



Primer 12: The United Nations Development Cooperation Forum Through a Women's Rights Lens

DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION AND WOMEN'S RIGHTS SERIES

By Julia Miller and Anne Schoenstein

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Association For Women's Rights In Development

ABOUT THE SERIES

DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION AND WOMEN'S RIGHTS

The purpose of this series is to share critical information and analysis with women's rights and gender equality advocates about the development cooperation system that emerged with the Paris Declaration and the Accra Agenda for Action. The system is now taking new forms after the 4th High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness (HLF-4) and with the Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation. In 2013, we are broadening the series to also inform about development cooperation debates and processes with the United Nations.

With these primers we aim to encourage women's rights and other civil society organizations to deepen their engagement—or join in the process—of calling for inclusive, sustainable, and just development for all and for development cooperation grounded in the framework of human rights with an integrated gender perspective.

Primer No. 1: An Overview of the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness and the New Aid Modalities

Primer No. 2: Key Official Bodies Related to the Implementation of the Paris Declaration

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Primer No.11: A Feminist Perspective on the Busan 4th High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness and its Outcomes

Primer No. 12: The United Nations Development Cooperation Forum Through a Women's Rights Lens

Primer 12 provides an overview of the UN Development Cooperation Forum (DCF), focusing on the DCF origins, focus to date and strategic plans for the future, while emphasizing the importance of the DCF for women's rights and gender equality advocates.

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The Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID) is an international feminist, membership organization committed to achieving gender equality, sustainable development and women's human rights. AWID's mission is to strengthen the voice, impact, and influence of women's rights advocates, organizations, and movements internationally to effectively advance the rights of women.

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Acronyms

AAA	Accra Agenda for Action
AWID	Association for Women's Rights in Development
BPfA	Beijing Platform for Action
BP	Busan Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CSO	Civil Society Organization
CPDE	CSO Partnership for Development Effectiveness
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
DAWN	Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era
DCF	United Nations Development Cooperation Forum
ECOSOC	Economic and Social Council of the United Nations
ESCR	Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
FfD	Financing for Development
GPEDC	Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation
G20	Group of Twenty
HLF 1 / 2 / 3 / 4	High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness 1, 2, 3, and 4
IADGs	Internationally Agreed Development Goals
LDC	Least Developed Country
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
ODA	Official Development Assistance
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
PD	Paris Declaration
SSC	South-South Cooperation
UN	United Nations
UNDESA	United Nations Department for Economic and Social Affairs
UN Women	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
VPD	Vienna Policy Dialogue

INTRODUCTION: Challenging the Aid Effectiveness Paradigm and Influencing Development Cooperation

Seeking to reform and respond to systemic changes and problems within the development landscape, the World Summit in 2005 mandated the creation of a new entity within the United Nations (UN), called the United Nations Development Cooperation Forum (DCF). Development and development cooperation are debated comprehensively at the UN, so the introduction of this new space that intended to go beyond the aid and development effectiveness paradigm — that is, the framing used in the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) — was a welcomed addition.

The DCF was set up to review economic and social development as well as international development goals. It provides a space for dialogue that is open, inclusive, multi-stakeholder, and transparent. Also, the role of the DCF is to ensure policy coherence and address structural barriers to development, which opens a space for including long-term demands from women's rights organizations.

Many women's rights organisations consider the UN as the only legitimate space for debates on development and development cooperation, as it is inclusive in comparison to other, self-selected spaces, and is grounded in the framework of human rights. Next to the development debates at the DCF, the UN currently also discusses a post-2015 development agenda, which will succeed the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). This development framework will be decided upon at the UN, and thus the DCF is an important space from which to engage with that process.

It is essential for all the different spaces and fora dealing with development and development cooperation to ensure synergies and to not duplicate efforts. It is also crucial for women's rights organizations and other civil society organizations (CSOs) to collectively push their demands and visions of development in the few inter-governmental and multi-stakeholder spaces that present some openings to receive and be influenced by these demands.

Events and Frameworks Alongside the DCF

In 2005, CSOs bore witness to the signing of the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness (PD),¹ an agreement to reform aid delivery and management in order to strengthen its impact and effectiveness. The PD was adopted in March 2005 at the 2nd High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness (HLF-2) organized by the OECD-DAC. The first High Level Forum (HLF-1) was held in Rome in 2003 where the principles for aid effectiveness were outlined in a concrete declaration for the first time.² While many CSOs acknowledge the importance of the five principles (ownership, alignment, harmonization, mutual accountability, and management for results)³ contained in the PD, and the need to reform development cooperation relationships and practices, CSOs are not signatories to the PD and they have been critical of this OECD-led process, advocating for it to move under the UN.

In 2008, and as a result of the 3rd High Level Forum (HLF-3) in Accra, Ghana, the Accra Agenda for Action (AAA) was endorsed to guide the implementation of the PD. The efforts by civil society actors, especially from women's rights organizations and gender equality advocates in several regional and international consultations,⁴ resulted in formal recognition of gender equality, human rights, and environmental sustainability in the final document. The AAA recognizes these elements as "...cornerstones for achieving enduring impact" (Accra Agenda for Action para. 3) and also recognizes the need to improve information systems, including through the disaggregation of data by sex (Accra Agenda for Action para. 23.a), albeit only "when appropriate."⁵ Women's rights organizations and other CSOs have also been strongly advocating for a shift from aid effectiveness to development effectiveness.⁶ That is to say, there is a need to move beyond technical aspects of aid delivery to a more holistic approach that encompasses the impact of the actions of development actors on all peoples' lives, and examines the root causes and symptoms of poverty, inequality—especially gender inequality—marginalization, and injustice.

