Key Messages for Cluster A: Ownership and Accountability

I The Paris Accra Commitments

Cluster A on ownership and accountability brings together several multi-stakeholder Task Teams[i] and interested constituencies within the Working Party. Over the past 18 months they have contributed evidence from country experiences from which the Cluster has reviewed issues relating to the implementation of ownership and accountability commitments in the Paris Declaration and the Accra Agenda for Action (AAA).

While the Paris Declaration acknowledges the participation of non-state actors, its focus and measure of "country ownership" has been a government's "operational development strategy". The AAA re-asserts the central importance of country ownership, but goes further to elaborate deeper and more inclusive engagement with all development actors, based on human rights norms. Donors and governments have agreed to work with their parliaments in country ownership (§8 and §13), with civil society to strengthen CSOs as development actors in their own right (§8, §13 and §20), and with local governments to ensure their active role in development policy dialogues (§13).

Acknowledging limited progress in realizing the Paris principle of mutual accountability, the AAA seeks a strong commitment to accountability, with particular attention to the role of parliament, and to transparency as powerful drivers of progress for development results (§22 and §24).

II Evidence of Progress

There is wide acknowledgement of the importance of country ownership. Nevertheless the evidence presented to the Cluster suggests significant differences in interpretation of country ownership by various stakeholders, which in turn affect assessments of progress and proposals for Busan.[ii] Some focus on characteristics of government leadership and inclusive ownership in the AAA, while others stress democratic ownership as a more precise principle for assuring country ownership. The latter puts attention on strengthening essential institutions and processes, including parliament, the judiciary, and local government, with opportunities for engagement, whereby people claim their rights and establish authority over their own development priorities.

Since Accra, multi-stakeholder dialogue under the aegis of the UN Development Cooperation Forum (DCF) has called for more accountable and transparent development cooperation, broader assessment of aid quality reflecting concerns of non-OECD stakeholders, and for stronger national ownership and leadership with non-executive stakeholders as integral part of development planning and evaluation. Also, civil society actors have advanced their own processes in the *Open Forum on CSO Development Effectiveness* and in multi-stakeholder country level monitoring of implementation of the AAA. On the other hand, there is also growing evidence to suggest an increasing restrictive, rather than enabling environment for civil society, with a narrowing of democratic, legal and financial space for CSOs.

Accountability in the use of development resources is a key driver for progress in aid and development effectiveness for poverty reduction. Recent research reveals important linkages between robust processes for domestic accountability and mutual accountability, including national processes of democratic decentralization. Work is underway exploring holistic approaches to creating a "culture of accountability", one that is sensitive to linkages between democratic

ownership, domestic accountability and mutual accountability and regional/global forums for accountability. At the same time, while there is lack of progress on mutual accountability at the national country level, there is some evidence of practices of mutual accountability in donor/recipient relationships at sector or project levels.

III Summary Messages

1) **Clarify the meaning and essential principles and conditions for developing country leadership in development cooperation.**   HLF4 should undertake interactive dialogue and political debate to clarify the essential conditions and best stakeholder practices to strengthen national and local institutions and processes for democratic governance as the foundation for robust country leadership in development. How can partner countries, supported by donors as genuine development partners, find ways to improve evidence-based and inclusive policy making for development, taking account the power dynamics in donor/recipient relations? Is there an alternative post-Busan development cooperation framework, which brings on board non-DAC donors, who focus on principles derived from national sovereignty, while also respecting the rights of peoples' participation and empowerment, gender equality, decent work and sustainability in development?

2) **Elaborate and monitor conditions for effective, transparent and broad-based multi-stakeholder policy dialogue for determining and implementing national and local development strategies.** HLF4 should reaffirm the centrality of government leadership, with strengthened roles for parliament, and inclusive multi-stakeholder processes for determining national strategies for development. The legitimacy of national strategies and their development impact depends upon consistent and transparent policy dialogue with/through parliament, representative local government, a diversity of civil society voices, and the private sector.

There is still a great deal to learn about diverse policy making processes and how to strengthen their quality. Among other policy dialogue experiences, lessons can be drawn from practices in existing social dialogues involving domestic social actors, such as trade unions and employers, women's organizations and other social movements. HLF4 should explore ways to strengthen capacities and activities of parliaments in determining and monitoring development strategies and in financial oversight, given its constitutional prerogatives, along with measures to strengthen ministries and other institutions important for democratic governance.

Government and non-state actors should explore ways to collaborate in implementing national development strategies within a framework that promotes good governance, human rights norms, gender equality and sustainable development. In this regard, non-state actors must retain the right to conduct independent research, to elaborate alternative visions and to pursue development activities independent of national development strategies.

3) **Establish multi-stakeholder processes in recipient and donor countries to monitor HLF commitments and identify further reforms of donor practices, including CSOs acting as donors, at country level.** Donor policies and practices continue to be strongly directive in day-to-day management of aid relationships, undermining country governance and sustainable development outcomes. Donor agency incentives and capacities must shift their practices towards flexible facilitation of recipient-led processes, engagement with multiple stakeholders

including social actors, domestic poor and marginalized populations in determining donor policies, skills for relationship-building and networking for change, and capacities for sustained knowledge of complex country situations. Equally, donors need to address growing constraints in the politics and policies of donor countries that reinforce donor practices that continue to undermine ownership and democratic governance, including decentralization processes.

