaps reduced.

Non-governmental organisations (NGO's), for all their commitment and grass-roots credibility, also find partnership to be difficult. Demands from the south for a new division of tasks are hard to reconcile with northern institutional survival strategies. The danger of bureaucratisation looms as northern NGO's develop their internal financial and reporting systems. In its experience, Actionaid (an international NGO) finds

that this keeps inquisitive donors satisfied, but puts considerable strains on relations with its southern partners.

In all of these cases, innovative aid programmes are under pressure to re-introduce, in effect, old-style,

Contradictions in the Current Aid System

- Donor agencies recognise that recipient ownership is necessary to make aid sustainable and to build local capacity, however, in practice, they are introducing more conditionalities, less flexibility, and centralised management into the aid process. All of these tend to work against ownership.
- To the extent that the development agenda is driven by donor priorities instead of recipient realities, the gap between development discourse and reality tends to become surrealistic.
- Pressures on donor agencies to deliver rapid and tangible results forces them to accelerate the pace of development by throwing money and expatriate personnel at problems. However, experience shows that this approach makes little sense, especially where absorptive capacity is weak.
- An army of people is mobilised to account for aid resources and their utilisation, but at the end of the day, no one really knows what results have been achieved, nor their sustainability.
- Donor concerns to improve aid utilisation contrast sharply with their unwillingness to address structural obstacles to development, including trade and debt issues. Without these broader commitments, current reforms are merely short-term crisis management.

donor-driven, and control-oriented approaches to development. Approaches that many in the development community feel were ineffective. As a result, major contradictions have emerged in the aid system. So, why are people moving away from partnership, and why is it so difficult to combine recipient ownership with donor accountability? The main reason is that traditional partnership concepts are no longer adapted to the new political climate of the 1990's. Five main factors illustrate some of the tensions in current partnership approaches:

Development conditionalities have changed

During the Cold War, aid was driven by geo-political, commercial (tied aid), and employment (technical cooperation) considerations. Little attention was paid to good governance, ownership, accountability and commitment to poverty alleviation. Over time, some

governments became experts at capturing aid, regardless of how it was to be used. This "incestuous conspiracy of interests" is coming under pressure. Real partnership is hard to achieve where governments are "entitled" to a given amount of aid. Governance, political accountability and human rights have moved to the forefront. Yet is not clear how these new conditionalities can be incorporated into partnership. What does "governance" actually contain? How can partnerships with self-serving and unaccountable governments be built, and how can good governance and transparency in donor policies and practices be ensured?

New partners have to be accommodated

Until recently, development partners were almost exclusively central state bureaucracies. Negotiations involved few people, and debates on major topics were restricted to them, and some selected outsiders. This is no longer true. The state has lost its most-favoured status; institutional pluralism and decentralised cooperation are the new buzzwords. However, the practical implications of this diversity are yet to be clarified.

Neither central governments nor official donor agencies have much experience in working with a wide range of partners -- and certainly not as "equal" partners. Civil society, on the other hand, tends to see the state (and some development agencies) as the enemy to be worked against, not with.

Responsibilities of partners are poorly-defined

Aid relations, by definition, take place between unequal partners. This ought not to be a problem when mutual roles and responsibilities are clearly and realistically spelled out. However, this is rarely the case. There are major flaws in both the substance and process of partnership relations. With regard to substance, donor agencies are generally too dominant in setting the agenda, imposing conditionalities and transplanting models -- often with little knowledge of local conditions. Paternalism, arrogance or unwillingness to listen are partly to blame for this.

On process, there are seldom two partners to tango. Most donor agencies talk grandly of recipient ownership, yet are reluctant to loosen control. Developing country staff criticise the donor-driven nature of aid, but shy away from taking responsibilities for their own development. Competition among donors pushes them to search for flag-bearing projects, to carve countries into regions and even to "own" special units in a ministry. At the recipient side, the best people are mobilised to negotiate new funding; equal efforts are not deployed to ensure that funds are effectively used.

Capacities are often over-estimated

Present partnerships are based on the assumption that all developing countries have well-functioning governments and sufficient capacity to perform the tasks and responsibilities expected of them. This is often not the case. Capacity may even be on the decline in many African countries -- despite decades of technical cooperation. Planning capacity, for instance, has virtually disappeared in adjustment-ridden countries. The bureaucratic complexity of the aid system adds further strains to weak recipient administrations. Developing countries share responsibility for this bureaucratic overload. In the absence of credible local accountability systems, one cannot expect donor agencies to simplify procedures. There are also capacity problems on the donor side, with most agencies poorly equipped to deal with an ever expanding development agenda.