The PD and the AAA were the agreements in place concerning the impact and effectiveness of aid and the relationship between developing and developed countries until the 4th High Level Forum (HLF-4) in Busan, South Korea, 2011. Women's rights organizations have long mobilized around the aid effectiveness agenda and, together with other CSOs, they influenced the HLF-4 process and outcomes. HLF-4 reached out to a diverse range of development stakeholders, including traditional and emerging donor governments, the private sector, parliamentarians, and civil society, including women's rights organizations. The conference resulted in the final document, the Busan Partnership⁷ for Effective Development Cooperation (BP), outlining principles, commitments, and actions for effective cooperation in support of international development. The diversity of actors at HLF-4, including CSOs, became part of the new OECD-UNDP supported body—the Global Partnership⁸ for Effective Development Cooperation (GPEDC)—to follow-up on development cooperation commitments agreed upon in this aid effectiveness process, and to support implementation.⁹

Overall

To be considered effective for women's rights and gender equality, development cooperation processes and policies must be aligned with international and regional agreements on human rights and gender equality, including the Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA) and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ESCR), and other conventions that frame legal obligations of governments regarding issues of development, human rights, gender equality, and environmental sustainability. While the PD, AAA and the BP¹⁰ remain voluntary agreements, international binding treaties endorsed by governments in the last decades must be the framework for development policies and practices. All governments should be held accountable for these commitments using human rights frameworks also within the development cooperation agenda, and the DCF is a forum where civil society and others can remind governments and all development stakeholders of these agreements.

1. Getting to Know the Development Cooperation Forum

1.1 The DCF History and Mandate

Launched as a response to concerns related to achieving sustainable development, the DCF is a multi-stakeholder body mandated by the UN General Assembly to review economic and social development as well as international development goals (Development Cooperation Forum).

The process that led to the creation of the DCF in 2007 had its origins in discussions held during the World Summit in 2005, which identified a number of threats to sustainable development and human rights that resulted in slow and uneven progress towards poverty eradication and the realization of other development goals (Johannesburg Summit, 2002). Most notably, the global context for development cooperation was fragile, dealing with multiple situations of conflict and insecurity, and issues around development and human rights. The Resolution from the General Assembly recognized that it was urgent to address the root causes of these systemic problems, building consensus among different stakeholders, and implementing concrete actions with resolve and determination (Johannesburg Summit, 2).

One of the ways the General Assembly sought to do this was by reaffirming and strengthening the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), which is the UN arm tasked with facilitating international cooperation on standards-making and problem-solving in economic and social issues. The General Assembly “reiterate[ed] that the Economic and Social Council should continue to strengthen its role as the central mechanism for system-wide coordination and thus promote the integrated and coordinated implementation of and follow-up to the outcomes of the major United Nations conferences in the economic, social and related fields” (Johannesburg Summit, 2). In order to do this, the General Assembly resolved to create a biennial Development Cooperation Forum (DCF) as one of the principal functions of ECOSOC. The DCF was welcomed as a high level entity with the potential to set standards for development cooperation and work in synergy with other stakeholders and arms of the UN, such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) (ECOSOC 2007). Dealing with threats and challenges to development that are still prevalent today, the DCF discusses and debates issues that are both normative—that is, discussions of standards and descriptive meanings of the development issues at hand—and technical, which are related to development cooperation and development more broadly.

In preparation for creating the mandate of the DCF, ECOSOC recognized that it would need to go beyond the aid effectiveness agenda as the focus. “A central point in discussions was a concern that it should be recognised that the DCF should cover the full range of development cooperation issues and avoid being exclusively concerned with aid issues and issues of accountability within the aid system” (Burall and Graves, 3). “...It was proposed that besides focusing on progress in aid effectiveness and commitments, the Forum would also address structural and institutional logjams that hold back development” (ECOSOC 2007, 4).

Distinct in its identity as part of ECOSOC, the DCF’s official mandate focuses on three concrete objectives:

- Review trends in international development cooperation, including strategies, policies and financing;
- Promote greater coherence among the development activities of different development partners;
- Strengthen the normative and operational link in the work of the UN (ECOSOC 2012b).

As part of its mandate, the DCF, anchored in the global partnership for development set out in the Millennium Declaration, the Monterrey Consensus and the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation, works to enhance the implementation of the internationally agreed development goals (IADGs),¹¹ and promotes dialogue to find effective ways for their realization (ECOSOC 2007). The DCF is also “entrusted with identifying gaps and obstacles in international development cooperation and providing practical policy recommendations to overcome them” (ECOSOC 2012f, 4).

Box 1

Millennium Declaration¹² and MDGs: Following the Millennium Summit held by the UN in 2000 and its declaration that affirmed, among others, that all members of the UN “respect fully and uphold the Universal Declaration of Human Rights...[and] strive for the full protection and promotion in all countries of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights for all,” the eight MDGs, much less comprehensive than the declaration, were created (2000, section v). While certainly a tool for galvanizing support towards poverty eradication, the MDGs “present a narrow and minimalist focus for measuring the advancement of gender equality and women’s rights because it ignores the structural nature of poverty and gender inequality. This agenda - already challenged by many social movements and networks - undermines attempts and previous commitments (such as those in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action from 1995) to address the systemic causes of poverty and gender inequality” (Schoenstein and Alemany, 2).

