

Citizens' participation at the centre of the aid agenda



World Vision's call to the Fourth High-Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness

Key messages

- World Vision believes that the engagement of citizens and communities is critical to aid effectiveness.
- Incorporating the engagement of citizens could lead to major progress on the Paris Declaration principles of Ownership and Mutual Accountability.
- World Vision calls on international decision makers to
 1. include citizens in the planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of development initiatives to enhance mutual accountability.
 2. apply high standards of transparency of aid flows to all development actors to allow citizens' scrutiny. Information on aid allocations should be accessible to citizens.

Background

Representatives from governments, partner countries, the private sector, international institutions and civil society organisations will gather for the Fourth High-Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness (HLF4) in Busan, South Korea on 29 November – 1 December 2011.

Commitments to improve and operationalise aid effectiveness have been made both in Paris in 2005 and in Accra in 2008. Progress has, however, been patchy, especially on the donors' side. HLF4 is the time to galvanise governments to take stock of what has been achieved so far, and to work out how to overcome challenges in a rapidly changing environment.

For World Vision, effective aid is central to achieving well-being for the world's poorest and most vulnerable children and their communities.

The engagement of the intended beneficiaries of aid, citizens in resource-poor countries, is critical in ensuring that aid is effective. Only if citizens are part of the chain of accountability can we ensure that aid resources will be effective, achieve long-term impact and produce sustainable results.

In Accra, World Vision called for greater inclusion of citizens' voices at the country level to improve local-level accountability and, ultimately, the effectiveness of aid and other financial resources. Although the Accra Agenda for Action has resulted in a stronger focus on inclusive partnerships, to date the key role of citizens is still missing in the implementation and monitoring of aid budgets and programmes.

HLF4 will present an opportunity for the international community to mobilise political commitments to move the aid effectiveness agenda forward and translate that into implementation plans and mechanisms to assess progress.

In Busan, World Vision will urge international decision makers to take the following actions:

1 Include citizens in the planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of development initiatives to enhance mutual accountability.

The first principle of the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness is ownership. World Vision believes that for this principle to yield the maximum impact for development, we need to engage not only governments and local authorities but also parliaments, civil society organisations and local community representatives. In far too many countries, there is not a conducive environment for the effective participation of communities. World Vision's experience with local-level participatory approaches has proven that involving citizens and communities in policy making leads to sustainable development results.

The engagement of citizens is a critical part of the accountability chain, ensuring that aid gets where it is supposed to go (both in terms of funds and reaching the most vulnerable), providing feedback on obstacles and success in order to improve the quality of aid delivery and build community resilience, and promoting long-term sustainability.

Children influence Zambia's education and health budget

As a child-focused organisation, World Vision is particularly aware that the participation of children is critical to ensuring that aid addresses their needs. World Vision's Vulnerable Child Advocacy aims at influencing policies and practices by holding governments accountable for providing quality services for this group. Policy influence entails engagement in policy formulation and review as well as policy implementation processes at the community and national levels.

One example of this approach occurred when the Zambian Ministry of Finance and Planning called for 2009 budget proposals. World Vision Zambia and other NGOs are part of a loose network, called the Child Budget Network (CBN), which had noticed that previous budgets had not met the African Union commitments to raise education funding to 20 per cent

of the budget and health to 15 per cent. The CBN advocates for the effective and efficient allocation and usage of resources in the national budget to advance the rights of Zambian children in general and those of orphans and vulnerable children (OVC) in particular. The CBN believes that a good budget is one that strives to protect the rights of the country's children. Children need to be adequately provided for in the budget for the simple reason that they are inherently vulnerable. The CBN held numerous community and consultative meetings to document the needs of Zambian children, especially in the social protection area. This groundswell was at least one factor in the Zambian government's raising its education allocation from 15.4 per cent to 17.2 per cent in the 2009 national budget, making a small increase in the health budget and placing increased emphasis on child-related policies.

