



PHOTO: BUSAN, SOUTH KOREA

# MEASURING FOR SUCCESS AT THE BUSAN HIGH LEVEL FORUM ON AID EFFECTIVENESS

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MAY 2011

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When the aid community meets at the High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness in Busan, Republic of Korea, in November 2011, they will have two tasks. The first is to take stock of commitments to improve the quality of aid made at previous forums in Paris and Accra. The second is to establish a new Global Compact that can drive further effectiveness improvements in the official aid sector while capturing the different circumstances under which aid today is delivered.

Taking stock of progress is now easier because commitments at the Paris High Level Forum were specified in quantitative terms and a global monitoring framework is in place to measure progress. The fieldwork for the most recent survey has just been completed and while the results are not yet known, it is already clear that there will be shortfalls against targets in some areas. Nevertheless, the process of setting up indicators, targets and monitoring instruments has proven its worth in supporting accountability, knowledge and learning. As targets for the Paris indicators were only specified up to 2010, a key success factor for Busan will be the development of a new set of targets and indicators to underpin ongoing dialogue on improving aid effectiveness.

## CONTEXT

How aid is delivered matters (Killen, 2010). This maxim is easily lost amid the standard discourse on aid which focuses attention on two narrow debates: whether total aid flows are sufficiently generous, and whether aid, in general, is effective or not. While these debates are of interest, they are of little help to aid agencies who must decide who to give their aid to, what form it should take, under what conditions and arrangements, and for what purpose.

The Paris High Level Forum in 2005 served as a watershed in global dialogue on aid effectiveness issues. At that meeting, donors and recipient countries jointly agreed to gauge their political resolve to improve aid quality by setting time-bound global targets aimed at changing the way aid is delivered. Twelve indicators of aid effectiveness were selected, each with a baseline 2005 value calculated and a target 2010 value agreed to, at the global level. The indicators and targets, in turn, were organized around five principles of effective aid: ownership, alignment, harmonization, managing for results and mutual accountability.

Progress towards the targets is monitored through periodic global surveys. The results of the 2006 baseline survey and the 2008 interim survey were important inputs into the Accra High Level Forum. The 2011 survey will similarly inform the discussions at Busan later this year.

This approach has yielded important results. By the time of the Accra High Level Forum, significant achievements had already been recorded in select areas, including the untying of aid, the coordination of technical cooperation, and improvements in the reliability of partner governments' financial systems. By contrast, in other areas, such as making aid more predictable and encouraging donors to actually use partners' financial and procurement systems, as well as the development of results frameworks and mutual accountability mechanisms at the country level, progress has been slower and in some cases, very modest (OECD DAC, 2008).

While progress on indicators is expected to have advanced since that time, the results of the 2011 survey will reveal that many of the targets have not been met. This is clearly a disappointment. At the same time, stretch targets have been shown to play a useful role in the aid system so it is unclear that the targets were inappropriately set (Kharas, 2010). Furthermore, over the course of the past six years, significant learning has taken place in terms of what is required to bring about organizational and cultural change within aid agencies to implement the Paris principles, so several agencies are now well placed to move forward and meet the targets in the near future. As one example, signatories to the International Aid Transparency Initiative have only recently developed platforms that can support the commitments made to raise the share of aid recorded on partner country budgets and the predictability of aid.

Moreover, even though changes in aid delivery behavior and practice have fallen short of what was hoped for, the “Paris process” has undeniably been useful in changing mindsets about aid quality and promoting the importance of metrics and evidence in judging aid effectiveness. The adoption of indicators and targets as a basis for tracking performance, benchmarking and standard setting, has generated a valuable discourse on what constitutes effective aid in different sectors and country circumstances.

## AN EVOLVING PROCESS FOR MONITORING AID QUALITY

The targets and indicators agreed at the Paris High Level Forum have remained unchanged since 2005 to preserve the credibility of the commitments made by donors and recipient partners. However, understanding on what constitutes effective aid has continued to grow. This has been reflected in an evolving process for global monitoring of aid quality that has steadily moved beyond the Paris framework. This year’s survey has thus incorporated optional modules on gender and country ownership, while supplementary reporting on aspects of effectiveness particular to fragile states, education, health and rural development have also been developed.