Johannesburg Plan of Implementation:¹³ In 2002, government officials gathered in Johannesburg for the World Summit on Sustainable Development, to reinvigorate global commitment to sustainable development (The Commonwealth). Building on Agenda 21, which was a non-binding action plan stemming from the UN Conference on Environment and Development held in 1992, the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation set out new agreements and priorities to achieving sustainable development. Most recently in 2012, the UN Conference on the Environment and Development held a conference in Rio to discuss and debate issues around sustainable development. The outcome document was deemed inadequate, and watered down from previous agreements. “Mary Robinson, Former President of Ireland, accused global leaders of ‘backsliding on fundamental texts’ agreed at two summits subsequently lauded for protecting women and girls: Cairo in 1994 and Beijing in 1995” (Martinson).

The DCF devoted the May 2012 Brisbane High Level Symposium and a part of the main biennial DCF in 2012 to the issue of development cooperation in the service of sustainable development and the post-Rio process. The official summary of the DCF states “the DCF can help ensure a more balanced consideration of the three pillars of sustainable development and promote coherence between the sustainable development goals and the post-2015 UN development agenda” (ECOSOC 2012c, 6-7).

The Monterrey Consensus: This is the final document¹⁴ that was adopted at the first international conference on Financing for Development (FfD) hosted by the UN in 2002 in Mexico. For the first time, the UN entered the “FfD field” previously the sole focus of the Bretton Woods Institutions. The main goals of the Monterrey Consensus are: the eradication of poverty; the achievement of sustained economic growth and; the promotion of sustainable development. It looks at six thematic areas to achieve this: domestic financial resources for development; international resources for development; international trade; international financial and technical cooperation for development; external debt and; systemic issues to enhance the coherence and consistency of the international monetary and financial and trading systems in support of development (Monterrey Consensus). It is a key reference in global development, also for women’s rights groups. Nonetheless, it fails to address the structural obstacles to development and systemic inequalities. Gender equality¹⁵ is particularly marginalized within the Monterrey Consensus (Schoenstein and Alemany).

1.2 The DCF Participants

Questions of participation and legitimacy are central to understanding the importance of the DCF. All development stakeholders are eligible to join the DCF, including the bodies of the UN, international financial and multilateral institutions such as the World Bank and the World Trade Organization, regional organizations, civil society organizations, local governments, and private sector representatives. The DCF is the only international space that welcomes equal participation from all actors central to the development process.

Under the auspices of the UN General Assembly, each nation has one vote, regardless of their economic power.¹⁶ This is in contrast to spaces such as the G20 and OECD-DAC, where governance structure and membership is often predicated on the size and power of the state.¹⁷ For instance, there are 173 UN member countries¹⁸ that are excluded from the G20, representing one-third of the global population (Alexander), which only further marginalizes these countries by not being able to participate in decision-making related to their economic and social policies, growth, and development. The G20 and OECD-DAC lack regional representation which is highly problematic as these entities are designing policy and practices around aid and loans¹⁹ to developing countries.

The DCF is thus a welcomed and needed alternative to closed and exclusive forums or “clubs,” as it is rooted, theoretically, on a more level playing field for development actors to have substantive debates that can influence and potentially improve international processes. In fact, women’s organizations have called for the DCF to be strengthened as the main space for standard setting on development cooperation (AWID, et al). The first report of the DCF in 2007 reaffirms that “the universal membership, neutrality and political independence of the United Nations will contribute to the Forum playing a unique role in this area” (ECOSOC 2008, 5).

While the DCF is framed as an open and multilateral environment to engage on development cooperation issues, it is important not to overlook the actual amount of space given to and taken by politicians from developing countries and CSOs. Although there has been steady improvement since the first DCF convened in 2008, participants have remarked that in 2010, participants from the Least Developed Countries (LDCs), from the Global South in general, and specifically from Sub-Saharan Africa were underrepresented. Additionally, high level representation—such as Ministers or Ambassadors from country missions to the UN—was minimal, which can indicate a lack of political will or commitment by governments to follow through on their pledges and promises (Raaber and Schoenstein). The President of ECOSOC also noted in the official summary that there is a “need to secure sufficient funding to enable developing countries and non executive stakeholders to participate in the DCF” (ECOSOC 2012d, 8). There has nevertheless been a marked improvement as reflected in the most recent DCF in terms of engagement and willingness to host a diverse set of actors as part of these high level debates. Secretary General Ban Ki-moon reaffirmed the importance of this space when he opened the DCF in July 2012, urging all actors to join forces saying, “only through collaboration, coherence and partnership will we achieve our development goals” (UN News Centre a).

CSOs (currently ActionAid, AWID, CIVICUS and IBON) are part of the informal DCF Advisory Group,²⁰ which is an overarching consultative structure for the DCF Forum that includes government officials and institutions, academia, CSOs, and the private sector. The Advisory Group seeks to promote active involvement of influential stakeholders and partnerships, fostering coherence, ensuring high analytical standards, garnering participation, and promoting advocacy and networking (ECOSOC 2012a).

