Why **effectiveness matters** in the response to the COVID-19 pandemic

CSO Partnership for Development Effectiveness

The Covid-19 crisis is gradually exposing the flaws of the prevailing market-based development framework that is narrowly centered on economic growth. Decades of deregulation and privatization hollowed the capacity of developing countries to mitigate the negative socio-economic impacts of the pandemic. Across the world, we constantly hear references to a 'new normal' that defines new parameters for our way of life amid the crisis. Discourses about the 'new normal' appear to challenge prevailing market-driven policies on development and thereby create openings for alternative people-centered approaches. However, current discussions in the international community simply point to new mutations of the same old policies that bail out corporations instead of communities in need, and prioritize business interests over the welfare of people in poverty. The crisis brought by the spread of Covid-19 exacerbates the challenges already confronting the development community. It impacts on all the SDGs and can jeopardise the delivery of these goals. New forms of what are essentially business-as-usual approaches will be of little help if we want to achieve progress in the SDGs in the context of the 'new normal'.

There seems to be broad consensus on the need to make human rights central to COVID-19 response and recovery. Further, we heard many times over that the response to the COVID-19 must be as effective as possible in order to maximize the impact of resources that are available, which are very likely to be scarce as against the real needs. This is echoed in the UN Secretary General's call for an inclusive and effective response to the Covid-19 pandemic, ensuring that we keep the most vulnerable populations front and centre.[1] The EU, in its most Council Conclusions on the pandemic, recalls that international development partners should align with partner countries and align with their response plans[2]. The GPEDC's most recent declaration[3] is a remarkable example of such positioning along with the CPDE's statement on this very topic[4].

Now it is possibly time to dig deeper and unpack, at the very least, the arguments about why effectiveness[5] matters for a sustainable and durable response to the pandemic, and why it should be at the core of the 'new normal'. From the CPDE angle, it is also very important to factor in the Leave No One Behind pledge due to its obvious implications in terms of both effectiveness (focus on results and /or inclusive partnerships) and the realization of human rights. Hence, CPDE is submitting the reality check list below for discussion with all relevant actors.

Ownership

Driven by national priorities and realities on the ground. Donors should align their plans with the reality on the ground as captured in national diagnostic, planning and budgeting instruments, which would ensure greater consistency of the COVID-19 response with the national, long term poverty reduction and development strategies. Ownership is also not about government ownership alone. National policies and strategies for Covid response should have support and legitimacy within other stakeholders including civil society. For country ownership to be democratic, the control that donors and recipient governments

1   https://www.un.org/en/coronavirus/un-secretary-general
2   https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/44347/team-europe-ccs-200608.pdf
3   http://effectivecooperation.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/COVID-19_Pandemic_and_New_Work_Programme-GPEDC_Co-Chairs_Statement-ENG.pdf
4   https://c419de57-e749-4591-9016-5feb763746da.filesusr.com/ugd/9f29ee_416e63eebead4f8b971457b095d8432f.pdf
5   As for the effectiveness agenda, we will draw references from the Busan Principles (2011) and Monitoring Framework as well as from the unfinished business, namely the still-active legacy from the Paris Declaration (2005).

exercises over its chosen policies must be rooted in the participation of, and accountability to, stakeholders and citizens, who are the intended beneficiaries. Ownership is further enhanced through:

Alignment and the use of country systems in financing Covid-19 response. Time is essential in the response to the pandemic. With this concern in mind, donors are expected to use country systems as their default option versus project modalities, which would be lengthier and support for Partner countries may arrive too late. Best practices may include using national diagnostics systems whenever available as well as speeding-up budget support (general or sectoral) implementation. Using programme aid – such as in the case of budget support – will also improve scrutiny by the national Parliaments and other non-executive actors, including CSOs. National strategies and policies must be coordinated with local governments and sectors to ensure coherence and responsiveness to local realities.

Predictability: Funding that is on-time and reliable. One of the lessons from the previous global crises is the fact that there is a gap between commitments and actual disbursements by the donor community, which impedes the partner governments' efforts at planning and undermines trust. Hence, the response to the COVID-19 pandemic should address such a challenge from the very start, including front loading to cover multiyear financial needs.

Harmonisation: Donor coordination on Covid-19 response. When donors do not coordinate their aid, recipients face additional burden in having to manage multiple donors. Through overburdening recipient systems already facing capacity constraints, aid fragmentation can undermine effective Covid response and adversely impact the ability of partner countries and CSOs to deliver services in response to the pandemic. Donors should coordinate their actions, simplify procedures and share information to avoid duplication. They must also ensure coordination of their humanitarian and development aid towards a more holistic response to the pandemic.

