

WIDE Network's reaction to the European Commission's Communication Proposal for the EU Common Position for the 4th High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness, Busan

September 2011

Drawing on more than 25 years of experience in promoting gender justice and women's rights in the European Union's development policies, WIDE network takes a critical stance on the narrow approach to gender equality in the common position of the EU - as it was proposed in the Commission Communication COM (2011) 541, Proposal for the EU common position for the 4th High level Forum on aid effectiveness, Busan¹.

WIDE calls on the Commission and Member States to **ensure that gender equality and women's rights feature strongly as goals in themselves and as horizontal issues in all priority areas of focus² in the EU final position and eventually in the Busan document.**

We draw our arguments and recommendations in this letter from the *Key Demands from Women's Rights Organizations and Gender Equality Advocates to the 4th High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness and Development Cooperation Forum* that are the result of the International Consultation organized by Women's Organizations in the BetterAid Coordination Group, and hosted by WIDE in Brussels (June 2011); as well as the expert analysis by WIDE Network that has been actively following the aid effectiveness process since 2007.

WIDE Network fully supports the CONCORD AidWatch reaction to the Commission Communication. WIDE's position and proposals are primary focused on the gender analysis of the Communication and should be treated complementary to the position of CONCORD³.

General remarks

The WIDE Network believes that the European Union has the capacity to be a driving force in the High Level Forum in Busan, as was the case during the High Level Forum in Accra (2008), particularly with regard to gender equality and human rights as cornerstones for development. Therefore, **we regret that the proposal for the EU common position is weak in political language and does not contain any concrete action to advance the aid and development effectiveness agenda, ahead and after Busan.**

WIDE is concerned that the proposal of the Commission is gender silent and fails to address gender equality as a goal in itself as well as a horizontal issue crucial in achieving any development impact (currently only present in the section on

¹ <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2011:0541:FIN:EN:PDF>

² According to the Communication these are; ownership, transparency, fragmentation, alignment, accountability for results, countries in fragile situation, South-south cooperation, private sector, climate financing, governance and monitoring framework.

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http://www.concordeurope.org/Files/media/0_internetdocumentsENG/4_Publications/3_CONCORDs_positions_and_studies/Positions2011/AW-reaction-to-EC-communication-FINAL.pdf

ownership). In this sense, the EU Communication does not reiterate nor advance the framework of Accra Agenda for Action and disregards the implementation of the *EU Plan of Action on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in Development (2010-2015)* - the framework that should coordinate the EU approach to promoting gender equality in the EU development cooperation.

The WIDE Network welcomes the Communication approach to learn from evidence and the recognition by the EC of the lack of political support as one of the main bottlenecks to implement the Paris and Accra reforms. Yet we are concerned about the narrow reading of evidence to guide the choice of „key commitments. The EU seems to ignore the fact that there has been little progress in most countries in giving greater priority to the needs of the poorest people, particularly women and girls.

- ✓ **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 empowerment⁴.
- ✓ **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 the gender equality agenda ahead and post Busan.**
- ✓ **The EU Commission and Member States must ensure that all building blocks integrate a gender equality and women's rights perspective, as well as engage with high level side 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 progress⁵.

Democratic Ownership

The WIDE Network welcomes the recognition by the Commission of democratic ownership and its direct reference to gender equality as a cornerstone of creating an enabling environment. It is positive that the proposal includes a commitment to safeguard the active participation of women, yet it mostly points out these responsibilities to partner countries and leaves out a number of key issues, such as a clear approach to policy conditionalities.

- ✓ **The EU must make concrete and time-bound commitments to provide an enabling environment for CSOs and particularly women's human rights defenders.** This can be done by ensuring strategic and long-term engagement with CSOs, backed by adequate resources to support them.

⁴ EU Plan of Action on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment, Objective 7 – Action A7.1 – indicator: the EU positions on MDGs and Aid Effectiveness have a strong focus on GEWE.