1.3 The DCF Structure

The DCF is currently structured around high level symposia that take place in preparation for a biennial forum. Given the importance of the forums, the latest DCF draft strategy plan includes a section on possibly moving to an annual rhythm, which will be discussed at the General Assembly review in 2013. It also states that the symposia aim to engage with stakeholders at country, regional, and global levels in a structured way throughout each DCF cycle with a view to promoting participatory agenda-setting and consultations for enhanced quality of interim DCF products, such as surveys, analytical studies, or briefs (ECOSOC 2012e). While the DCF does not produce a negotiated outcome document, it does provide comprehensive summaries issued by the Secretary General (International Development Cooperation, ECOSOC).

As noted above, the DCF is one of the central functions of ECOSOC, and, as a UN entity it is grounded in the normative framework of human rights. In spite of this, CSOs have, and continue to need to urge the DCF to streamline the human rights framework throughout meetings, processes, and in all the documents produced, which would include also an integrated gender perspective and the systematic participation of women's rights organizations and gender equality advocates in all phases.

2. Focus Areas of the DCF and its Relation to Other Development Cooperation Spaces

The DCF has focused on a wide range of issues²¹ affecting development. Central and recurring themes include:

Policy coherence: Since 2008, the President's Summary of the Economic and Social Council has issued a call for policy coherence, that is, policies that are mutually supportive of one another (ECOSOC 2008, 2012d, 1). However, the DCF's understanding focused particularly on new ways to catalyze development financing rather than genuine policy coherence for development (ECOSOC 2012e). Calls were issued at the 2012 DCF Forum, for coherence among development cooperation policies and between development cooperation policies and other macroeconomic policies that shape development (such as policies on trade, debt, foreign direct investment, and taxation). Aid flows must be understood in the broader context of financing for development, recognizing that while quality aid can be an important tool for development, the volume of other financial flows often eclipses it. For example, Norway's Minister of International Development noted the following: "we should address illicit capital flows [if we are serious about financing for development]...as ten times more money leaks illicitly out of developing countries than the amount aid brings in" (as cited in Raaber and Moro-Coco). The Women's Key Demands, points out "[p]olicy coherence for development and gender equality is essential so that economic policies (e.g. trade, migration, energy etc.) and social policies are not working at cross purposes, resulting in the perpetuation of or increases in social and gender inequalities" (AWID, et al, 2).

Development effectiveness and aid allocation: The topic of aid quality has been one of the central issues on the DCF agenda and has focused on: policy conditionality, concessionality, aid flexibility, allocation, quality, and predictability. In some of the previous DCF documents the understanding of aid effectiveness seems to be limited and aims to "improve [aid] quality and maximize its impact and value for money" (CPDE, 2). It is expected that the upcoming 2nd International Development Cooperation Report and the DCF strategy towards the 2014 Forum (UN DCF) will work to improve this understanding (CPDE).

After more than fifty years of aid allocation, these public resources have rarely reached women's organizations.²² Despite gender equality affecting all areas of development, there is currently only a small percentage of Official Development Assistance (ODA) that directly benefits women (UNDESA). There is a need to not only improve the quantity of resources and disbursement, but also to establish political will and commitment.

The importance of the quality of tracking and accountability needs to be underscored to move beyond aid allocation, into assessing the impact and results (Alpízar Durán, 2012b, 2). The OECD-DAC Gender Equality Policy Marker is used by OECD member governments to classify aid activities based on whether they have gender equality as a principle or significant objective and it is an important advance. But the marker focuses only on *intention* of the activity and *amount* of aid allocated. Other accountability tools are needed to track the *quality* of the resources and the *outcomes* delivered.

The most recent DCF documents have made reference to the Busan Partnership and the work of the GPEDC as a means to develop a comprehensive strategy on aid effectiveness. For example, the Secretary General's report to the DCF stressed "[d]uplication of discussions and frameworks on aid quality should be avoided, [there is a need to] build more systematic linkages between post-Busan ministerial meetings and the Development Cooperation Forum, which is a universal forum" (ECOSOC 2012f, 2). Also, the Preparations for the Development Cooperation Forum (2012) document points out the importance for the DCF to be open to all the other forums that deal with development cooperation issues and that it could encourage synergies with other relevant initiatives and processes such as the GPEDC.

Mutual accountability and multiple accountability: Mutual accountability is one of the five principles included in the framework of the PD. It refers to a guiding principal of development partnerships, that donors and partners should be accountable to one another for development results (OECD). The role of the DCF as

a *mutual accountability* platform was recognized in the outcome documents of the Doha Review Conference on Financing for Development and the Accra High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness in 2008 (CPDE, 2).

Recognizing the growing complexity of the development cooperation system that has a large diversity of actors and power dynamics involved, CSOs have been advocating for a shift to a 'multiple accountability' approach. A multiple accountability approach recognizes and includes diverse development actors such as CSOs, including feminist and women's rights organizations, parliamentarians, local governments, the private sector and others (AWID, et al). Aid and development cooperation monitoring systems must improve and build on the existing country or regionally relevant gender equality indicators and accountability mechanisms to promote multiple accountability (Moro-Coco). "What is needed are strong global and regional-level frameworks to accelerate country-level progress...along with political will and leadership from programme countries and providers. These strong institutions and legal frameworks are crucial to change behaviour and increase results" (UN News Centre b).

South-South Cooperation: The framework of South-South Cooperation (SSC) has been hailed in reports of the DCF (ECOSOC 2008, 8), as a successful model in which southern governments own and promote alternate visions of development.