Aid performance criteria are inappropriate

While achieving "value for money" is the order of the day, it is not clear what value is being looked for. The accountability regime under current partnership approaches is flawed. Instead of moving "downwards" towards beneficiaries, it moves "upwards" towards donor constituencies. Performance is measured according to levels of disbursement, delivery of inputs, and satisfaction of deadlines. These "efficiency" criteria are weighted towards control-oriented relationships in which the benefits from a partnership - such as ownership, discussion and debate, flexibility, and sustained local impact - are hardly measured. For supporters of fiscal accountability and aid efficiency that use these kind of criteria, too much partnership can have a negative impact on aid delivery. Where aid is considered (according to these criteria) to be inefficient or ineffective, the partnership is often blamed. However, believers in impact and the contributions of genuine partnership argue that it is the evaluation criteria and not always the partnership, that need to be changed.

The Way Forward: Redefining Partnership

What are the implications of this rather gloomy picture of partnership relations? Does an attempt to reconcile "recipient ownership" and "donor accountability" only produce bad development assistance? Is partnership still desirable, and if so, what is its comparative advantage? How can we move forward?

The starting point is to openly recognise the shortcomings of current approaches to partnership. In most cases, realism and modesty are lacking, and dialogue

is based on declarations of intent rather than substance. Joint decision-making and implementation, without clear task division, may dilute the sense of ownership and obscure responsibilities. In these partnerships - mainly concerned with mobilising and spending money - there is little room for legitimate demands by both sides for "good governance."

The next step is to abandon a "business-as-usual" approach in which vested interests are reconciled or seducing opportunities of the aid system are shared. This can be done. There is evidence of successful development programmes that are based on effective partnerships. And, there are many examples of best practice in managing aid. Furthermore, much development takes place without aid. If the different parties could learn from these experiences, major benefits are possible. This requires a willingness from both sides to tackle the contradictions of the aid system up front, rather than to circumvent them; it implies a search for converging interests, priorities and expectations; and it calls for pragmatism rather than ideology in determining appropriate task divisions between partners.

This brings us to the main argument of this brief -- that partnership remains a valid, and essential, approach to development. But, if sustainable development impact is the real aim, then it needs to be fundamentally redefined, and its rationale, constituent elements and mode of operation clarified.

Four pre-requisites are needed to achieve a modern and business-like partnership:

1. *Recipient ownership combined with donor accountability.* Experience from more than thirty years of development shows that donor attempts to re-centralise decision-making and implementation makes little sense. Hands-on approaches look tempting, but successful implementation and sustainable results cannot be achieved without recipient participation and ownership. This is not to say that donor agencies have no role to play other than committing funds. On the contrary, the post-Cold War climate provides new opportunities to accommodate legitimate donor accountability concerns. There is nothing wrong with donor agencies putting forward their own objectives and spending priorities. This is a precondition for a genuine partnership. The challenge is to find new management approaches that leave development initiatives in the hands of local actors, while ensuring result-oriented donor control.
2. *Improved policy dialogue.* Current approaches to policy dialogue are flawed (they are too focused on money), unbalanced (restricted to central

bureaucracies) or ineffective (competitive rather than coordinated). Prior to releasing funds, donors need open, transparent and continuous dialogue with a wide variety of actors and stakeholders. This provides opportunities to assess mutual interests, levels of commitment and the most appropriate partners and performance criteria. It may also provide a forum to ensure greater consistency and long-term perspectives in donor support.

3. *Flexible implementation.* If serious and representative policy dialogue occurs, there will be room for flexible and decentralised implementation. Meeting donor policy concerns, should make it possible to accelerate the speed of disbursement. If partnership relations are enshrined in clear contracts, there is scope to simplify procedures and accountability requirements. Instead of submerging southern partners with excessive reporting requirements, local systems of accountability can be developed; instead of enforcing

Improving the Management of Partnership

- Change programme design and implementation, by
 - using local capacity as the basis for action
 - adopting country-specific approaches
 - decentralising decision making and management
- Use partnership effectively, by
 - saying no
 - seeking agreement on conditionalities
 - defining new accountability systems
- Build partnership capacity, by
 - dismantling ad hoc institutions and procedures
 - building analysis and negotiation skills of local actors
 - moving to a process approach

bureaucratic rules, incentives can be provided to field staff to take risks, to innovate, and to adapt implementation to local conditions.

4. *Capacity development.* If one is committed to recipient ownership and sustainability, support for capacity development becomes a top priority that has to be reflected in budgets. Shying away from institutional problems (through project implementation units or technical cooperation) makes little sense. Effective partnership will not arise unless the institutional conditions for recipient-led negotiation and management are created, in both the public and private sectors.

