Progress Since Busan: Country and Democratic Ownership

This document was prepared by a consultant supported by ActionAid, along with the CSO Partnership for Development Effectiveness (CPDE), and does not necessarily reflect the official views of the the Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation (GPEDC). This paper draws on a range of evidence sources and is designed to complement and deepen the analysis available from the Global Monitoring Report so as to foster useful discussions during the High Level Meeting in Mexico City.

Contacts:
Amy Dodd, UK Aid Network amy@ukan.org.uk
Luca De Fraia, Action Aid luca.defraia@actionaid.org

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INTRODUCTION

Supporting ownership is central to development. The international community has been engaging with this question for many years in different ways. The Bandung Principles for cooperation between Asian and African countries, set out in in 1955 and reaffirmed in 2005, include 'abstention from intervention of interference in the internal affairs of another country.'[1] The First Ministerial Conference of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) declared that 'Each country has the right to choose, in its course of development, its own social system, development model and way of life in light of its national conditions.'[2]

In November 2011, the Fourth High Level Meeting on Aid Effectiveness was held in Busan, Korea. The outcome of that meeting, the Busan Partnership document (BPa)[3], builds on previous aid effectiveness agreements: the Rome Declaration on Harmonisation (2003),[4] the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness (2005), and the Accra Agenda for Action (2008).[5] This discussion paper looks at evidence of progress with country and democratic ownership since the Busan agreement.

The Busan Partnership agreement states country ownership as a shared common principle among Busan partners:

> "*Ownership of development priorities by developing countries.* Partnerships for development can only succeed if they are led by developing countries, implementing approaches that are tailored to country--- specific situations and needs." (BPa §11 a).

Furthermore, the Busan partners agree to use these shared principles to guide their actions to "deepen, extend and operationalise the democratic ownership of development policies and processes." (BPa §12 a)

Ownership is a contested concept, but a working definition of 'country ownership' is that the partner country government exercises leadership over its development policies and strategies, rather than primarily aid providers. 'By invoking 'ownership' the Busan Partners recognise that effective change in developing countries cannot be simply imposed by external agents, and that governments lead on policy direction and implementation.

Democratic 'ownership' is a broader concept that encompasses the whole of society. It goes beyond governments only and takes into account the nature of the support for the partner government's policies and strategies among the wider population of the partner country, and the participation of the population in setting policy and monitoring implementation. In subscribing to an ideal of 'democratic ownership', Busan Partners recognise that all governments should be held to account by their people rather than by external agents. Governments should respond to the needs of their wider population, and the wider population should be able to engage in policy-making processes, and monitoring the effective implementation of these policies. The mechanisms by which this may happen are many and varied, but Busan partners agree to support rather than undermine the accountability of the government to its people.

Support for ownership requires alignment of the aid providers' priorities with the stated priorities of the partner governments; harmonisation of aid providers' reporting and assessment procedures to reduce workload on recipients; honest dialogue between donors and partner governments on the political constraints holding back government performance; and governments' willingness to address corruption and inefficiencies in local systems.

Key elements of practice that support ownership include:

- government leadership in policy formulation, implementation and monitoring, with participation by a wide range of stakeholders including the recipient government, aid providers, civil society, local governments, private sector, parliaments and others;

- government leadership in managing aid processes;

- ensuring that parliaments and civil society are enabled to play their role in holding government to account;

- supportive behaviour from aid providers, in particular:

    o providing predictable development assistance;

    o untying aid; and

    o use of country systems by providers of development assistance.

The Busan partners recognise that an aid relationship based on democratic ownership of the development agenda and monitoring mechanisms is more likely to provide an effective and inclusive means of managing diverse development resources than any alternative.

WHERE ARE WE NOW?

The purpose of this paper is to provide an evidence-based document to trigger the discussion on ownership at the First High Level Meeting of the Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation. This paper draws on diverse evidence sources - beyond the GPEDC Monitoring Report - to provide a good snapshot of evidence and experience of progress on ownership at the global and country level. It also focuses on assessing progress against the agreed measures of ownership from Busan and previous aid effectiveness fora while recognising broader work and debates on the idea of ownership. It is not intended to duplicate the official Busan monitoring process, but to spark discussion among Busan partners.