Since SSC is an area that is growing in its trajectory, affirmed by the Secretary General in the DCF report (2012),²³ it is important to make a systematic effort to include women's rights organizations and other CSOs in the design and implementation of national development strategies and regular assessments of implementation programs. "Sharing information on the sources, magnitudes and allocation of various types of South-South development cooperation flows and their impact on sustainable development is key to promoting better understanding, expertise and coordination among different stakeholders" (ECOSOC 2012e, 9). "There is also a need to go beyond anecdotal evidence and case studies in order to better understand the comparative advantage of S-S cooperation" (ECOSOC 2012d, 5).

Sustainable development: In light of the geo-political dynamics and deep changes in the development cooperation landscape in which it was formed, the DCF has championed the importance of sustainable development. This involves "rethinking of the dominant development model, which has focused on promoting growth and the largely social-development oriented Millennium Development Goals" (ECOSOC 2012f, 9). Recognizing that there is an urgent need to rethink and reframe the current discourse, the discussions have so far focused around the three pillars of sustainable development: promoting equitable growth and reducing poverty, advancing social equity, and ensuring environmental sustainability (ECOSOC 2012f, 9). The importance of creating policies that are inclusive, transparent, and equitable is central to this area.

The role of the private sector:²⁴ The DCF is planning to make greater efforts to engage foundations and the private sector in the work of the DCF Forum. Increasingly, the private sector has been playing a larger role in the development process. With levels of ODA stagnant or decreasing, the DCF is pointing to the need for innovative financing mechanisms, which the private sector has shown some willingness to provide (ECOSOC 2012f, 11).

However, a strong focus on aid as a catalyst for growth and private sector development is a concern if poverty eradication and human rights are not explicitly identified. We are thus in the paradoxical situation where we, on the one hand, witness increased recognition of women and girls by mainstream actors, but, on the other hand, the strategies used tend to instrumentalize women's agendas, and do not put women's rights at the center (Batiwala). Furthermore, "the risk is that these [programs] favor quick fixes over long-term strategies to tackle deep-rooted power relations that require generations to surmount" (Provost, para 5). The empowerment of women requires fundamental shifts in social, political, and economic structures and such transformative approaches may be incompatible with the priorities of some private sector actors.

Gender equality: At the July 2012 DCF, there was renewed interest and strong support for a focus on gender equality. The outcome document stated, "gender equality and the empowerment of women should be at the heart of the emerging development agenda and global partnership for development" (ECOSOC 2012d, 2). As a result, the preparations for the 2014 DCF started with a policy dialogue on "Advancing gender equality and the empowerment of women: role of development cooperation." It was organized by the

United Nations Department for Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA) in partnership with the Government of Austria and UN WOMEN in Vienna, Austria, in December 2012. The dialogue discussed²⁵ how critical it was to “firmly anchor gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls and the protection of their rights in the changing landscape of international development cooperation and in the evolving post-2015 UN development agenda” (ECOSOC 2013). “Poverty continues to have a female face,” said the Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs, Wu Hongbo. “All of us have a duty to change this. All of us have a role in bringing about that change” (UN News Centre c). Gender equality was already part of discussions at previous DCF meetings.²⁶ The DCF is well placed to continue working to ensure that next to gender equality and women’s empowerment, women’s rights and the human rights of all are explicitly put on the table and reflected in all its documents.

Post-2015 Development Agenda and other key processes:²⁷ According to its draft strategy (2012), the preparations for the 2014 DCF will be influenced by several major intergovernmental and other UN processes. This includes discussions on the post-2015 UN development agenda; the follow-up to the Rio+20 Conference;²⁸ and the upcoming review during the 67th Session of the General Assembly of Resolution 61/16 on the “Strengthening of the Economic and Social Council.” The DCF sees that it can play a constructive role in fostering multi-stakeholder dialogue at the global level on the future of development cooperation in the emerging post-2015 development agenda and the transition to sustainable development (ECOSOC 2012e). Therefore, in its draft strategy it proposes that the overarching objective towards the 2014 DCF be to make a significant and substantive contribution to the global dialogue on the future of development cooperation in the post-2015 agenda. This would also be reflected in the analytical work of the DCF and is mirrored in its objectives in the area of global accountability which include the advancement of “mutual accountability as a technical tool and overarching principle in the post-2015 development agenda with a view to promoting enhanced reporting on agreed commitments at the global level and adapting development cooperation to emerging challenges” (ECOSOC 2012e, 6). Already the 2012 DCF Vienna policy dialogue discussions have contributed to the post-2015 agenda.

3. The Relevance of the DCF for Women's Rights Organizations and Some Key Demands²⁹

The last few years have starkly demonstrated the negative effects of flawed development and neoliberal economic models. Mainstream responses have failed to make substantive change to the roots causes of the crises and as a result, poverty and inequality remain of high concern. The progress of women's rights and gender equality around the world remain a challenge and are under severe threat. The solutions and quick fixes that have been proposed to tackle the crises the world faces often seem to compound the already negative effects brought on by many of these policies. Indeed, as the Secretary General's 2012 report notes: "rethinking of the dominant development model and indicators" is needed, as the "current global development model is unsustainable and business as usual is not an option" (ECOSOC 2012f, 7).

Women's rights organizations and activists have been at the forefront of the advocacy agenda, in collaboration with other CSOs, to challenge the tenants of these policies and the still fairly gender blind development cooperation debate. They underscore the importance of putting human rights, gender equality, environmental sustainability, and decent work at the center of any effective development cooperation framework so that it be truly inclusive, just, and sustainable.