Improving the Management of Partnership

How then can aid policy and practice be reformed to achieve this new type of partnership in which the four pre-requisites are present? What changes in management approaches allow for a better combination of recipient ownership and donor accountability?

Three main actions can be envisaged. First, to change the process by which development activities are formulated and implemented; second, to use partnership more effectively; and third, to develop capacity to enter into, and manage partnerships.

Change Programme Design and Implementation

Improving the management of partnerships will require major changes in the process of identifying, designing and managing development programmes.

Three main changes are advocated:

Put local capacity first

To avoid situations where development agendas are dominated by donor priorities, the aid system must be reviewed from a recipient perspective. Local conditions and capacities should become the starting point of development programmes rather than a contextual footnote. This calls for a fundamental reversal of current management approaches. It implies:

- Scaling down expectations to what can realistically be achieved. This means starting from local values and expressed needs rather than from blueprints or perceived needs; it requires a careful assessment of political, institutional and socio-cultural constraints that may affect implementation.
- Adopting an interactive process approach to designing and implementing development programmes. This allows local actors to determine the agenda, pace, and the rhythm of implementation. It requires the use of steering committees or mixed working groups to involve different stakeholders in an activity. If serious about ownership, the donors need to adapt their internal procedures accordingly. As a result, progress may also be slower than planned.
- Adapting the nature of donor involvement to local capacities. This implies that "first-best" technical prescriptions and complex schemes may not be appropriate, that extended time

horizons are needed, and that the profile and working methods of technical cooperation personnel need to be changed. It means moving away from a relationship characterised by prescription, imposition, condition-setting and decision-making, to one of explanation, demonstration, facilitation, and advice.

- Adapting financial flows to recipient implementation capacities. It makes little sense to submerge developing countries with aid that cannot be absorbed. Time is needed to ensure genuine participation and to generate ownership. If there is insufficient capacity, donors should target their support to improving implementation capacity before they release new funds. However, it is unlikely that recipient countries will support participatory approaches if it means slower and possibly also lower aid disbursements. Donors can help to overcome these fears in two ways. First, by abandoning annual budgetary cycles in favour of multi-year programming and financing. Second, by delegating management authority to field offices where delays in programme preparation can be compensated by accelerated disbursement during implementation.

Adopt country specific approaches

Commitment and capacities to realise development goals clearly vary between countries. However, this diversity is seldom reflected in the approaches of external agencies. Instead, all countries tend to be lumped together, using "worst case-scenarios" and standard policies and procedures.

Adopting a truly country-specific approach in managing development cooperation requires a differentiated approach to:

- Conditionality. Where real trust exists, donors can be more flexible, and there is room to adapt the pace and sequence of reforms to local conditions. Where trust is not guaranteed, donors have few alternatives than to adopt "hands-on" approaches that are based on high profile conditionality.
- Choice of partners. In some countries with poor systems of governance, donor agencies are often inclined to "by-pass" the state. This is rarely a desirable nor viable option. International NGO's, in particular, often work too much on their own and in the process, they weaken local structures (by taking away their best staff for example). Only in countries facing complete economic and

political collapse should NGO's even consider such approaches or parallel systems.

- **Accountability.** In countries with credible governance systems, donors no longer have an excuse to adopt highly centralised "upward" systems of accountability. If conditions allow, donor accountability requirements could be (partly) integrated in the existing audit systems at recipient level. In countries with endemic levels of corruption, the challenge is to identify the most productive channels to deliver aid.
- **Technical cooperation.** In crisis-ridden countries, "gap-filling" technical cooperation may prove to be a necessity. In other countries, this type of substitution is no longer acceptable. The resources involved could be better used for other purposes -- perhaps to retain national skills.

Promote decentralisation

It is now widely agreed by most recipient governments and donor agencies that sustainable development impact will not be achieved through top-down approaches. A balanced and careful decentralisation of decision-making and implementation may:

- **Enhance ownership.** Reserving aid decisions to senior staff in either donor or recipient central bureaucracies does little to promote ownership. All too often, donor agencies incorrectly assume that where commitment has been expressed at the highest level, ownership will follow. This rarely happens, mainly because risks and rewards in the aid sector are not intimately linked -- as is the case in the private sector. If ownership is indeed a higher order of involvement than commitment, and that it needs to be achieved rather than declared, then the need for participation in project preparation is clear.
- **Improve accountability.** Decentralising financial authority may act a safeguard against a monopolistic and non-transparent use of aid resources (or at least as an elegant manner to spread corruption more evenly). The closer accountability is brought to the beneficiaries, the more likely it is that value for money will be achieved.
- **Facilitate monitoring and evaluation.** Decentralisation makes it possible for both partners to set up effective systems of monitoring, evaluation and feedback, throughout the life cycle of a project. This contrasts with the

current emphasis on "post mortem" evaluations at the end of a project.