Government ownership of national frameworks for development

The Busan agreement commits partners to "deepen, extend, and operationalise the democratic ownership of development policies and processes." (BPa, §12a).

Partner countries are continuing to show laudable leadership in developing and maintaining national development strategies and national results frameworks, despite weak capacity in many cases. In some cases, the government provides leadership to deepen the results-orientation of previous plans and strategies. In some fragile states, such as South Sudan, the creation of a government-owned New Deal is the focus of government efforts around transition and development and is being led by the government.[6]

Cambodia has recently drafted a new Development Cooperation Partnerships Strategy which sets out a programme of work to enhance the results orientation of existing national processes. There are efforts to link the results-frameworks of sector-level Technical Working Groups with sector strategies/plans that link in turn to the National Strategic Development Plan. These will link with Joint Monitoring Indicators that are now a "well-established tool for setting common goals and jointly monitoring progress."[7]

South-south cooperation can be an important means of delivering country-ownership. Middle-income partners such as Brazil may position themselves as providers of demand-driven technical assistance, where the needs of the recipient country are seen to take precedence over the agenda of the provider. In addition, peer-to-peer learning is the foundation of groups like the g7+,

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a voluntary association of fragile states. This peer group influences international policy dialogue at the highest levels to ensure the needs of fragile and transition states are voiced, was instrumental in shaping the New Deal agreed at Busan,[8] and has also reached out to the similarly affected countries such as the Central African Republic to assist where possible.[9]

Brazilian cooperation

"A defining feature of Brazilian SSDC is its delivery by civil servants who are based in different line ministries and government institutions, rather than a central aid agency. This means that experts with first-hand experience of designing and delivering policies and programmes in Brazil are able to share their knowledge with peers in partner countries. However, high staff turnover, workload and lack of experience of working in different environments all pose serious challenges.

Civil society organisations and social movements have played a key role in many of the social policy innovations which Brazilian SSDC is seeking to share. Some Brazilian civil society organisations are also experienced players in development cooperation, and are highly engaged in transnational networks… There is a strong perception that Brazil stands out amongst the BRICS for its potential to promote a participatory approach to development cooperation – including sustained dialogue with civil society both within Brazil and in partner countries – but that this potential is not currently being realised."[10]

In addition to national-level policy, local and regional governments (LRGs) are taking a greater role in decentralised development cooperation. New ways of working that have great potential for fostering greater country and democratic ownership below the level of central government.

Decentralised development cooperation

"In recent years, decentralised development cooperation has evolved remarkably, and has overcome the initial inefficient vertical models, based primarily on a donor-recipient logic. LRGs have shifted to setting up new specific modalities based on horizontal and reciprocal partnerships between peers, with a high capacity to mobilise economic and social stakeholders at the territorial level such as the private sector, civil society organisations and academia. These modalities possess great potential to contribute to development through peer-to-peer learning, the exchange of experiences and know-how, the provision of technical assistance and the promotion of a shared political agenda."[11]

In some cases, nationally-owned policy making and monitoring processes institutionalise the role of civil society and other stakeholders in ways that may serve to foster democratic ownership. However, the extent to which non-governmental stakeholders are involved in policy making varies widely. "There is growing evidence of the effectiveness of multi- stakeholder approaches to advance ownership at the global level, such as seen with the GPEDC. There are also indications that, while the quality varies considerably, multi- stakeholder dialogue is on the rise at country level."[12]

Bangladesh's Sixth Five Year Plan includes third-party monitoring of the Plan, an important feature that would support greater democratic ownership. "Third Party monitoring by qualified civil society organizations complements the efforts of the Government of Bangladesh to monitor the Plan jointly with development partners through the Development Results Framework. It offers the opportunity to complement the analysis of performance indicators with in depth information gathered directly from citizens at the local level. The Government of Bangladesh believes that effective monitoring of the Five Year Plan by third parties will be instrumental in strengthening accountability and transparency; and effective in helping to take corrective actions to improve development results."[13]