The report of the DCF Helsinki High Level Symposium notes "More needs to be done to ensure that women ... benefit equally from aid. While commitments are there and solutions are known, new laws, policies and strategies need to be enacted and concrete steps need to be taken..." (ECOSOC 2010, 13).

Women's rights organizations, gender equality advocates and activists prepared the Women's Key Demands for HLF-4 and the 2012 DCF. These demands are part of a larger political agenda to collectively challenge current power imbalances and praxis to advance women's rights. "While diverse in their scope, philosophical underpinnings, and objectives, a common and central claim of women's rights movements is the commitment to a rights-based approach that aims to shift dominant power relations, structures, and discrimination wherever they manifest" (Alpizar Durán, 2012a, 2). By challenging pre-conceived notions that "women need to be saved" or are victims, women are articulating the important role they play in development as active agents for change, as leaders and organizers, and are calling for democratic ownership and meaningful participation in these processes, at all levels.

In order to combat poverty and inequality, women's organizations and other CSOs have articulated a vision of development that also includes proposals and demands to advance human rights for all in the context of development cooperation. They have also made concrete demands to the DCF itself. The list³⁰ below presents some of those demands:

- Overcoming the mainstream development model, financial architecture, and economic policies that are oftentimes detrimental to human rights commitments and thus also to women's rights and gender equality.
- Taking into account development alternatives and addressing the structural factors that perpetuate crisis, inequality, insecurity, and human rights violations.
- Keeping gender equality and women's rights as a stand-alone sector, and increasing significantly the quantity and quality of resources allocated. This means moving beyond gender mainstreaming towards ensuring that women's rights and gender equality are at the center of any development goals or processes.
- Improving the amount of aid tracked with the OECD gender marker (Code 15170) and improving the quality of existing tools, so that information tracked is not only aid allocation, but actual aid results.
- Promoting multiple accountability systems for women's rights and gender equality to improve existing monitoring systems.

- Recognizing that issues around development are often siloed (i.e. economic policies, social policies), there is a need to promote policy coherence and facilitate collaboration between the different issues so they are not working at cross-purposes to one another.
- Challenging the often limited discourse around women and gender equality as “smart investments” and tools for quick economic gains. All development actors should commit to make women’s rights a central priority in each development sector and to challenge the structural causes of poverty, discrimination, and power imbalances.
- Supporting the capacity of organized women at all levels. This is central to ensuring there is substantive democratic ownership of national development processes, and to ensuring that accountability mechanisms at all levels are inclusive of women’s voices.
- Playing a pivotal role in shaping—according to participatory and fully democratic principles—the outcomes of Rio+20 and the process on the post-2015 development agenda. The DCF, going forward, must squarely embed its efforts in the normative framework of international human rights agreements, including the agreements from the UN conferences from Vienna, Cairo, and Rome to Copenhagen and Beijing.
- Consulting CSOs in a timely and systematic manner and giving due consideration to the participation of CSOs, facilitating an inclusive space. There need to be clear and effective mechanisms for on-going CSO participation and formal representation in development cooperation debates and processes.
- Dedicating funds and support to the DCF plan of action and reaffirming DCF’s capacity to deliver and perform meaningful outreach to all relevant constituencies, including to LDCs and CSOs.
- Demonstrating political will from all governments and members to ensure the DCF becomes a key forum for coordination and greater coherence of the development cooperation agenda. Ensuring that the DCF is the place where normative agreements to govern development cooperation are made, and where key actors in development cooperation are held accountable would help to frame the development cooperation system—and development—as one that is just, transparent, equitable, sustainable, and in line with human rights.
- Holding a DCF symposium or dialogue on forms of accountability at different levels in the development framework, also linking the human rights framework with accountability in the development agenda, and including its financing.
- Organizing a DCF High Level Symposium or dialogue on gender equality, women’s rights, and women’s empowerment in development cooperation prior to the 2014 DCF to ensure the discussion from Vienna 2012 continues with high level delegates, ministers, and other decision makers.

The DCF is one of the spaces in which women’s rights organizations can participate and advocate for the structural changes they seek in order to eradicate poverty, advance their vision of development and the realization of women’s and all people’s rights. The DCF is relevant for women’s rights organizations as any debates on development and development cooperation, including policy making and implementation, must ensure an integrated gender perspective in order to ensure the progressive realization of rights for all people. The participation and voice of women’s rights organizations in such processes at all levels is thus crucial.

4. Women's Rights Organizations Engagement with DCF and What is Next

Women's rights organizations together with other CSOs have been participating in different DCF symposia and forums as speakers, moderators, and delegates and have been involved in the meetings' agenda-setting, review of DCF strategy documents and other activities. Since the first DCF in 2008, where CSOs had difficulty speaking from the floor, the opportunity for CSOs to participate in the official policy panels has improved. Despite these openings, CSOs engaging with the DCF seek deeper and stronger engagement.

In this regard, the planned scaling-up of partnership-building, outreach, networking, and communications activities from the DCF is welcome. These plans include reinforcing "the DCF non-executive consultative group; tailoring DCF materials more effectively to civil society and parliamentarians; mobilizing resources to support the participation of such stakeholders in DCF events" (ECOSOC 2012e, 9). The DCF Advisory Group includes representatives from national governments, including bilateral donor agencies, international and regional institutions, CSOs, academia, and the private sector. CSOs, including women's rights organizations, coordinated by ActionAid³¹ have been organizing their engagement through a CSO DCF working group e-list and in 2012 particularly through reference groups of interested CSOs per respective DCF meeting.