⁵ Example of useful references/ EU Donors Under Women's Watch.WIDE checks up on Gender Equality and Women's Rights on the road to Busan 2011; Findings from the gender equality module of the 2011 Paris Declaration monitoring survey (GENDERNET, 2011).

- ✓ **The EU should be firm and clear in its approach to conditionalities. Economic policy conditionalities have a negative impact on people, particularly on women and girls, undermining the principle of ownership and contradicting rights to development and self-determination.** Instead, multiple responsibility, accountability and transparency must be applied to donors and developing countries, for example by reinforcing democratic scrutiny of development goals, policies and results.

Transparency and predictability

The WIDE Network acknowledges and welcomes the political leadership by the EU on transparency. We believe that EU donors will be able to demonstrate a progressive agenda in Busan and we support the EC proposal that donors should adopt global reporting system based on the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI) and the Creditor Reporting System (CRS). While the aid transparency of EU donors has generally improved, **WIDE research on aid policies of EU Member States have proved that there is a serious information gap and lack of primary data to determine the level of gender policies implementation and the results on the ground⁶.**

- ✓ **Resources for gender equality need to be better tracked and more effectively distributed.** This includes both ODA and countries' own budgetary allocations. The DAC gender equality policy marker is a statistical tool for tracking the levels of aid to gender equality, yet its application by EU Member States should be improved and completed by publishing the gender disaggregated data also specific to the sectors.
- ✓ **EU needs to strengthen its own capacity and support partner countries to collect and use data disaggregated by sex,** and make full use of them to inform policy decisions and guide financial resources in its development programmes.

Fragmentation and proliferation

The WIDE Network welcomes the Communication focus on reducing fragmentation, clear acknowledging of the lump amount that can be saved by increasing coordination and pointing out the political nature of division of labor. Echoing the concerns included in the reaction by CONCORD AidWatch, we have the following recommendations to consider in the EU common position for Busan.

- ✓ **The EU must ensure adequate investment for certain controversial and sensitive women's rights issues, such as sexual and reproductive health and rights,** which are loaded with debates around access to family planning/contraception, safe abortion and sexual orientation. **The EU needs to strengthen its co-operation mechanisms to ensure that no gender equality**

⁶ *EU Donors Under Women's Watch. WIDE checks up on Gender Equality and Women's Rights on the road to Busan 2011.*

targeted development programmes and/ or mainstreaming efforts fails due to lack of finance.

Alignment

The WIDE Network regrets that the EU Communication does not advance the commitment to alignment beyond what has already been agreed in Paris and Accra, nor does it address the fact that qualified country systems are currently not used to the maximum extent (2008 Paris monitoring survey).

- ✓ **The EU must accelerate efforts to ensure that public financial management systems, planning and budgeting are gender responsive in both EU donors and partner countries and allocated resources match the commitments to gender equality.**
- ✓ **Developing countries and their citizens must be in the driving seat to choose between a range of aid-modalities based on what is appropriate to their context.**
- ✓ **Sector budget support should be considered for gender equality, women's rights and health issues in particular, in countries where social sectors are less likely to receive adequate funding.**

Accountability for results

The WIDE Network welcomes the recognition that supporting the achievement of development results is the overall justification for the aid effectiveness agenda. Yet, we point out the fact that the EU proposal fails to provide a clear definition of what "development results" concretely means.

Secondly, we acknowledge the will to deepen the commitment to accountability, but we are concerned that the proposal fails to address the political nature of the latter, and the fact that while donors' accountability towards the partner countries government is slowly improving, for the citizens it generally remains weak⁷.

- ✓ **The EU position for Busan must present a clear definition on development results in terms of poverty eradication, gender equality, environmental sustainability and human rights.**
- ✓ **The EU donors must recognize and operationalize mutual accountability as a vector principle for aid and development cooperation efforts.** The foundation must be strong national accountability mechanism (both in the EU and partner countries) backed up by a political will to engage and support the capacities and participation of various stakeholders - particularly women organizations and parliamentarians - to ensure the quality of the process.