While in many countries arrangements for donor coordination and alignment are being implemented, the exact extent to which actors in developing countries can or will align their support to such strategies and frameworks is not always clear. There is no automatic link between the existence of a national policy or framework and the behaviour of individual aid providers or other stakeholders. The Busan monitoring process is piloting an indicator to monitor the extent to which providers of development cooperation use country results frameworks, but is likely to find that it is too early to tell whether there is progress on this. In addition, it is important to remember that even if actors do align their support with national development, their behaviour

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in other areas (such as aid predictability and use of country systems) will have an enormous impact on the prospects for real country ownership of development processes.

Country ownership of aid management processes

The Busan agreement makes a strong statement on country-led aid management as a part of country ownership.

> "Developing countries will lead consultation and coordination efforts to manage…diversity at a country level, while providers of development assistance have a responsibility to reduce fragmentation and curb the proliferation of aid channels….We will, by 2013, make greater use of country-led coordination arrangements, including division of labour, as well as programme-based approaches, joint programming and delegated cooperation." (§25)

More countries report that they have national aid policies, but they are still a minority.[14] There are some good practice examples of deeper ownership of aid processes, where "partner countries show strong ownership in ensuring that the other core principles of the effectiveness agenda – alignment, harmonisation, results orientation, transparency and mutual accountability as well as inclusive partnerships – are followed with regard to aid diversity management."[15] Crucially, studies show that capacity for country-owned aid management must be supported and aid providers must act in ways that support country-owned aid management.

Importantly for the ideal of democratic ownership, some partner countries also include all relevant stakeholders (bi- and multilateral donors, newly emerging donors, civil society, private actors, etc.) in the dialogue. One element of good practice that is highlighted is that of the recipient government "continuously leading an intensive and trust-based dialogue with all development stakeholders."[16]

Rwanda: Case study by the Building Block on Managing Diversity and Reducing Fragmentation

"Resulting from its initiative and leadership, the government of Rwanda has been able to continuously improve in the past years its management of aid diversity. It has conducted a donor mapping in 2010 and an assessment of donors' comparative advantages, which have laid the foundation for a division of labour process between donors that has been aligned with national priorities. Major pillars of aid management have been the continuous and government-led dialogue between the government and development partners, the establishment of working groups at the sector level, the continuous assessment of donor performance, and the operation of an up-to-date aid database. The fragmentation ratio has dropped from an average of 40% during 2008-2011 to 31% in 2012. Going forward, Rwanda wants to further improve the management of aid diversity by using joint programming of EU and non-EU donors."[17]

National leadership in driving aid management processes must, however, be complemented by efforts at the global level and donor headquarter level to reduce aid fragmentation. Some major donors have made steps towards operationalising their commitments to joint programming. The EC's Joint Programming Strategy was first piloted in five countries in 2012 and it is now underway in 20 countries[18]. However, the EC's Joint Programming exercise is not generally open to a variety of stakeholders, thus limiting the impact on democratic ownership[19].

In **Ethiopia** the EU+ group (EU institutions, member states, plus Norway) have now published a Joint Cooperation Strategy which includes firm commitments to "activate progressively a joint programming strategy by 2015" and build a Common Results Framework, as well as reiterating other commitments on division of labour and mutual accountability.[20]

Despite a well-established multilateral reform agenda, partner countries are "the least involved and least influential stakeholder group in multilateral policy discussions or reform efforts."[21] The multilateral system has continued to proliferate despite existing commitments, which has a deleterious impact on country ownership of aid management.

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> "Various forms of earmarked funding (e.g., single and thematic Trust Funds, Fiduciary Intermediary Funds, etc.) often lead to the creation of new and often financially insignificant aid relationships with multiple partner countries. While acknowledging certain advantages of TF resources, partner countries question the high level of control remaining with the TF holding organisations, their "off-budget" character and a particular lack of information and transparency regarding TF-resources."[22]

Aid transparency and mutual accountability processes also play a fundamental role in ensuring democratic ownership of aid processes. These are being explored more fully in a companion paper, but in short it will be necessary to increase the momentum around existing international and country-level initiatives in order to deliver on their potential.