What is Next?

The summary of the December 2012 Vienna Policy Dialogue on gender equality should be available on the DCF website in February/March 2013. The launch of the 2nd International Development Cooperation Report is scheduled for April 2013 and should then also be available online.³² Three High Level Symposia are thus far planned—Ethiopia (June 2013), Switzerland (October 2013), and Germany (first quarter of 2014)—for the path towards the 2014 DCF Forum. All of this is in addition to related technical meetings, studies, and other activities.

Moving forward, it will be key for women's rights organizations, CSOs, and development actors, to ensure that human rights, women's rights, and gender equality are systematically and consistently integrated in all DCF processes. This includes all debates, documents, and the DCF engagement and contributions to other key processes, such as the post-2015 development agenda.

Using, among others, the recommendations in the forthcoming summary from the 2012 Vienna Policy Dialogue, the recommendations from the 2010 Helsinki High Level Symposium and The Women's Key Demands can provide a helpful basis to advocate for multiple accountability, policy coherence for development, and women's rights in the relevant national, regional, and international spaces.

AWID administers a google e-list for sharing key information on development cooperation from a women's rights and gender equality perspective. Women's rights and gender equality advocates are encouraged to join by writing to Ana Inés Abelenda: AAbelenda@awid.org, and to use the e-list to share relevant information and planned activities.

Endnotes

- 1 For further information on the PD process from a gender equality and women's rights perspective see AWID's primer series on Aid Effectiveness, available here: <http://awid.org/Library/Aid-Effectiveness>.
- 2 For more official information on the High Level Forum processes see the OECD page: The High Level Fora on Aid Effectiveness: A history <http://www.oecd.org/dac/aideffectiveness/thehighlevelforaonaideffectivenessahistory.htm>
- 3 For further analysis on the five principles for aid effectiveness see Implementing the Paris Declaration: Implications for the promotion of women's rights and gender equality: <http://www.awid.org/Our-Initiatives/Influencing-Development-Actors-and-Practices-for-Women-s-Rights/Resources-on-Aid-Effectiveness/Implementing-the-Paris-Declaration-Implications-for-the-Promotion-of-Women-s-Rights-and-Gender-Equality>
- 4 For more information on the HLF-3 consultations see Primer 7: Gender Equality and Aid Effectiveness: Regional perspectives in the preparation process towards Accra: <http://www.awid.org/Library/Development-Cooperation-and-Women-s-Rights-Series>
- 5 For an analysis of HLF-3 see Primer 8: The Accra Agenda for Action: A brief review from a women's rights perspective <http://www.awid.org/Library/Development-Cooperation-and-Women-s-Rights-Series>
- 6 For further analysis see Development Cooperation Beyond the Aid Effectiveness Paradigm: A Women's Rights Perspective: <http://www.awid.org/Library/Development-Cooperation-Beyond-the-Aid-Effectiveness-Paradigm-A-women-s-rights-perspective>
- 7 For more information on the Busan Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation see: <http://www.aideffectiveness.org/busanhlf4/en/component/content/article/698.html>
- 8 For more information on The Global Partnership see: http://www.undp.org/content/seoul_policy_center/en/home/presscenter/articles/2012/03/26/busan-partnership-for-effective-development-cooperation/
- 9 For the link between the DCF and the GPEDC please see chapter two of this primer.
- 10 Read the full document Busan Partnership for Effective Development Co-operation document (BPd) available at: <http://www.oecd.org/dac/aideffectiveness/fourthhighlevelforumonaideffectiveness.htm> - agreement
- 11 "The IADGs are a set of specific goals, many with concrete time-bound targets, which form the United Nations Development Agenda. They summarize the major commitments of the UN global summits held since 1990 on different aspects of global development challenges. Some of these commitments were combined in the Millennium Declaration adopted by all governments at the Millennium UN Summit in 2000. The IADGs include the eight specific Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), but are a much broader set of objectives. The IADGs include challenges of economic growth at country level, equitable social progress, decent work, sustainable development, human rights (including women's rights, children's rights, indigenous peoples rights), equitable global economic governance, fair trade, debt cancellation and migration rights." Quoted from the Nairobi Declaration for Development Effectiveness. December 2012. Available: http://www.cso-effectiveness.org/IMG/pdf/the_nairobi_declaration_for_development_effectiveness.pdf
- 12 For more information on Millennium Declaration see Resolution adopted by the General Assembly 55/2. United Nations Millennium Declaration <http://www.un.org/millennium/>
- 13 For more information on the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation see http://www.johannesburgsummit.org/html/documents/summit_docs/2309_planfinal.htm
- 14 For more information on The Monterrey Consensus see www.un.org/esa/ffd/monterrey/MonterreyConsensus.pdf
- 15 For a systematization of the few and inadequate references to gender and women in the Monterrey Consensus refer to Aguiar, D. (November 2008): *The Financing for Development Process in the United Nations: A gender perspective*. IGTN Global Secretariat, p.23.
- 16 For more information on the UN General Assembly see: <http://www.un.org/en/ga/about/index.shtml>
- 17 For more information on the OECD, G20 membership and governance structure see <http://www.oecd.org/about/membersandpartners/>
- 18 Currently the UN has 193 members: <http://www.un.org/en/members/growth.shtml>
- 19 Women's rights organizations are also strongly concerned about the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF), for more information see <http://www.awid.org/Our-Initiatives/Influencing-Development-Actors-and-Practices-for-Women-s-Rights/Resources-on-Financing-for-Development-and-the-Financial-Crisis/G20-the-IMF-Peddling-Cosmetic-Changes-while-Hounded-by-Illegitimacy>
- 20 For the list of members of the DCF AG see <http://www.un.org/en/ecosoc/newfunct/advismem.shtml>