Several donor agencies, including SIDA and the British Overseas Development Administration, have recently reinforced their field offices. Yet much more is at stake than the transfer of staff to the field. This type of delegation makes little sense if decision-making procedures, accountability requirements, and staff incentives remain unaltered.

It should also be clear that decentralisation is no panacea. Decentralisation does not automatically lead to more participation or more transparency. Inevitably, central agencies on both sides will retain overall political and financial authority. Their role, however, will shift from one in which central agencies dominate the development cooperation process, to one in which they provide an enabling environment for a variety of relatively autonomous actors.

Promising Reform Attempts

- *Ensuring local participation in programme design.* African governments such as the Gambia, working with the World Bank and others, have adopted an Institutional Environment Assessment (IEA) approach to civil service reform. Using a participatory process, senior and middle level officials diagnose the strengths and weaknesses of their institutional environment, and devise action plans and strategies for the future. The emphasis throughout is on adapting the design of aid programmes to the requirements of local ownership and capacity.
- *Promoting wider involvement in policy dialogue.* In Senegal, efforts to broaden the involvement of non-government actors in policy dialogues with donors have yielded an enormous response. The private sector, for example, has had direct discussions on desirable policies with the World Bank. Refinements are now in progress to better involve the government and other donors in these discussions, and to organise follow-up to such meetings.
- *Decentralising cooperation.* Several African countries (including Uganda and Zimbabwe) and donor agencies are decentralising part of the aid budgets and delivering aid much more directly to the people, for instance, through local districts and NGO's. This new approach to aid delivery may boost the participation of civil society, while reducing the administrative burden on central government.
- *Seeking new performance indicators.* Research is under way, often in a participatory way, to find new ways to measure the impact of "institutional development" programmes, and new tools to promote ownership. The Canadian International Development Agency, for instance, is working on a "responsibility framework" that can be used to help allocate responsibilities in the project cycle to the most appropriate stakeholders.

Use Partnership more Effectively

So far, the benefits of working together in a partnership mode have remained largely untapped. However, if carefully managed, a partnership approach can help in at least three ways to deal with some of the pressures currently affecting development cooperation.

Learn to say "no"

Achieving greater development impact will only be possible if both parties put an end to business-as-usual approaches. This includes a willingness to refuse partnership if the constraints are too binding, and for recipients to choose other partners if necessary. While this option may look unattractive to cash-trapped African countries, donor agencies are increasingly concerned to put their money where it can be used most effectively. Countries that have tried to work out their own policies and priorities offer that guarantee. Learning to say "no" also applies to donor agencies. This will not be easy as long as aid remains tied to foreign policy and agencies are trapped in a disbursement culture. It means assuring that programmes have real constituencies, and that there is sufficient capacity to implement them. It requires greater selectivity in the choice of partners, wider participation in programme design, insistence on clear-cut responsibilities, and a preparedness to withhold assistance.

Agree on conditionalities

The effectiveness of conditionalities could be greatly enhanced if they were agreed upon in a more balanced and participatory way. Rather than imposing conditionalities, donor agencies could create room for an open-ended dialogue with key actors and stakeholders from both the public and private sector. This would make it possible to jointly identify key constraints, risks and opportunities. The end result could be a set of self-imposed and realistic conditionalities.

Define new accountability systems

There can be no partnership without strict financial accountability. But more is at stake than simply balancing the books. The aid sector urgently needs to move away from a commitment and disbursement culture. Sustainable development impact rather than inputs and spending targets have to become the main yardsticks for performance and reward. The content and modalities of this new accountability culture could best be devised in a partnership mode. This involves joint identification of performance criteria, ways of measuring progress and benchmarks upon which to base the release of funds. Possible indicators include the quality of dialogue, levels of participation, development of local capacities, implementation progress, and the sustainability of benefits.

Build Capacity for Partnership

These reforms will not materialise in the absence of a comprehensive effort to increase capacity on both sides of the aid relationship. The problem is that capacity-building remains a rather obscure concept.

Often, what is at stake is not capacity-building, but capacity utilisation and/or retention.