⁷ See for example: 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

- ✓ **The EU needs to ensure that gender equality is systematically addressed** as part of mutual reviews of performance, grounded in international and regional commitments, like CEDAW, BPfA and others.

Countries in fragile situation

The WIDE Network welcomes the EU Commission proposal to focus on countries in fragile situations. In fragile and conflict affected states, women and girls needs, priorities and perspectives are still largely absent from planning and financing frameworks in support of an early recovery and peace-building process. We are therefore concerned that this key commitment, as presented in the EU Communication, is gender blind.

- ✓ **The EU must safeguard the acknowledgement of the differential and disproportionate impact of armed conflicts on the lives and rights of women and girls.** This means guaranteeing cooperation to address these issues and to ensure equality, justice, reparation and guarantees of non-repetition for women who are victims, as well as effective participation in peace processes and post conflict reconstructions.
- ✓ **The EU must work towards the protection and participation of women by ensuring implementation of UNSCRs 1325, 1820, 1888 and 1889.** All parties must support state and civil society actors (including women's organizations) to develop national action plans to operationalize the UN resolutions on women, peace and security.

Private sector and South-South Cooperation

The WIDE Network values the role that the private sector, specially small and medium enterprises in partner countries, can play in development, while stressing that human rights-based development is primarily the responsibility of states. We contest the notion of aid as a catalyst for private sector investments. If this sector is to play a role at Busan, private sector organizations must commit to human rights legal standards, including those relevant for women's rights.

The WIDE Network values the increasing importance of financial flows channeled through South-South cooperation and calls on the governments to include in their technical assistance good practices related to gender equality and women's rights. Recognizing that South-South cooperation initiatives have their own dynamics and practices, WIDE urges the EU to call on all related governments to implement mechanisms to ensure adequate access to information and space for CSOs' participation in cooperation processes.

- ✓ **The EU should encourage all partners in development cooperation, particularly emerging donors and private sector, to improve their capacity for understanding and promoting gender equality and women's empowerment in line with international commitments.**

Future aid effectiveness and monitoring

All parties and signatories of the Busan outcome document should commit to concrete responsibilities and be held accountable for undertaking their agreed commitments. The WIDE Network welcomes the EU Communication focus on new partnerships for the Busan Forum, yet stresses that participation of new actors should not water down the commitments already agreed in Paris and Accra.

The WIDE Network acknowledges the Communication recognition of the need for high level political support to foster the reform process, yet we are concerned about the proposal to hold the debates on progress at the International Monetary Fund or World Bank where partner countries are under-represented and their voices often ignored.

WIDE is also seriously concerned about the proposal to drop some of the Paris indicators. We believe that the PD monitoring exercise, although not perfect, has been vital to generate evidence and ensure accountability at global level.

✓ **The EU must ensure that any post Busan monitoring framework includes gender specific indicators.** While the three **GENDERNET** indicators on gender equality and aid effectiveness integrated into the 2011 Paris Declaration Monitoring Survey are important, these indicators **should be made mandatory** as part of the follow up of AAA and PD implementation including other indicators, particularly those measuring countries' budget allocations to women's rights and gender equality.

✓ **The EU must assure that the future governance framework guarantees the equal participation of all countries,** which have been traditionally excluded from decision-making processes at the regional and international levels. An equitable and just development architecture, based on sovereignty and policy coherence, should be rooted in a multilateral body that ensures legitimacy through membership of all development actors, with full representation of all developing country perspectives, such as UN.

The WIDE Network, its platforms in Europe and partners in the South, will continue to monitor and advocate for progress on gender equality and human rights in aid and development effectiveness agenda in Busan and beyond.

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Globalising Gender Equality and Social Justice