

The Reality of Aid Network

The Reality of Aid Network exists to promote national and international policies that contribute to new and effective strategies for poverty eradication built on solidarity and equity. Established in 1993, the Reality of Aid is a collaborative, non-profit initiative, involving non-governmental organisations from North and South.

The Reality of Aid publishes regular, reliable reports on international development cooperation and the extent to which governments, North and South, address the extreme inequalities of income and the structural, social and political injustices that entrench people in poverty.

The network has been publishing reports and Reality Checks on aid and development cooperation since 1993.

These reports provide a critical analysis of how governments address the issues of poverty and whether aid and development cooperation policies are put into practice.

The Reality of Aid Project Management Committee is made up of regional representatives of all participating agencies.

REALITY OF AID NETWORK Management Committee (2010)

Chairperson/representing Asia/Pacific CSO members

Antonio Tujan, Jr.

IBON Foundation and

Reality of Aid Asia/Pacific

3/f IBON Center

114 Timog Avenue, Quezon City 1103

Philippines

Telefax: +632 927 6981

atujan@ibon.org

Vice Chairperson/representing Non-OECD country CSO partners

Brian Tomlinson

Canadian Council for International Cooperation (CCIC)

1 Nicolas Street Suite 300, Ottawa

Ontario, Canada K1N 7B7

Fax: +1 613 241 5302

Tel: +1 613 241 7007

btomlinson@ccic.ca

Representing African CSO members

Vitalice Meja

Reality of Aid Africa

Kirichwa Road, Kilimani

P.O. Box: 5252-00100

Nairobi, Kenya

Tel: + 254 20 3861590 / + 254 20 2494795

roafrica-secretariat@realityofaid.org

Representing Latin American CSO partners

Ruben Fernandez

Asociación Latinoamericana de Organizaciones de Promoción al Desarrollo, A.C. (ALOP)

Calle 55 No. 41 - 10, Medellin-Colombia

Tel: +57 4 2166822

presidencia@region.org.co

Representing European Country CSO partners

Bodo Ellmers

European Network on Debt and Development (EURODAD)

Rue d'Edimbourg 18-26

1050 Brussels, Belgium

Tel: +322 894 4645

bellmers@eurodad.org

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Overall editorial control of the Reality of Aid 2010 Report lies with the Reality of Aid Management Committee, but the views expressed in the reports do not necessarily reflect the views of the Management Committee, or of IBON Foundation that published this Report.

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Preface

The aid effectiveness agenda for reform of aid quality has evolved progressively since commitments were made for donor harmonisation in the first High Level Forum in 2002 in Rome. A more comprehensive approach was adopted in the Paris Declaration at the second High Level Forum in 2005, but these reforms remained limited to technocratic approaches for efficiency in aid management and delivery.

Even then Reality of Aid reports challenged the reform agenda, calling for an end to conditionality in its 2002 Report and proposing a comprehensive range of reforms in aid governance in its 2004 Report. Towards the 2008 High Level Forum in Accra, an even broader platform of organizations both from rich and poor countries called for a more thoroughgoing reform of development cooperation. Civil society organisations (CSOs) at the Accra Forum made a strong call for development effectiveness as a new agenda for reform that went deeper and way beyond the management parameters of aid effectiveness.

The Accra High Level Forum responded to the proposals and challenges presented by CSOs, developing countries and other aid actors, resulting in the Accra Agenda for Action (AAA). The AAA deepened to some degree the understanding of aid effectiveness and broadened its scope to include civil society and parliamentarians, besides other actors, as well as to encompass South-South cooperation with its unique approaches and contributions to development.

But a thoroughgoing reform of the development cooperation system remains largely incomplete and undefined. This 2010 Reality of Aid Report demonstrates that implementation of aid effectiveness reforms for management and delivery under the Paris Declaration and the Accra Agenda for Action are far from optimal at country level. Furthermore, the severe fragmentation of cooperation efforts and the dichotomies of North-South and South-South cooperation perpetuate ineffectiveness and anti-development power relationships. A more comprehensive and equitable approach to development cooperation is urgently required. All stakeholders must embrace development effectiveness as a “third reform agenda” focusing on results to achieve the goals of poverty reduction and human rights-based development. In doing so, these reforms should address the urgency of policy coherence for development, with a renewed development cooperation architecture that promotes the centrality of the poor and their developing countries in the aid system through equality and mutuality in development cooperation.

The fourth High Level Forum (HLF4) in Busan, South Korea in 2011 presents a unique opportunity for these reforms. But the objectives for HLF4 will have to reach beyond taking stock of the achievements and shortcomings of the Paris/Accra aid effectiveness reforms and the need to press forward on these earlier reforms. The challenge and opportunity for Busan is a new political agreement, a “Busan Declaration”, which establishes a development effectiveness framework for aid effectiveness reform and sets the path for the construction of an equitable, inclusive and progressive architecture for development cooperation, possibly towards a new United Nations (UN) Convention on Development Effectiveness.

This 2010 Reality of Aid Report articulates Southern and Northern civil society perspectives through the lens of development effectiveness. It draws from the rich experience of CSOs in 30 countries, revealing the problems and potentials of remaining in narrow aid effectiveness approaches, and pointing to the needed transformation in development cooperation to achieve poverty reduction, human rights, social justice and sustainable development.

The Reality of Aid Network focuses on those aspects of development effectiveness relevant to achieving genuine aid effectiveness, while acknowledging that the totality of development in all its economic, political, social and cultural aspects is expansive. However development cooperation and assistance do play catalytic roles in hastening development, and in certain countries can be central to reducing poverty and achieving development goals.

This Report seeks to provide rigorous analysis for challenging accustomed notions in aid and development cooperation, as well as suggest practical measures for moving forward on urgent reforms. Its proposals are addressed to government and non-government stakeholders at international, national and even community levels. We hope it helps guide what will certainly be a complex process as well as stimulate thinking in further creative and productive directions.

Antonio Tujan, Jr.

Chairperson

Management Committee

Reality of Aid Network