This process of evolution must now continue to capture four emerging lessons:

- Donors, recipients and sectors cannot be treated as homogeneous so aid quality metrics must be *differentiated by context*
- Much of the value of aid quality targets is found at the *country level* in discussions on mutual accountability for performance
- Global targets on aid effectiveness provide valuable signals to drive donor agency performance but need to be carefully selected to *focus on priority issues*
- Coordination and cooperation deserve special consideration where significant spillover effects occur between donors, emphasizing the need for *full donor coverage*

## DIFFERENTIATION BY CONTEXT

In their quest for simplicity, the architects of the Paris Declaration agreed on a single set of global indicators and targets intended for all elements of the aid system. While the indicators and targets were chosen on the basis of their broad applicability, their selection appears to have been built around a particular aid paradigm that views aid principally as a relationship between bilateral aid agencies and stable low-income countries, in which support is provided for sectors such as health and education where large recurrent and capital expenditures coexist.

While there are merits to a “one size fits all” approach, not least in permitting the aggregation of results to global targets, the indicators and targets did not always relate well when the context differed from the standard model.

One example is how indicators should apply to small, new development partners, especially those who are not members of the OECD DAC. These donors tend to view development cooperation in terms of a bilateral relationship with partner countries, through which they can share their own distinctive development experiences. Under the Paris system, they are encouraged to coordinate with larger, established partners but this can easily drown out their voice and the particular experience and expertise they can bring to bear. For such donors, cooperation with other agencies is a less relevant objective than identifying specific niches where they have a comparative advantage.

Equally, recipient countries are not alike and what constitutes high aid quality may differ from one setting to another. This was already recognized in the Accra Agenda for Action that states: “the commitments we agree today will need to be adapted to different country circumstances—including in middle-income countries, small states and countries in situations of fragility.” Nevertheless, all recipients continue to be monitored against the same set of indicators and targets.

In the case of fragile states, the Paris indicators and targets are not just harder to achieve, but fail to recognize what constitutes good donor practice. For instance, it is widely recognized that aligning with recipient financial systems in fragile states, where those systems are weak and lack credibility, presents enormous risks. New approaches have enabled donors to manage those risks by, for example, using partial earmarks, budget oversight and tracking, and/or requiring recipient governments to contract out certain functions such as audit services. These approaches have enabled donors to provide budget support in complex environments such as Afghanistan, Burundi, Central African Republic and Guinea Bissau (World Bank, 2011), but they do not meet the standards of

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the Paris indicators that insist that donors “only require financial reports prepared using [a] country’s established financial reporting arrangements” and that audits are “carried out under the responsibility of the [country’s] Supreme Audit Institution.” Such indicators need to be tailored to country circumstances if they are to remain relevant measures of effectiveness.

The Paris indicators and targets also make no allowance for the varied ways in which aid effectiveness applies to different sectors. Take, for instance, the infrastructure sector. Among the Paris targets is a goal for more aid to be delivered in program-based approaches. However, aid for infrastructure is chiefly concerned with large, complex, discrete activities—for instance, dredging a port, building a power station, or constructing a highway. These activities are best undertaken using well-honed disciplines of project management, drawing on the best available international expertise. For donors that focus on the infrastructure sector, the Paris targets may provide perverse incentives and penalize good practice.

A number of steps have already been taken to develop targets and indicators that look beyond the confines of the Paris agenda. Supplementary principles for donor engagement in fragile states have been developed and are being assessed this year in conjunction with the Paris monitoring survey. Sector indicators and dialogue have been developed by the International Health Partnership, the Education for All Fast Track Initiative and the Global Donor Platform for Rural Development. Nevertheless, more must be done to adequately account for the different circumstances in which aid is delivered.