Capacity is not merely a technical problem that can be solved with funds, training, and new management approaches. Poor governance conditions tend also to be a "de-capacitating" force in which there is little room for professionalism, meritocracy and the effective use of skills. The erosion of incentives, including salaries, reinforces the brain drain. Donor inconsistencies compound the problem. Technical cooperation personnel, for instance, continues to displace local expertise rather than building indigenous capacities.

The following priority actions provide a start in building the capacity that is needed to effectively operate in a partnership:

- Paradoxically, the first priority is not to build new institutions, but to dismantle the wide array of ad hoc institutions created to speed up the implementation of aid programmes.
- Involving local actors through a process of "learning by doing" allows them to take the initiative in designing the development programmes that they will implement. And, crucially, it is also the best investment in building recipient capacities to formulate their own development priorities.
- Building new skills and capacities on both sides of the aid relationship is necessary to move from a project to a process approach, including the adoption of new roles. "New-style" projects that emphasise ownership and capacity development will require people with facilitation skills rather than the more traditional "control" approaches that donor agencies currently depend on. This has major implications for new hiring as well as for training and re-deployment of staff. Recipient staff, on the other hand, may need a transition period before they can assume ownership.
- Strengthening local accountability capacity by using local structures such as central and local government bodies, and independent audit bureaux to account for development activities. Strengthening countervailing powers (the press) and supporting transparency - through public hearings on budget policies and the dissemination of evaluations - also shifts the (capacity-building) emphasis to local stakeholders.
- Reinforcing recipient capacity to coordinate aid policies. National Consultative Groups and Round Tables on aid, in their present form, are often adversarial and over-focused on money issues. Their potential as partnership mechanisms, with recipient countries at the centre of the process, is still under-exploited.

This Report

Policy Management Briefs are intended for policy-makers concerned with aspects of development. Drawing from work of ECDPM, its partners, and its associates, the aim is to provide succinct and readable summaries of current issues in the management of development policy. ECDPM is grateful to the following organisations for co-sponsoring its 1994 Round Table on "Partnership in Development Cooperation: Combining Recipient Responsibility with Donor Accountability": the Belgian Administration for Development Cooperation, the Canadian International Development Agency, the Commission of the European Communities - Directorate-General for Development, and the World Bank.

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Getting the Changes Accepted

How realistic and feasible is this reform agenda? It is surely an ambitious menu, involving a radical overhaul of the ground rules under which aid is negotiated and implemented.

At first sight, prospects look grim. Some of the proposals - ownership, delegation of authority, and simplification of procedures - have been around a long time. Limited progress suggests that the aid environment is more resistant to change than we would like. The current political climate offers little relief -- restrictive attitudes prevail at a moment when innovation is most badly needed. Donor control and upwards accountability are the norms of the day. Frustration is growing among aid practitioners, both in head offices and in the field. Defensive attitudes at the recipient side, aimed at safeguarding the status quo, further complicate the task of reformers.

On second analysis, however, some small margins of manoeuvre for effective change can be seen:

- In many developing countries, societies are opening up; non-state actors demand improved governance and participation in development. This creates new opportunities for international cooperation. As "responsible governments" take charge, rigid donor control become less evident.
- Pressures on aid budgets can be healthy. They lead to changed criteria for allocating aid, and more attention to performance, the search for complementarities, and donor concentration.
- Alliances in favour of change are slowly coalescing within both donor and recipient agencies. This process is fuelled by the realisation that without radical changes, the aid sector will become obsolete. Reform-minded people on both sides have responded to this challenge by launching innovative approaches to managing development cooperation resources (see box on page 7).

Three further steps can be taken to accelerate reform. First, probably the best way to reverse the downward aid spiral is to demonstrate to politicians and public opinion that a reformed partnership approach is more effective than donor-driven approaches to aid. This can be done through the use and dissemination of evaluations, lessons of best practice, and cost-benefit analyses of the different approaches.

The second is to change the incentive and evaluation culture within the aid sector so that premiums are attached to the sustainable development impact of an activity, rather than to how money is mobilised and

spent. Furthermore, accountability regimes should reflect the high-risk nature of development. This requires that the limits of donor staff accountability are recognised. They can't be held responsible for the end result of an aid project since this creates risk aversion, and furthermore it dilutes recipient responsibility. Constituencies at home should also accept that delays and even failure are facts of life in the aid sector.

Third, clear and unambiguous support from political leaders on both sides of the aid relationship is necessary. In official discourse, there is no shortage of rhetoric on the need for reform. But words are cheap. The real test of political will is to implement what is already known, to apply the lessons of the last thirty years and more, and to reduce the gap between theory and reality in the field.