



**EU Donors under Women’s Watch –
WIDE Checks up on
Gender Equality and Women’s Rights
in the Aid Effectiveness Agenda
on the Road to Busan**

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This policy brief summarises the most important findings of the mapping study based on women's organisations' voices carried out by WIDE on EU donors' compliance with their ownership and mutual accountability commitments made in the Paris Declaration and Accra Agenda for Action. WIDE has focused on the EU's intentions and actions as donors based on the example of five Member States: Austria, Netherlands, Poland, Spain and the UK. The brief highlights how gender equality and women's rights have been addressed in the changing aid modalities context; it points out to the gaps, and suggests ways for improvement.



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Introduction

The aid effectiveness process launched with the Paris Declaration in 2005 and accelerated further with the Accra Agenda for Action in 2008 currently defines the relationship between donors and developing countries. It also determines how aid is being delivered. Paris outcomes motivated the major reforms with most of the European donors. It has been a very technical process but at the same time also a political one.

With The Fourth High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness (HLF-4) taking place in Busan from 29 November to 1 December 2011, the Paris and Accra agenda will officially come to a close. HLF-4 has a mandate to assess implementation of the aid effectiveness process. Its outcome is expected to be informed by evidence and will determine whether the new agreement broadens Paris and Accra and moves towards development effectiveness, or aid architecture reforms are put on hold.

What progress has been made against the Paris Declaration indicators and the Accra principles is not yet clear and differs depending on the donor, country and the sector. As donors were not obliged to report on the quality of aid provided, it has been extremely difficult for civil society to follow the process. As usual, it has been even more complex for gender equality and women's rights.

This briefing paper is the summary of the mapping report which was WIDE's first attempt to take stock of EU donors' current levels of implementation of the ownership and mutual accountability principles. It is also a direct response to the gender-blind nature of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation

and Development's (OECD) evaluation and monitoring process, which is voluntary and has a predominant focus on the partner countries.

Over the past five years, women's organisations and gender advocates have been involved in the aid effectiveness process, yet are not signatories to the Paris Declaration nor to the Accra Agenda for Action and question the OECD leadership as not being democratic and inclusive enough. Women's organisations acknowledged that the Paris and Accra principles opened up opportunities for women, just as they have entailed risk. There is no doubt that new aid architecture has had a huge impact on gender equality. Women's organisations strived to monitor its implementation and hold donors to account. This briefing paper summarises their voices, which are further elaborated in the full version of the report.

PART I: EVIDENCE

Key findings: gains and challenges for gender equality and women's rights

1. Commitment to gender equality and women's empowerment within development policies of the EU Members States has become more explicit, yet budgets are still gender blind and insufficient.

EU Member States are credited for strengthening the gender equality and women's empowerment approach in their policy framework for all aid coordination mechanisms: from planning to delivery, monitoring and evaluation. This is the biggest advancement for women brought about by the Paris and Accra agendas.

Yet, although there has been progress at the policy level, this has been nuanced by the serious lack of policy coherence, earmarked budgets, weak, genuine mainstreaming and sufficient results for women on the ground. It is no secret that when there is no budget, there is no implementation. Given the current political climate and the fact that there is very little chance of aid increasing, putting gender policies into practice will present a continuing challenge for partner countries and women's organisations.

2. The approach to gender equality remains narrow in the development programmes of EU donors, which fail to analyse the gender impact of macro-economic policies and address power relations between women and men in real country and development contexts.

EU donors have committed to put women at the heart of development, but in reality women are most of the time addressed in specific, ascribed gender roles including mothers (priority on sexual reproductive health), girls (priority on education) or conflict situations (priority on UN Resolution 1325). There is still little support for women's voice, economic empowerment, political leadership and participation of the women's movement.

3. The participation of women's organisations and gender advocates in policymaking processes is not meaningful enough in Europe and seriously shrinking in the South.

The Paris Declaration and Accra Agenda for Action raised the profile of democratic ownership, yet EU donors have not progressed it enough. After 2005, new consultation spaces and instruments have emerged, yet from the perspective of women's organisations in the EU, this has

been more a strategy for governments to improve their credibility than a meaningful process of exchange.

EU donors' direct engagement with civil society and women's organisations in partner countries has been shrinking, as the priority is on government-to-government support. Women's organisations are generally not consulted when the programme documents or Country Strategy Papers are being developed. The absence of capacity-building opportunities has also made it difficult to engage with complex issues such as macro-economic policies or budget/sector support.

Women's organisations everywhere face increasingly serious funding challenges and, in the South, legal barriers that hold back their engagement in holding their governments to account.

4. Progress is less consistent on mutual accountability, while transparency and the value-for-money approach are on the rise.