Role of Parliaments and Civil Society

The role of parliaments is critical in building democratic ownership of development policy and Busan partners are committed to strengthening the role of parliaments. The Busan agreement also contains commitments to "enable CSOs to exercise their roles as independent development actors, with a particular focus on an enabling environment." (BPa §22). The Civicus Enabling Environment Index will provide a useful starting point for this indicator.[23]

Parliamentarians may have little or no role in aid processes such as dialogue or mutual accountability arrangements and would benefit from greater capacity and skills to provide strong oversight of the national executive.

Supporting the work of parliaments

The Association of European Parliamentarians with Africa (AWEPA) and the Parliamentary Forum of the South African Development Community (SADC PF) held a joint seminar aimed to encourage constructive dialogue over development effectiveness, with a particular emphasis on priority setting and policy oversight. The workshop resulted in a statement on enhancing parliamentary engagement in the GPDEC (to be tabled).[24]

Parliamentary scrutiny of budgets is an important aspect of democratic ownership. Parliamentarians often lack the specialist knowledge and skills required for strong budget oversight.

> "Although African legislatures are becoming more active in budget processes, their focus has seldom been on performance. Budget programme managers are rarely named publicly or held to account for performance before parliamentary committees charged with examining budget outcomes and performance"[25] (p x) .

Civil society access to budget documents is a further element of democratic ownership, but is insufficient in many countries. "For the most part, access to [budget] information is either very partial or unavailable on a straightforward and timely basis."[26]

There are some examples of emerging country-level multi-stakeholder dialogue fora that have the potential to deepen and operationalize the democratic ownership principle. In Cameroon, for instance, there are 37 sectoral or thematic fora which provide space for participatory dialogue. In Malawi, many CSOs engage at decision-making processes and forums at the district level.[27]

Public Councils in Kyrgyzstan

"The Public Councils (PCs) launched in Kyrgyzstan in 2011 offer an interesting model of institutionalized multi- stakeholder dialogue. These multi- stakeholder councils work under each Ministry and Agency as mechanisms of dialogue between government, civil society, the private sector, and other actors. They play both a consultative and a watchdog role, and are also intended to be a venue for information sharing on non- state actors' initiatives. By 2012, thirty- six such PCs were in operation with mixed success. Despite the highest level of political will in support of the PCs, which were introduced by Presidential Decree, there remains some resistance at Ministry and Agency level to embrace the inclusive PC format (Dzhanaeva, 2013, p. 104). A draft law is under consideration, which would further legitimize their existence as autonomous, arms- length bodies geared to both advise and monitor state actions. While a tool for promoting transparency, accountability and democratic ownership, the PCs are also seen to have an intrinsic

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value in strengthening state – civil society relationships that can, over time, help broaden and deepen the political will necessary for such inclusive mechanisms to work."[28]

On the whole, however, multi-stakeholder consultation is "mostly episodic, at the discretion of governments and often involves limited numbers of CSOs and other stakeholders within government bodies mandated to coordinate and/or monitor country development strategies remains the exception rather than the rule."[29] In addition, there is a "worrying trend that the less-than-conducive environment for civil society reported pre-Busan continues today, and is perhaps growing in a wider range of countries… In particular limitations on peaceful assembly are increasing, based on the misconception that peaceful assemblies are a priori a threat to public order."[30]
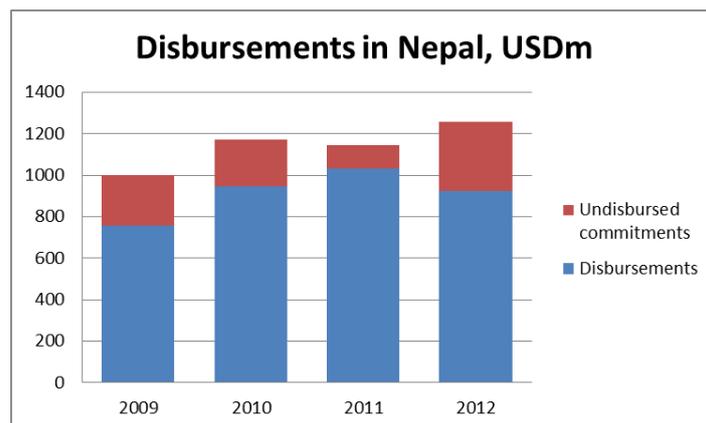
Aid predictability