Mutual accountability – donors and developing countries being held accountable for the results they achieve, to each other, to their parliaments and to the public – is one of the principles of the Paris Declaration, and monitoring systems are an important part of any accountability process. According to the preliminary findings from the Paris Monitoring Survey, mutual accountability has seen the least amount of progress of all the aid-effectiveness principles.

World Vision recommends that governments at HLF4

- commit to establishing accountability mechanisms and frameworks at the national level, which include representation of all development actors, including parliamentarians and local civil-society organisations. These frameworks should draw on the evidence from local communities, incorporating their engagement.

2 Apply high standards of transparency of aid flows to all development actors to allow citizens' scrutiny.

Commitment to transparency and access to information on the use of aid and domestic resources is paramount to improving mutual and domestic accountability. However, provision of timely and transparent information on aid flows has been a growing concern. World Vision is particularly concerned that information should be provided in ways that are accessible and understandable to communities (in local languages, through media, including radio, taking literacy levels into account). Mechanisms should also be provided to lodge questions and disputes.

World Vision recommends that

- governments at HLF4 adopt transparency as a principle in the outcome document. We particularly encourage outreach to emerging donors in order to build international consensus around this issue.
- all governments sign up to the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI) so information on aid budgets is available to citizens in both donor and recipient countries.

Mutual accountability and transparency in health

Aid to the health sector is significant and complex, with a multitude of stakeholders and a proliferation of funding streams and modalities. As aid for health exemplifies many of the challenges for aid effectiveness more broadly, the sector has been used in recent years as a 'tracer' and a subject of particular focus by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Working Party on Aid Effectiveness. At the same time, the recent UN Commission on Information and Accountability for Women's and Children's Health provides a practical illustration of an attempt to improve transparency of aid and ensure citizen participation in a global process from the beginning. This time-bound Commission was established in early 2011 to develop a framework for global reporting, oversight and accountability for the US\$40 billion total pledged in September 2010 to the UN Secretary-General's Global Strategy for Women's and Children's Health.

Tasked with developing this accountability framework, the Commission embraced the key principles of the Global Strategy, based on the following principles of aid effectiveness:

- focusing on national leadership and ownership of results
- strengthening country capacity to monitor and evaluate
- reducing the reporting burden by aligning efforts with country systems used to monitor and evaluate national health strategies
- strengthening and harmonising existing international mechanisms to track progress on commitments

Made up of 30 commissioners from government, multilateral organisations, civil society (including World Vision International's president) and the private sector, the Commission made 10 recommendations which, if fully implemented, would allow the greater tracking of promised resources and expected results on Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) 4 and 5, saving millions of women's and children's lives by 2015. The centrality of citizens to the accountability process can be seen in the final report of the Commission, which states, 'We have proposed a framework that places accountability soundly where it belongs: at the country level, with the active engagement of national governments, parliaments, communities, and civil society.'¹ A pledge by all stakeholders to greater transparency of information on commitments, resources and results achieved is one of the Commission's 10 central recommendations. Dedicated technical and financial resources will need to be pledged by donor governments to ensure that the strengthening of often weak national systems of accountability and tracking for health takes place at the rate required to meet these MDGs.

World Vision has been closely involved in the development of the Global Strategy for Women's and Children's Health and the resulting Commission on Information and Accountability, and has worked hard to ensure the inclusion of citizen engagement and transparency within these processes. Now World Vision's focus will shift to the implementation of the Commission's recommendations, including the strengthening of national accountability mechanisms that are 'transparent' and 'inclusive of all stakeholders'. Efforts will continue in particular to ensure the inclusion of citizens in accountability mechanisms, and to call for a feedback loop that matches transparency of information from the national to the local level, with the aggregation of feedback and use of data from the local to the national level.

1. Final Report Commission on Information and Accountability for Women's and Children's Health http://www.everywomaneverychild.org/userfiles/Final_EN_Web.pdf.