



PRESS RELEASE

For immediate release

Accra marks a turning point for aid, but in which direction?

Brussels, 5 September 2008 – Northern and Southern governments meeting in Accra, Ghana on 2-4 September have further defined how they intend to improve the effectiveness of aid by 2010. The agreement offers much positive language on long-overdue changes needed. The true depth of reforms to come will reveal whether aid will finally be used as an instrument for justice, or whether more of the same failed aid, simply polished around the edges, will signal the beginning of the end of the international aid system.

On the one hand, we see that the primacy of democratic accountability to Parliaments and citizens in use of public resources, and the transparency it requires, has been made more explicit in the Accra Agenda for Action (AAA). The role of civil society as independent and valued development actors has been recognized. And donors have agreed to make aid flows more predictable as well as to move away from dictating economic policy choices as a condition for aid, though without specific targets.

On the other hand, even the principle alone of untying of food aid does not appear in the AAA. Rene Grotenhuis, CIDSE President, said, "As we are talking in Accra, a growing number of men, and in particular women and children, are dying of starvation. Shipping subsidized Northern food aid to Africa is precisely one of the underlying reasons for the current food crisis. It has for decades undermined the capacity of local agriculture, as small farmers could no longer sell their own goods and earn sustainable livelihoods. We have got to stop this vicious circle of dependency."

African churches, supported by international faith-based organizations, are standing up and demanding that Africans be the drivers of their own development. Northern governments must support this vision by making the sometimes difficult changes they have promised. It will not be easy. But times have changed, and there is no longer an alternative.

The outcomes of the Accra meeting were dominated by the dynamics of a unified and generally progressive European Union position, and initial disagreement but finally potentially significant changes in the positions of United States and Japan. Denise Auclair of CIDSE said, "Everyone was asking, where are the Africans? Why don't we hear united voices from the South? Our African colleagues present in Accra underlined this as a lesson of the necessity of the strengthening of regional and continental institutions. And China is the elephant in the room. If the OECD donors can't get their act together so that aid makes a noticeable difference in the lives of the poor, the aid system will become obsolete. Africans are saying, the OECD is no longer the only option.

"We should recall that aid is only a small piece of the pie compared to the potential for mobilizing domestic resources in developing countries, through taxation, limiting tax evasion and capital flight, and responsible use of revenues from the significant natural resources in Africa. We cannot spin our wheels on aid while the world races by. Rendez-vous in Doha for the UN Financing for Development conference in November."

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Contact:

For more information and to set up interviews, please contact Denise Auclair, e-mail: auclair@cidse.org, Mobile: +32 (0) 478 96 20 13

Notes to the editors:

CIDSE is an alliance of 16 catholic development organizations from Europe and North America (www.cidse.org). The CIDSE Secretariat is based in Brussels.