4) **HLF4 should identify practical ways for improving incentives and allocating resources for capacity development to strengthen country leadership and ownership.** Capacity development is a critical requirement in realizing AAA commitments. While a broad consensus exists on best practices in support of capacity development (CD), a large gap exists between these norms and lessons and actual donor practices and incentives that drive their programs. Donors, including civil society actors for capacity development, need to improve internal incentives to give priority to proven approaches for CD, work on their own donor capacities (see #3 above), provide adequate resources, while reducing rigid institutional barriers (quick results and disbursements etc.). Country stakeholders must invest in leadership at national and local levels to determine capacity needs at all levels, putting their own resources and staff time to improve capacity in priority areas.

5) **HLF4 should acknowledge and commit to furthering the outcomes of the CSO-led Open Forum on CSO Development Effectiveness by endorsing the *Istanbul Principles for CSO Development Effectiveness* as a basis for CSOs to realize their full potential as development actors in their own right.** Civil society organizations, alongside other democratic institutions, are a vibrant and essential feature in the democratic life of countries across the globe. CSOs have roles in development that complement but are distinct from those of government, parliament and the private sector, whether in the provision of services, or in contributing to policy dialogue or in monitoring policies related to development. Many CSOs are facing an increasingly disabling environment in which to pursue development. As CSOs take practical measures to strengthen their own practices and accountability to the *Istanbul Principles* and effectiveness for development results[iii], donors and developing country governments should engage in structured processes with CSOs at country and global levels on practical measures for an enabling environment for CSOs to be development actors in their own right, and countering practices that undermine CSO development effectiveness.

6) **HLF4 should acknowledge and seek collaboration with human rights bodies mandated to protect and promote the right to assembly, freedom of expression and gender equality, which are essential to democratic governance and ownership.** All governments have an obligation to uphold basic human rights – among others, the right to association, the right to assembly, the freedom of expression and gender equality. HLF4 should reaffirm the importance of these basic rights as a pre-condition for democratic governance, ownership and the effective allocation of resources for development. In this regard, all Working Party members should welcome and work with the Special Rapporteur on the Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and Association, to be appointed by the Human Rights Council in 2011 and establish dialogue with other relevant human rights bodies, including the ILO.

7) **HLF4 should identify measures that strengthen a culture of accountability as the basis for mutual accountability in development cooperation.** Meeting the Paris/AAA commitments

on mutual accountability for development results will require the creation of a genuine "culture of accountability" on the part of all stakeholders, with regular national, regional and international multi-stakeholder mechanisms and review, focused resources with targets, political leadership with deeper engagement with parliament and local governments, adequate investments in monitoring and evaluation, and inclusion of diverse development stakeholders, including non-DAC donors. Accountability systems should be up-front processes that involve all affected stakeholders, and particularly excluded communities in development decisions that affect their lives. Parliaments should be strengthened with resources and capacities to fulfill their constitutional mandate for holding the executive accountable.

8) **HLF4 should endorse the progress made in the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI), urge all members to fully implement all phases as soon as possible, and share lessons from various transparency initiatives since Accra.** Transparency is a fundamental condition for accountability. IATI promises to dramatically improve accessibility of timely information on development cooperation (strategies, resources, implementation of initiatives) for legislatures, local government, CSOs and other social actors. Transparency needs to be accompanied by capacity development to improve the analytical skills of parliamentary oversight committees, local government and other non-state development actors.

9) **HLF4 should promote further exploration of the linkages between domestic and mutual accountability in both donor and recipient countries.**   Complex webs of relationships in international cooperation affect conditions and capacities for mutual accountability. Further work is required, building mutual accountability on conditions for domestic accountability. What are the political boundaries for donors' engagement with domestic accountability? How do trends and demands for accountability in donor countries affect international cooperation practices and conditions for domestic accountability in developing countries?   How can accountability be strengthened through international peer exchanges, such as with parliamentarians, local government or social actors? Mutual accountability is a gradual political process based on negotiations and dialogue among all relevant stakeholders, and thus requires political commitment from highest level in countries and donors.

10) **HLF4 should encourage support for multi-stakeholder processes to monitor and contribute to the implementation of commitments made in Busan with regard to ownership and democratic governance, CSO development effectiveness principles and practice, enabling conditions for civil society development effectiveness, and improved practices in support of domestic and mutual accountability.**

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[i] The work streams under Cluster A include the Broad-Based Democratic Ownership Group, the Task Team on Mutual Accountability working with the Work-Stream on Aid and Accountability (GovNet) and the Task Team on CSO Development Effectiveness and the Enabling Environment.

[ii] For a detailed review of findings and recommendations in the research and in interviews with selected Cluster members see Brian Tomlinson, "Strengthening Broad-Based Inclusive Ownership and Accountability: A Synthesis of Key Findings and Cluster A Messages for the Working Party on Aid Effectiveness and the Fourth High Level Forum", A report commissioned by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, February 2011.

[iii] CSO commitments to strengthen their own practices and accountability in relation to these Principles will be found in the *CSO International Framework for CSO Development Effectiveness*, which will be presented by the Open Forum to the HLF4. The *Istanbul Principles* and the draft *Framework* are available on the Open Forum web site, www.cso-effectiveness.org.