The emerging picture from the aid effectiveness evaluations is that donors' accountability towards the government is slowly improving, while for the citizens generally remains weak.¹

WIDE is seriously concerned about the growing power of the value-for-money approach. First, because it is targeted at the tax payers in the donor countries, not the development owners from the South; second, because it increases the risk of reducing activities where progress is slow and difficult

¹ Policy and Operations Evaluation Department (IOB) Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Ahead of the Crowd?" *The process of implementing the Paris Declaration Case study: the Netherlands*. Report produced for the synthesis of the results of the first phase of the evaluation of the Paris Declaration, 27 February 2008.

to demonstrate – such as gender equality and women’s rights.

5. EU donors lack the capacity to track funding for gender equality within the new aid modalities, and there is not enough information or primary data on budgets, implementation and the impact on the situation of women on the ground.

Since 2005, transparency has improved, yet still there are hardly any gender-disaggregated data or regular reporting practices on the impact and outcomes of aid. The gender marker, used by most of the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC), is a step in the right direction, yet not enough to provide comprehensive information on budget allocations (who is getting the money and for what) and without any reference to the impact or quality of the process.

There has been serious concern among women’s organisations, but also among the donors themselves, that gender equality and women’s rights are losing ground when channelling programme aid in line with the Paris Declaration. The challenge is about demonstrating causal and quantifiable links between inputs and practical results in the complex macro-interventions that engage other donors that provide the budgets. The methodology developed so far falls short of responding to the new modalities that are taking over. This is the case for both missing indicators and their actual application to the complexity of programme and sector support.

6. The current political climate in EU Member States is unfavourable to push for progressive commitments during HLF-4.

Since the Paris Declaration in 2005, many EU governments have changed. In some cases, i.e. Spain, this has had a very positive impact on the approach to gender equality. As for the

others, be it the UK or the Netherlands, the shift is still too recent, yet women’s organisations already feel that space for genuine consultation has narrowed and previous ambitious policies are being replaced.

Although the Paris Declaration facilitated major changes within development cooperation throughout the EU, some Member States are still far behind in implementing their commitments. Some, such as Poland and other new EU Member States, are only starting the adjustment process now. Others, i.e. Austria, are done with the initial steps, but there is still a long way to go.

HLF-4 comes at a time when the conservative governments in Europe are on the rise. The focus on value for money, the security agenda and economic growth, as has been recently demonstrated in the context of European Commission- and EU-level debates on the Green Paper on European Development Policy in support of inclusive growth.² It is highly unlikely that the EU will be leading on HLF-4, as was the case in Accra. The WIDE network is concerned that these trends could undermine support to gender equality, human rights, democratic ownership and poverty eradication. Therefore, it requires a strong advocacy approach from us and a search for new allies to make HLF-4 a meaningful space.

PART TWO: RECOMMENDATIONS

The Busan outcome will be crucial for women, and women’s organisations are joining their advocacy efforts to ensure that the agenda progresses. Nevertheless, as WIDE has

²http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/how/public-consultations/5241_en.htm.

mapped, **Paris and Accra are unfinished business**, as there are still very serious gaps in implementation of the commitments already made. That is why WIDE calls on EU donors to ensure that gender equality and women's rights feature strongly as goals in themselves and as horizontal issues in the outcome document of the High Level Forum in Busan.

1. EU donors must translate their rhetoric into practice by increasing budgets to implement the gender equality commitments they have made.

EU donors will demonstrate real commitment to the promotion of gender equality and women's rights only if it is implemented with adequate resources. Therefore, Member States' financial frameworks must show an increase in Official Development Assistance (ODA) and clear budget allocations for the implementation of national gender strategies and programmes, as well as regional commitments such as the EU Plan of Action on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in Development (2010-2015).

WIDE calls on EU donors to follow the example of the Netherlands, which usually allocates 20 per cent of its overall aid budget to gender equality and women's empowerment – a big share of that directly to strengthen the women's movement. It is also crucial to move forward with a twin-track approach and combine actions targeted specifically at women with mainstreaming, particularly in the context of programme support. EU donors should always integrate a gender-responsive budgeting tool when channelling programme aid in line with the Paris Declaration.

2. EU donors need to move their approach to gender equality forward by addressing the power relations and impact of macro-

economic and sector policies on the lives of women on the ground.

WIDE calls on EU donors to follow the positive example of Spain and progress from an approach of women in development to one of gender and development. Women need to be addressed in the complex matrix of social, productive and political roles; therefore, it is crucial that gender in development can become both a thematic priority and a cross-cutting issue in development cooperation efforts. EU donors should strengthen their gender impact assessments on internal and external policies and pay more attention to women's rights in the macro-economic context – for example, the impact of the economic crisis. It is important that donors take note of this while designing their gender strategies and channelling specific funds to women's organisations with the aim of tackling these concerns.

3. EU donors have to carry out regular, inclusive and meaningful policy dialogues on development cooperation and support the necessary conditions, including funding, for women's organisations so that they can fully exercise their role in the development process.

EU donors must stop instrumentalising consultations and complete government-to-government dialogues with more political will to directly engage with women's organisations in partner countries in the South.