## COUNTRY LEVEL FOCUS FOR MUTUAL ACCOUNTABILITY

The Paris indicators and targets reflect aspects of both donor and recipient performance. Both sets of actors are encouraged to “establish their own targets for improved aid effectiveness within the framework of the agreed partnership commitments and indicators of progress,” akin to the localization of the Millennium Development Goals endorsed in the Millennium Declaration. Furthermore, the principle of mutual accountability calls for donors and recipients to establish country-level mechanisms for addressing effectiveness issues and to carry out joint assessments of progress.

However, for all the discussion of individual action plans and country-level dialogue, accountability within the Paris Declaration is principally set at the global level and around the High Level Forum. The monitoring survey is organized with a periodicity of two to three years so that reports can be prepared in time for each forum, even though this is poorly suited to support country-level mutual accountability dialogues that are typically (and appropriately) annual exercises.

The burden for initiating and steering country-level discussions falls on recipient countries. While a few have risen to the challenge, most recipients have neither the resources nor the implementation capacity to build the evidence base that would permit a meaningful dialogue with donors. Where effective country-level dialogue around aid quality is taking place, it has emerged slowly over time. In some circumstances, the donors

themselves may be unresponsive to partner country requests for information. Numerous anecdotes attest to the unwillingness or inability of some donors to provide up-to-date information on their activities in a given country (Fengler and Kharas, 2010).

Learning what works in aid is most useful when done at the country level. Yet most evaluations of aid projects are carried out in donor headquarters. Project and program evaluations which could be beneficial to recipient countries and other donors in country instead tend to be geared narrowly towards the aid agency sponsoring the intervention. This is regrettable given that development outcomes are highly context and country specific (Kharas, 2011).

By designing the Paris monitoring framework to support a global dialogue, some of the granularity and context that is so important to country-level problems—and which can make the difference between good and bad aid on the ground—is lost. Linking the process of global accountability more coherently to the incipient processes of country-level mutual accountability would be one way to dramatically improve aid quality in the field and to pinpoint accountability more precisely to areas, and individuals, where remedial actions can be taken.

## **PRIORITY GLOBAL TARGETS**

The coverage of the Paris agenda is limited by its choice of indicators and the five principles of effectiveness on which they focus. While the indicators and principles pick up many crucial aspects of aid that determine its effectiveness, other important aspects are missing (Box 1).

Prompted by the signing of the Paris Declaration, a number of new assessments of aid effectiveness have been developed since 2005, bringing to light many new indicators which could be included in future monitoring frameworks (Birsdall and Kharas, 2010; Knack et al. 2010; Easterly and Pfütze, 2008). At the same time, there is a virtue in ensuring that the number of global targets is kept relatively small, both to prioritize what is most important and to ensure that the aid effectiveness agenda remains sufficiently comprehensible to garner broad support.

It is worth noting that the aspects of the aid system which are currently drawing most criticism—fragmentation, proliferation, volatility, lack of transparency—are among those that are currently excluded from the Paris targets and indicators. There is an important lesson here, captured in the old saying: “You get what you measure.”

## BOX 1: IMPORTANT EFFECTIVENESS ISSUES MISSING FROM THE PARIS MONITORING FRAMEWORK

*Country Programmable Aid:* ODA net flows do not translate one-for-one into resources made available for development. Some flows do not involve transfers to partner countries (such as scholarships and the provision of foreign advisers), or serve other purposes (food aid, humanitarian aid, debt relief) which, while important, are not concerned with development activities themselves. A donor's Country Programmable Aid (CPA) share is a measure of what fraction of its ODA contributes directly to development interventions. In 2009, DAC countries provided \$55 billion in CPA compared to \$92 billion in gross bilateral ODA disbursements.

*Leverage:* ODA can also be used to leverage other resources for development, as in the case of public-private partnerships and investment guarantees. Leverage is not picked up in existing aid or aid effectiveness metrics; perversely, guarantees are only counted in ODA when they are called—precisely when their impact on development is lowest. Capturing the catalytic effect of aid is important to understanding its overall impact as well as to promoting the use of ODA in new ways that systematically encourage partnerships.

*Volatility:* Both the Paris Declaration and the subsequent Accra Agenda for Action address the importance of aid predictability and identify indicators and targets with this in mind. But predictability is only one facet of the bigger problem of aid volatility that partner countries repeatedly complain about. High variance in aid flows creates distortions and costs that can be substantial, estimated at up to 15 percent of the value of total aid flows (Kharas, 2008).