One of the ways in which development assistance can support ownership is for providers to provide resources predictably. Without this information, governments have difficulty planning and implementing their policies. Aid predictability is a key Busan commitment for aid providers, encompassing both disbursing commitments on time, and providing a forward spending plan to recipients.

Globally, nearly 12% of official development aid that was committed for 2012 went undisbursed, reversing a previously encouraging trend.

Percent of commitments undisbursed, all donors
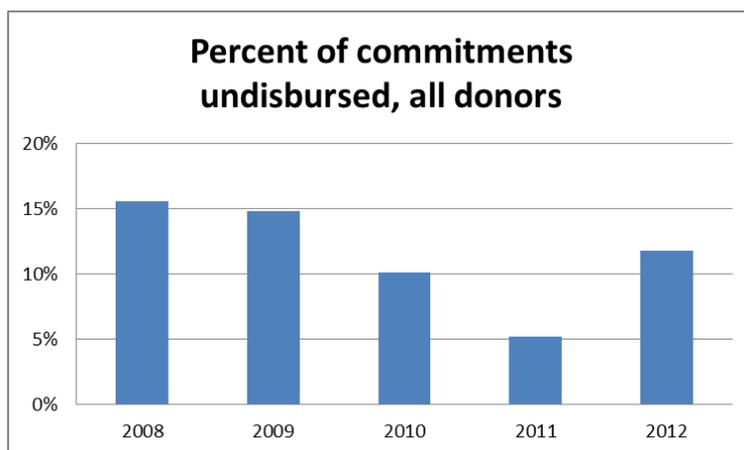
Data from stats.oecd.org 24 February 2014,
comparing commitments and gross disbursements
for all donors that report to the OECD.

Given past disbursement patterns, it is clear that for some aid providers disbursing their commitments within year is highly problematic. Data from the OECD shows that the discrepancy between their commitments for a financial year and their disbursements for that financial year can be extremely high for both bilateral and multilateral donors, particularly the World Bank, the EU, and Arab donors. Ownership at country level is affected to a greater or lesser degree depending on the size of the flows and the relative significance of the donor involved. In Nepal, for instance, the situation is worsening over time rather than improving.

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Disbursements in Nepal, USDm

Source: stats.oecd.org, 25 February,
commitments and gross disbursements, all donors

In terms of the provision of forward spending information, there remains work to be done. Only two EU member states provide three to five year development plans for all their development partners, although not on a rolling basis.[31] A large minority of donors (43.2%) publish no forward-looking disaggregated budget information at all. A sizeable proportion of donors (26.9%) publish information relating to 3 or more years in the future, but they are outweighed by the proportion looking only 1 or 2 years into the future (29.9%).[32]

Donors publishing disaggregated forward spending information

DAC donors	7	Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Korea, Portugal, US MCC
Multilateral donors	2	AsDB, UNICEF
Emerging donors	2	Czech Republic, Slovenia
Other donors	1	European Investment Bank

Source: Publish What You Fund – data for the 2013 Aid Transparency Index

Although DAC donors may provide (or plan to provide) information in key countries, or for certain modalities, the evidence "suggests no donors have met the commitment to provide all developing countries with forward spending plans that cover all forms of aid and that are revised on a rolling basis… Bottlenecks cited include legal, economic and procedural constraints."[33]

Untying aid

Tied aid means that development assistance must be spent on goods and services from the donor country or region. Untying aid is important for aid efficiency, and for supporting local procurement, the local private sector and the local economy. If aid is tied, recipients are not free to shop for the best deals, and are not free to pay for the services of local private sector organisations. It is commonly estimated that tying raises the cost of a project by 15% to 30%.