WIDE calls on EU donors to create meaningful political spaces at all stages of the development process (planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation) by including the voices of women and girls from diverse backgrounds and setting up clear rules and instruments for participation.

EU donors have to strengthen the enabling environment for women's organisations as development actors in their own right through earmarked and increased funds and simplified access to them. There must also be a significant increase in investing in women's rights organisations and movements by strengthening the contribution to funds managed by women's organisations. EU donors must strive for substantial, predictable and multi-year core funding so that women's organisations can eventually play meaningful watchdog, advocacy and support roles in both Europe and countries in the South.

4. EU donors must deliver on the principle of mutual accountability founded on strong national accountability mechanisms and political will to support the participation of national women's machineries – women's organisations in particular.

The foundation must be a strong national accountability mechanism (both in the EU and partner countries) backed up by political will to engage and support the participation of national women's machineries, and particularly women's organisations and parliamentarians, to ensure the quality of the process.

EU donors must continuously draw their legitimacy from their constituencies in Europe and countries in the South. This means engagement and support for capacity development, particularly for civil society and women's organisations, so that they can monitor governments and hold them to account. WIDE encourages EU countries to follow the positive example of the UK, which has committed to set aside an amount equivalent to at least 5 per cent of its budget support funds to strengthen accountability mechanisms in partner countries. A similar

modality should also be introduced throughout Europe.

5. Donors need to make more and better information available on policies and budgets, implementation of aid architecture reform and the gender impact of development cooperation on the lives of poor people.

WIDE maintains that transparency is the first step towards accountability and that it is governments' responsibility to ensure that civil society is kept informed to be able to monitor and engage with the development effectiveness process.

Consequently, EU donors need to accelerate:

- efforts to provide easily accessible and user-friendly information – for example, an e-database format, such as IATI, that assesses the gender equality and human rights focus throughout all interventions;
- reporting on the actions taken to implement aid architecture reform. WIDE calls on EU Member States to take on the indicators developed by GENDERNET³; and
- capacity to manage the results and track the gender impact at country level. This translates into completing results frameworks for the strategies and programmes, acquisition and improvement of sex-disaggregated data, and improving and engendering monitoring and evaluation. It must also be explicitly stated how the data for indicators are being generated so

³ GENDERNET, DAC guiding principles for aid effectiveness, gender equality and women's empowerment, 2008.

that women's organisations can both generate the data and monitor the indicators. Only in this way can progress be measured accurately.

6. EU Member States must meet their aid budget pledges and Paris and Accra commitments together with international and regional gender and development obligations such as CEDAW, the Beijing Platform for Action and the EU Gender Action Plan on Development.

WIDE calls on EU donors to stop cutting aid and take a responsible stand to deliver the promised ODA of 0.7% of GNI (for the EU-15) and 0.33% of GNI (for the 12 new EU Member States) by 2015.

EU donors need to raise the profile of CEDAW and the Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA) to guide their development cooperation for gender equality and women's rights. The EU must also make an effort to coordinate its actions on implementation of the Paris and Accra agendas as well as its commitments from the EU Plan of Action on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in Development. The EU should stop counting only on the performance of leading countries, since it is the performance of all Member States which matters, and drive positive change for women on the ground.

The EU must take a joint stand for a progressive, forward-looking and human rights-based politically binding agreement in Busan!

The success of HLF-4 in Busan will partly depend on the commitment of the EU to proactively engage in the negotiation process and lead by example - particularly with regard to gender equality and human rights as cornerstones for development. Therefore, WIDE calls on EU donors to show more political will and interest to ensure an ambitious and binding agreement in Busan that deepens the current commitments and goes beyond aid towards human rights based development effectiveness approach.

- **The EU must provide the political leadership to ensure that gender equality is in the centre of the Busan reform** to fulfill its commitment to positively influence the outcomes of the summit on aid effectiveness with regard to gender equality and women's empowerment¹.
- **The EU must notably accelerate the implementation of the *EU Plan of Action on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in Development* and put forward a concrete proposal in terms of clear actions and budgets to advance gender equality agenda ahead and post Busan.**
- **The EU Commission and Member States must politically support and engage with high level political event on gender equality to be held in Busan.**
- **The EU must take stock of the available evidence, including independent research from civil society.** A number of useful resources already exist such as reports, case studies and others which also highlight recommendations for achieving progress.

Key Demands from Women's Rights Organizations and Gender Equality Advocates To the Fourth High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness (Busan, Korea, 2011) and the Development Cooperation Forum (2012)

WIDE Network is a member of the BetterAid Coordination Group and engages with the process leading up to the Busan Forum together with other feminist, gender equality and women's rights activists and organizations

The Key Demands document reaffirms our vision for transformation and offers concrete recommendations for improving the international development cooperation architecture in Busan.

You can learn more about Women's Organisations' mobilising for Busan and read the Key Demands document on: <http://www.betteraid.org/>