*Division of Labor:* The Paris Declaration and Accra Agenda for Action advocate for a donor division of labor based on each donor's comparative advantage, but do not subject this to indicators and targets. One proxy for donors' adherence to a division of labor is to measure the overall focus of each agency's aid program. The *Quality of Official Development Aid* assessment uses revealed comparative advantage (RCA) scores to measure donor focus, both in terms of country and sector coverage (Birdsall and Kharas, 2010).

*Proliferation:* Recent years have seen an explosion in the total number of organizations delivering aid, driven by the creation of new multilateral agencies and the decision of donor countries to channel their aid through multiple government departments rather than through a single specialist agency. Both lead to higher transaction costs for recipients who are forced to juggle multiple relationships and procedures.

*Fragmentation:* Aid activities are becoming increasingly small in size. While there is considerable variance within the aid system, more than half of all activities today have a value of less than \$100,000. Small-scale interventions can play an important role, such as serving as pilot projects which may later be scaled up, but in such large numbers they place an enormous strain on recipient governments and add to transaction costs. Savings of up to \$5 billion per year could be realized by a focus on lowering transactions costs (Killen and Rogerson, 2010).

*Transparency:* There remains considerable scope to improve the breadth, quality, granularity, accessibility and timeliness of the information donor agencies provide. Transparency is promoted in the Paris Declaration and Accra Agenda for Action, especially as a tool for supporting mutual accountability and results management. However, its only appearance in the Paris targets and indicators is accidental: the reporting of aid flows on recipient budgets is used as a (very) rough measure of donor alignment with recipients' development priorities. Greater transparency could generate benefits of up to \$11 billion annually from better use of aid (Aidinfo, 2009).

## COVERAGE OF DONORS

Some aspects of aid have important spillover effects that influence the effectiveness of other donors' aid. For example, concessional credits can affect partner country creditworthiness regardless of the source of the credit.

Similarly, topping up civil servant salaries or poaching bureaucratic talent can create costs for all (Knack and Rahman, 2004). Conversely, capacity building and development of country systems can have favorable spillovers across donors.

In each of these areas, it is important to have information on as complete a set of donors as possible in order to understand the extent of these spillover effects. At present, however, there are two important sets of actors among official aid donors who are inadequately represented in the Paris monitoring framework.

The first of these is multilateral aid agencies. While all of the largest multilaterals—the World Bank, the regional development banks, the European Commission, the Global Fund—are meaningfully engaged in the Paris process, many of the smaller agencies, of which there are more than 100, have managed to slip under the radar. The UN is a special case; it reports its performance as if it were a single donor, rather than distinguishing between its various agencies, which would be preferable.

The second, and arguably more important, omission is new development partners from emerging economies. As non-DAC members, the emerging donors fall outside the purview of the Paris Declaration and while they are free to participate in elements of the process, many of the largest have chosen to stay outside it. With total flows estimated at \$15 billion a year and growing quickly (Park, 2011), the absence of emerging donors from current monitoring on aid effectiveness is increasingly hard to ignore. Furthermore, their omission threatens to undermine the credibility of the effectiveness agenda and the claims of the High Level Forum to represent a truly global agreement.

## A MONITORING FRAMEWORK FOR A BUSAN GLOBAL DEVELOPMENT COMPACT

The task before the Busan High Level Forum is to deliver a new Global Compact to further improve the quality and effectiveness of aid. Such a compact should build on the learning from the implementation of the Paris targets and indicators. It must provide a framework that differentiates aid quality by context, drills down to the country level, focuses global targets on the most important issues, and be inclusive of all development partners.

A compact of this kind will be a challenge to monitor. Yet, the overriding lesson of the Paris process is that setting medium-term commitments to improve aid quality, coupled with a sound monitoring system, is a strong basis for promoting accountability, knowledge and learning. Quantitative indicators and targets should therefore be retained as the foundation of the new Development Compact.