There has been encouraging progress in donors reporting the tying status of their aid in official databases: in 2011 only about 10% of donors consistently reported the tying status of their aid in the OECD's Creditor Reporting System or IATI, while in 2013, over 37% did so. This is still a minority of donors, however. Of emerging donors, only Latvia consistently reports the tying status of its aid.[34]

There has been only marginal progress on actually untying aid since the 2011 Busan agreement. Only five European member states have announced ambitions to further untie their aid since Busan.[35] Data from the OECD shows 86.1% of global aid being untied in 2012 as compared to 81.0% in 2011. There has been limited progress on further aid untying among DAC members.[36]

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However, DAC members have untied a significant proportion of their aid compared to many non-DAC donors. Some of these are large donors – Saudi Arabia, for instance, was estimated to provide nearly $3bn in non-emergency assistance in 2011, all of which is tied.[37]

Donor use of Country Systems

When providers of development assistance use the financial management and administrative systems of the recipient country to deliver their resources, the country systems become strengthened through use. Weaknesses and flaws are more readily identified and capacity is built through practice. Using project-specific systems, or the donor's own systems, diverts capacity and resources away from the strengthening partner country systems. The Busan partners agree that the "use and strengthening of countries' systems remains central to our efforts to build effective institutions." (BPa, §19) Partners agree to use country systems as the "default approach for development cooperation" (BPa, §19a). There is ongoing work on developing indicators for measuring progress in this area, including an 'ichallenge' to crowdsource ideas for indicators.

Progress in this area would appear to be slow overall. "PEFA assessments in 2012 and 2013 found that only 5 out of 14 countries showed an increase in the use of country systems."[38] Some parts of country systems are used more than others, with donors traditionally starting their use of country systems with audit systems, but reluctant to use planning and budget preparation systems (except in the case of budget support).[39]

Some ways of providing assistance support the use of country systems more than others. Data from the OECD shows that budget support (the primary aid instrument that uses country PFM systems by default) has decreased to less than half the amount disbursed in 2009. Nearly all bilateral DAC donors have decreased their general budget support (GBS) spend since 2011. The only exceptions are Italy, Japan, and New Zealand; Japan has more than doubled its GBS between 2011 and 2012. The United Arab Emirates (not a member of the DAC) has also more than doubled its budget support from $200m in 2011 to over $400m in 2012.
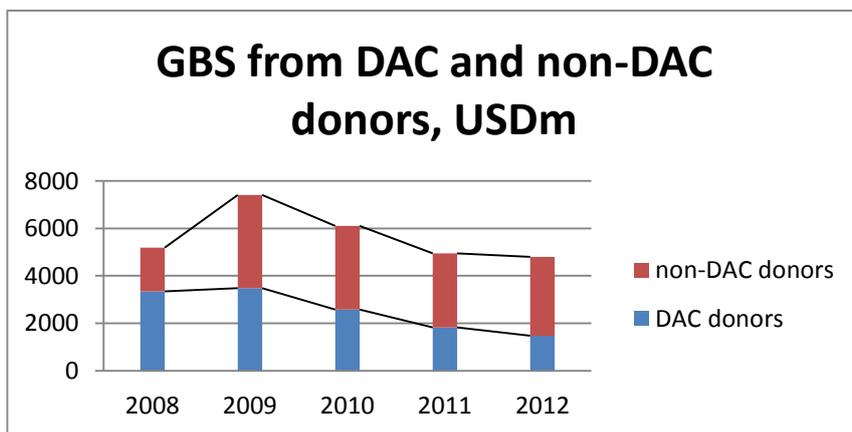
Data from stats.oecd.org download 12 Feb 2014
All channels, all sectors, constant prices, gross disbursements.