- 21 For more information on DCF focus issues see http://www.un.org/en/ecosoc/julyhls/pdf12/ecosoc_prez_summary_22_oct_2012.pdf and <http://www.un.org/en/ecosoc/dcf/index.shtml>
- 22 For more information on aid allocation and women's rights see 2009-2010 Fundher Research Update: Trends in Bilateral and Multilateral Funding, page 17: <http://awid.org/Library/Brief-1-FundHer-Research-Update-Brief-Series>
- 23 For more information on the DCF 2012 Report see http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=E/2012/78 p. 25
- 24 For more information on the DCF and the role of the private sector see Investing in the Business of Development http://www.ccic.ca/_files/en/what_we_do/2013-01-11_The%20Business_of_Development.pdf
- 25 Vienna Policy Dialogue highlights are available: <http://www.awid.org/News-Analysis/Friday-Files/UN-Starts-with-Gender-Equality-Focus-Preparing-for-its-2014-DCF-and-Post-2015>
- 26 Read for example the report of the 2010 Helsinki High Level Symposium: <http://www.un.org/Docs/journal/asp/ws.asp?m=E/2010/104>
- 27 For more information about post-2015 see AWID Friday Files: "The Post 2015 Development Agenda – What It Means And How To Get Involved" <http://www.awid.org/Library/The-Post-2015-Development-Agenda-What-it-Means-and-How-to-Get-Involved> and "The UN Post-2015 Development Agenda – A Critical Analysis" <http://www.awid.org/Library/The-Post-2015-Development-Agenda-What-it-Means-and-How-to-Get-Involved>
- 28 For further analysis on Rio Plus 20 from a women's rights perspective see <http://www.awid.org/eng/News-Analysis/Rio-20>
- 29 The Women's Key Demands for HLF-4 and the 2012 DCF (October 2011) are available: <http://www.awid.org/Library/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>. Also, the CSO statement to the 2012 DCF: http://www.un.org/en/ecosoc/julyhls/pdf12/csos_room_statement_at_the_dcf.pdf Previous statements of the Women's Working Group on Financing for Development are available here: <http://www.fdnngo.org/gender-financing-development>
- 30 This section draws from Women's Key Demands (2011), Mayra Moro Coco's presentation to the European Parliament (2012), Lydia Alpízar Durán's presentation at the CSW (2012) and the CSO room statement to the 2012 DCF.
- 31 Luca de Fraia, ActionAid. Contact: Luca.Defraia@actionaid.org
- 32 DCF website: <http://www.un.org/en/ecosoc/dcf/index.shtml>

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WHY SHOULD WOMEN'S RIGHTS GROUPS CARE ABOUT THE AID EFFECTIVENESS AGENDA? WHAT IS AT STAKE FOR WOMEN AND GENDER JUSTICE?

While it is affirming that gender equality is increasingly getting the focus it rightly deserves, attention must be paid towards ensuring that it is not merely lip service, and concrete actions are taken such as aligning international, national, and local plans to women's rights, needs, and priorities as set by women themselves.

- The aid and development effectiveness agenda and development cooperation more broadly is – like any other area or sphere – **not gender-neutral**.
- The Paris Declaration is gender-blind and, despite some advances in the aid effectiveness agenda since then, currently **women's rights and gender equality are often not—or insufficiently—reflected** in aid and development cooperation debates, national development plans, and development policy making more broadly, from the country and donor side.
- **Despite numerous commitments and obligations** of governments to human rights and gender equality there is a **failure of actual implementation**.
- Funding data shows the extent to which gender equality commitments and rhetoric is deeply unsatisfactorily translated into practice at bilateral and multilateral levels. OECD-DAC data (sector code 15170 on funding to women's organizations and institutions), shows that only USD 331.8 million dollars in the 2010 budget went to women's organizations and gender institutions (including national machineries). This means **only 1.3% of all DAC-screened funds were dedicated to gender equality** (AWID Friday File).
- Development cooperation **agreements being made at different levels (national, regional, international) risk not having an effect, or, even worse, can have a detrimental impact** for people on the ground – with women oftentimes being disproportionately, negatively impacted – especially if not consulting meaningfully and consistently with the rights holders of any potential interventions and policies.
- The trend of 'investing' in women, girls, and gender equality that often has an **'instrumentalizing'³³ face** and view women and gender equality primarily as drivers for economic growth, is also occurring in aid and development cooperation debates.
- The **strong and collective engagement of women's rights and gender equality advocates, organizations** and movements, among others, is required to make clear the meaning of women's empowerment in its entirety, to confront essentializing ideas about 'how women are,' to push the focus onto tackling the root causes of poverty and inequality, and overcoming the various power imbalances that exist at different levels as well as enduring patriarchal structures.

What is at stake? ⇨ Women's rights and all peoples' human rights!



ABOUT THIS PRIMER

Primer No. 12: The United Nations Development Cooperation Forum Through a Women's Rights Lens

Primer 12 provides an overview of the UN Development Cooperation Forum (DCF), focusing on the DCF origins, focus to date and strategic plans for the future, while emphasizing the importance of the DCF for women's rights and gender equality advocates.