The first step in forging a new approach in Busan is to agree on a new, updated list of indicators which reflects the latest knowledge and the range of issues that constitute effective aid. The indicators employed in the Paris Declaration provide a useful starting point from which this can be developed. The list should be based on broad consultation with practitioners, recipients and beneficiaries regarding their key priorities and concerns for increasing aid's impact. The Busan forum provides an excellent opportunity to have such a conversation, even if the list cannot be firmly agreed upon at the forum itself. That would not be unusual; the Paris targets and indicators were not finalized until several months after the Paris event.

Under the new monitoring framework, these indicators should be monitored universally—that is, for all official providers of aid and in as many recipient countries as possible—and on an annual basis, as opposed to once every two to three years. Universality and high periodicity are essential factors to enhance the role of monitoring in improving knowledge and accountability.

The next step is to divide these indicators into two subsets: the first concerning aid effectiveness issues that demand global collective action in order to be addressed, and the second concerning issues that are context and country specific (Figure 1).

The first subset includes the aspects of aid effectiveness which, if neglected by one donor, create negative spill-over effects for the effectiveness of other aid, or where global targets may prompt concerted action by many donors. This may include the following:

- *Transparency*, enabling minimum standards of coordination to avoid donors getting in each other's way, and to disclose information on recipient government borrowing which is relevant for informing governments' creditworthiness
- *Untying*, to avoid donors being drawn into a beggar thy neighbor scenario
- *Volatility and predictability*, since one instance of volatile/unpredictable aid can force recipients to make adjustments that affect the success of other development programs, and to support longer-term planning
- *Respecting recipient institutions*, which means avoiding the establishment of Project Implementation Units, or the poaching of staff from the public sector
- *Division of Labor*, to address the issue of donor "orphans" and "darlings" as well as to encourage sector specialization and expertise within donor agencies

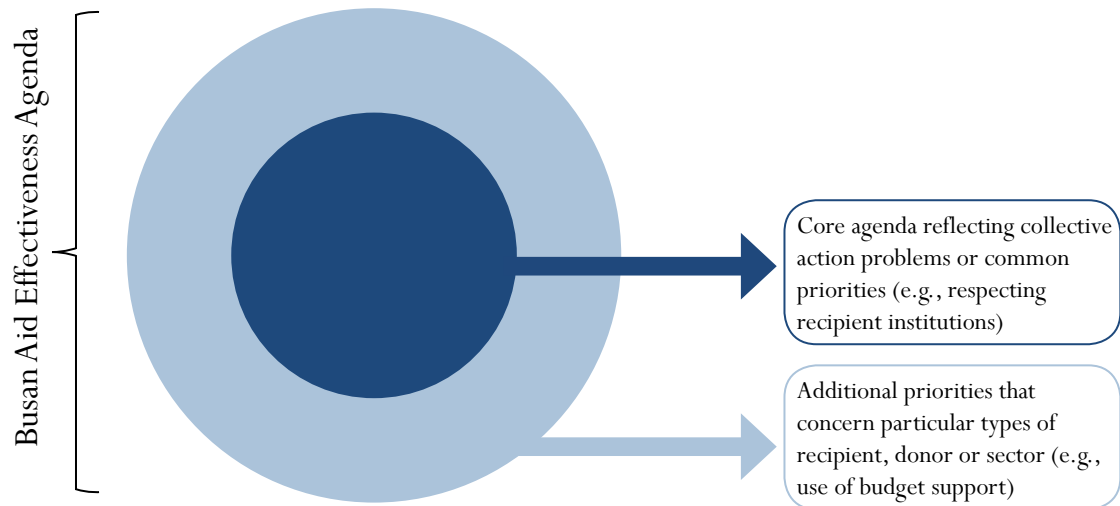
Since meaningful progress in these select areas of aid effectiveness depends on action by all parties, these—and these alone—should be subject to global commitments to commonly-defined targets which apply universally throughout the global aid system. In other words, these are the minimum standards to which all official donors—bilateral, multilateral, DAC and non-DAC—should be held. Accountability for progress on these targets should be set at the global level, and around the High Level Forum process, as is the case for the Paris targets.