Inclusive partnerships

Strengthening civil society participation in Covid response. All interested parties should listen to the communities that are bearing the brunt of the pandemic, which are in most case already the most excluded that face now the risk of being further marginalized. Moreover, the recourse to social distancing and emergency measures to mitigate the impact of the pandemic cannot be used to silence or criminalize critical voices or dissent. In some countries, civil society has witnessed aggressive authoritarian responses including media censorship and massive surveillance measures pointing to a growing pattern of shrinking civic space amid the pandemic. National laws and measures on Covid response must uphold human rights norms – freedom of assembly and mobility, the right to privacy, and opportunities to participate. CSOs play a crucial role in the pandemic response (through service delivery, monitoring, advocacy, etc.) and need an enabling environment (including access to affordable technology) to effectively perform their work in the current context.

Transparency and accountability

Availability of oversight and redress mechanisms. National oversight mechanisms should be enhanced or established to monitor integrity and accountability in Covid-19 response. Participation in these bodies must be inclusive and comprise civil society groups to support transparency and accountability of governments and duty-bearers. Grievance mechanisms must also be available and accessible to the wider public.

Clarity in allocation and disbursement of Covid-related funding. Timely access to comprehensive, disaggregated information on donors' commitments and transfers for the response to the pandemic is crucial on different counts, including better mutual accountability over time and greater planning capacity on the part of the partner countries. Moreover, timely access to information will allow an early assessment of the additional resources available and consequently of the risk of diversion from other preexisting priority sectors and countries.

Access to prompt, reliable, and comprehensive information on Covid-19 situation and response. National mechanisms must establish concrete measures to provide prompt and precise information to all development stakeholders and the general public regarding the

spread of the pandemic, as well as the response situation. Duty-bearers must ensure that their knowledge base includes information from the ground, taking particular care to reflect the realities among the most marginalised sectors of the society. Mechanisms to verify the accuracy of such information such as multi-stakeholder assessments should be supported and put in place.

Focus on results

Covid-19 response beyond humanitarian, address structural weaknesses exposed by pandemic. Development partners and duty-bearers must be accountable for the results of their Covid response. There needs to be transparent, measurable, and time-bound frameworks for assessing progress and results. Focus on results should not only emphasize value for money but also recognize and seek to address the structural weaknesses (e.g. lack of access to affordable healthcare, decent work, etc.) brought to light by the pandemic.

Leave no one behind

Fulfill and surpass aid targets. Aid from all DAC donors accounted for only 0.30 % of GNI in 2019, well below the 0.7 % United Nations target.[6] ODA to LDCs also comprise but a small percentage of donors' ODA. The international community should fulfill and surpass internationally agreed ODA commitments on quantity and quality to respond to the immediate and long-term impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. This includes removing conditionalities and enhancing support to countries in need, especially LDCs.

Access for the vulnerable and marginalized. Duty bearers must ensure that the provision of relief and services in response to the pandemic guarantee and prioritize access for poor and vulnerable sectors, including migrants, refugees, indigenous peoples, peasant farmers, informal workers, etc. National policies and strategies for Covid response needs to be gender-sensitive and take into account the acute effects of the pandemic on women and girls.

Human rights at the core of the pandemic response. The human rights-based approach is essential in ensuring the rights and welfare of women, indigenous peoples, youth and children, the elderly, persons living with disabilities, rural communities, and other vulnerable sectors are protected and upheld. Stringent accountability systems must be established to ensure Covid-19 measures are consistent with human rights laws and norms, with particular regard to women's rights instruments, and the use of gender and human rights-based approaches.

Solidarity: More grants instead of loans. Aid provided in the form of loans increases the debt vulnerabilities of developing countries. It also further restricts their resource capacity to respond to the pandemic because of debt servicing. Aid and emergency financing provided by donors to help poor countries respond to the pandemic should come in the form of grants as opposed to loans.

Additionality: Distinct and additional funds for Covid response. Development aid is an indispensable resource used in curbing poverty in developing countries, including in strengthening healthcare systems. Donors must avoid diverting aid resources from critical sectors like health in developing countries to support in-donor country spending. Aid must be provided to countries in need to help them in their Covid-19 response. These resources must be additional and distinct from ODA.

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6   Based on the OECD DAC 2019 preliminary ODA figures: https://www.oecd.org/dac/financing-sustainable-development/development-finance-data/ODA-2019-detailed-summary.pdf