Although aid providers are some way away from using country systems as a default, the direction of change is generally positive. Donors 'grow into' using country systems, proceeding (for instance) from pooled funds to budget support, and more donors joining existing instruments that use country systems. Furthermore, there is a "threshold effect, with donors tolerating

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deterioration in country PFM systems when already using systems, but being slow to switch to use of country systems when there is PFM improvement."[40]

In many cases, donors have legitimate concerns about the quality of recipient country systems, concerns about corruption and poor financial management systems. Reform of public financial management (PFM) is a key element to encouraging use of country systems. Looking at more general evidence on the state of PFM reform globally, there is among many an 'emerging consensus' on the importance of country-owned, government-led, politically-sensitive reform that starts with the 'basics' and moves on to more complex reforms. There is widespread agreement that aid providers fail to operate according to these principles and often "give contradictory and confusing advice that can overwhelm the limited capacity of senior technocrats."[41]

This is not purely a problem for aid providers, of course. "In many cases…the binding constraint for PFM reform is not donor resources or even government capacity, but rather resistance from certain public officials who benefit from maintaining less-transparent systems and procedures."[42]

Use of country systems is strongly related to the quality of those systems, but that this is not the sole determinant of donors' decisions – other factors also play an important role.[43] Ways forward will be determined at country level with reference to country-owned aid management processes, and as such there are proposals to launch country dialogues on the use and strengthening of local systems.

Conclusions

High-level commitment to the principle and practice of ownership remains relatively strong despite challenges, and progress has been encouraging in some areas. There are encouraging stories around the development of nationally owned development strategies/results frameworks and aid diversity management at country level, although **capacity is often lacking, multilateral proliferation continues, and frameworks are often not open to broad groups of stakeholders**. Some countries are providing examples of ways of working that could be adapted for other country contexts, and provide empowering examples of what ownership might look like in practice.

Parliaments need more support in strengthening their policy oversight capacity, in particular for budget scrutiny. They are not usually involved in aid management processes or mutual accountability mechanisms. **Civil society involvement in policy making and monitoring of implementation is patchy and limited**, with considerable room for improvement in ensuring an enabling environment for their work.

Progress from aid providers is regrettably limited in untying aid and aid predictability. Addressing blocks at donor headquarter level will be critical for improving country ownership. In particular, non-DAC donors should address the levels of tied aid. **The use of country systems as a default also seems some way away at the moment**. Strengthening PFM systems continues to be challenging not least because of a lack of coordination in this area, and resistance from some public officials in partner countries.

Despite pockets of good practice, progress to change the balance of the aid relationship is slow. Business as usual is not sufficient to bring about the levels of ownership and democratic ownership required for truly effective aid. Strong and reinvigorated commitment to the Busan principles is urgently needed, backed by firm action from donors, recipient governments and wider stakeholders.

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ACTION PLAN FOR IMPLEMENTING BUSAN COMMITMENTS ON OWNERSHIP

- All Busan partners should strongly recommit to the principle of democratic ownership and the necessary changes in behaviour that support ownership.
- All Busan partners should support and strengthen country-owned aid management processes and mutual accountability processes. This requires specialist capacity-building as well as behaviour change among aid providers at country level and headquarter level.
- All Busan partners should strongly recommit to the use of country systems as a first option and ensure that information on cooperation is aligned with national budgets. Partner countries should create entry points and pathways for donors to increase the use of country systems.
- Partner countries should call for harmonisation of support to PFM reform, beginning with harmonised fiduciary risk assessments and continuing with a 'back to basics' approach where relevant.
- Aid providers should recommit to untying all aid and improving aid predictability. This requires ensuring that country-level aid management processes can hold aid providers accountable for failures to disburse and failures to provide forward information. Aid providers should address their individual constraints in providing forward information as a matter of urgency.
- All Busan partners should support parliaments in their oversight role, with specialist capacity building work. Publication of budget information is critical for budget oversight by both parliaments and civil society.
- All Busan partners should agree to reverse the current trend of shrinking space for civil society by committing to establishing an enabling environment for CSOs including supporting an enabling environment framework and guidelines.
- Further data on progress against Busan indicators and the publication of implementation schedules would provide a stronger basis for accelerating progress and strengthening political commitment.

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[16] Quote from p 2 of short paper *op. cit.*

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