The second subset of aid effectiveness indicators need not be part of these minimum standards. These indicators are relevant to particular types of aid, depending on the recipient, donor or priority sector involved. Indicators of this type may measure the use of country systems, extent of country programmable aid, donor agency proliferation and specialization, use of budget support, coordination of missions and studies, project size and other elements of transaction costs.

For these indicators, recipients, in collaboration with their donor partners, should decide which are most relevant to them, and subject these to country-based targets. Negotiations of these targets should occur at a country level and on a bilateral basis, and be embedded within partnership agreements between recipient governments

and each of their major donor partners. In each case, partner countries and their development partners would agree on appropriate country-level targets, drawing from the range of indicators tracked at a global level, supplementing these with country-based indicators, stakeholder perception surveys, or qualitative assessments, where appropriate. The partnership agreements would allow DAC donors who have “unfinished business” in meeting the Paris targets to continue to pursue these as a matter of priority. Since these indicators would not be subject to global targets, responsibility for progress would rest entirely at the country level, providing a foundation for true mutual accountability.

**FIGURE 1: BUSAN AID EFFECTIVENESS AGENDA**



An important feature of this proposal which differs from the Paris approach is to partially de-link the parameters of the global monitoring framework from the negotiation of global targets. Under the Paris Declaration, the scope of monitoring was defined by the targets themselves, but at Busan, a positive outcome could involve a narrow set of global targets combined with a more expansive set of indicators, donors and recipients subject to global monitoring.

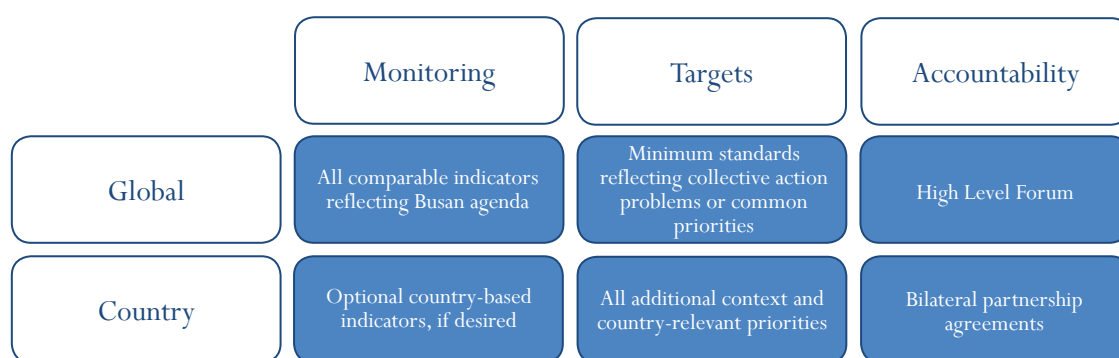
The division between global accountability for global targets and country-level accountability for country targets plays to the aid system’s strengths (Figure 2). Global dialogue on aid is best focused on what donors and partners have in common, on how actions by one actor affects others, and on what changes agency headquarters can bring about through institutional reforms and new codes of conduct. Accountability at a global level requires a comprehensible and streamlined agenda which can easily be communicated, and around which global campaign groups can then build support. The set of priority global indicators could realistically be limited to no more than half a dozen indicators.

In contrast, country-level dialogue should focus on the differentiated recipient and sector circumstances and the differentiated development partner responsibilities which reflect the realities development actors face on the ground.

Dialogue can be more substantive and iterative, focusing on particular blockages in the aid system and other issues of implementation unique to particular countries, donors and sectors. Recipient countries can focus their capacity on leading country-level dialogue with donors while relying on global monitoring to conduct surveys and provide the evidence base for discussions. Furthermore, partnership agreements on effectiveness can be embedded within existing development planning processes and aid coordination initiatives, where there is a growing basis for accountability, and where civil society, the private sector, parliament and other domestic accountability mechanisms can be engaged.

If implemented successfully, this two-track global-country framework could bring about significant improvements in aid effectiveness, enabling aid to finally fulfill its potential to catalyze development.

**FIGURE 2: A TWO-TRACK FRAMEWORK FOR BUSAN**



## WHO SHOULD LEAD THE GLOBAL MONITORING EFFORT?

Our proposal will entail a significant, though manageable, increase in global monitoring of aid effectiveness. The level of monitoring will expand in three dimensions: the number of effectiveness indicators, the number of official donors and recipients, and the periodicity of surveys.

At present, the DAC secretariat is responsible for global monitoring, under the stewardship of the Working Party on Aid Effectiveness (WP-EFF). This is appropriate insofar as the targets and indicators emerged out of, and serve as input into, the High Level Forum agenda. Under a two-track framework, global monitoring will support both global and country-level accountability, so it is not clear what monitoring functions the DAC secretariat should retain.

Global dialogue on aid is best focused on what donors and partners have in common, on how actions by one actor affects others, and on what changes agency headquarters can bring about through institutional reforms and new codes of conduct.

In contrast, country-level dialogue should focus on the differentiated recipient and sector circumstances and the differentiated development partner responsibilities which reflect the realities development actors face on the ground.

The heaviest administrative costs associated with the monitoring process are born by donors and partner countries themselves so they should be consulted about how best to administer any new framework agreed at Busan. The effectiveness benefits that could potentially emerge from a two-track framework would appear to easily offset these transaction costs, but clarity as to who would pay for monitoring is important.

In Table 1, we describe four institutional options for administering global monitoring. The table compares retaining the role of the DAC secretariat, or passing control over to one of three institutions: the UNDCF, a Korean institution, or an independent body, such as a coalition of global think tanks or a dedicated NGO. Each option has pros and cons that should be debated, but a way forward should be identified during the Busan forum. For each option, it may also be useful to think of the role that regional institutions can play as knowledge platforms to promote best practices and the sharing of experiences across countries.

**TABLE 1: FOUR INSTITUTIONAL OPTIONS FOR GLOBAL MONITORING**

Institution	Pros	Cons
DAC secretariat	Proven capability and experience in administering survey.	No field presence. Questionable legitimacy in monitoring non-DAC members.
UNDCF	Legitimacy springs from broad UN membership. Some experience engaging in existing monitoring arrangements.	Possible conflict of interest in monitoring of UN agencies.
Korean institution	“Bridge” between new and old donors. Permanent link to Busan Compact. Link to Seoul Development Consensus (G20) actions.	No prior experience in global aid monitoring.
Coalition of global think tanks, or dedicated NGO	Independent and impartial.	Could weaken donor interest. Requires new funding.

## A TIMETABLE FOR ACTION

With six months to go before this year's High Level Forum in Busan, preparations are now well under way, led by the WP-EFF. At present, discussions are rightly focused on the form of the new agreement and its thematic areas. With these discussions still having some way to run, it is not surprising that deliberation over the possible form of a post-Busan monitoring framework has barely begun.

Rather than attempting to pin down the details of a new monitoring framework at Busan immediately, participants should look to identify some general principles to guide its development over time. At a minimum, coming out of the Busan forum, participants should have agreed to the following:

- The need for ongoing monitoring of aid effectiveness, based on a system of indicators, targets, surveys and reports
- Support for a two-track framework involving:
- Global monitoring of an updated list of effectiveness indicators, accompanied by global targets for a subset of issues that become minimum standards for ODA
- Country-based targets for other context-relevant effectiveness issues, negotiated on a bilateral basis and embedded within partnership agreements
- A commitment by as many new development partners as possible to participate in global monitoring efforts
- A commitment by DAC members to meet those targets that remain unmet from the Paris Declaration
- The integration of sector and recipient-based principles of good practice with country indicators
- An agreement on the desired approach towards institutional arrangements for future global monitoring

Within six months of the High Level Forum and following further consultation, the final details of the new monitoring framework should be agreed. Partner countries should by then have also agreed to a timetable for the introduction of an annual country-level mutual accountability process.

Together, these commitments and agreements could form the basis of a voluntary Busan Global Aid Quality Initiative which would provide a strong foundation for accountability and learning in the Busan Global Development Compact.

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