

Keynote Speech made by Deepak Obhrai, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs at the Africa Canada Parliamentary Dialogue

2006-11-06

Mutual Accountability and Aid Effectiveness

1. Introduction

- I would like to thank the Parliamentary Centre for inviting me to address the participants of the Africa-Canada Parliamentary Dialogue on the theme “Mutual Accountability and Aid Effectiveness: the Role of Parliamentarians” and welcome everyone to this afternoon’s program.
- As a Member of Parliament for over 9 years and a member of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs I have traveled extensively and I know that there is a demand for foreign aid money; there is a demand for countries to spend 0.07% of

their GDP on aid. The government is committed to achieving that goal.

- It is also committed to being accountable for every dollar it spends.
- That is why last Wednesday, at a the meeting of the Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development, I asked officials of the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) about the effectiveness of Canada's foreign aid – what mechanisms are in place to measure this effectiveness?
- The Minister of International Cooperation responded by reminding the Committee that Canada's New Government has placed a priority on achieving greater aid effectiveness and is devoted to managing the flow of aid so as to achieve concrete results.
- As outlined in the Speech from the Throne by our Prime Minister, Canada's New

Government is fully committed to ensuring the effective distribution of aid.

- Accountability and Transparency are the overarching themes of our new government. The first bill that we introduced was the Federal Accountability Act. Thus, accountability for aid dollars spent is a clear priority for this Government.
- In our first budget, Canada's New Government outlined clearly for all Canadians the manner in which it intends to allocate public money for foreign aid.
- This government is mindful of how important Canada's role is, and will continue to be on the international scene. Moreover, we are committed to ensuring that the level of our international aid in 2001 will double by 2011.
- Aid can and does give tangible results. It contributes to the establishment of democratic societies governed by the rule of law. It helps build societies that respect human rights for all their citizens. And it

enables societies to take measures to protect their environment.

Aid effectiveness: A four-part agenda

- The Government of Canada, in our drive toward greater aid effectiveness, has set out a four part agenda:
- I. A more strategic focus on our interventions whereby we can identify where we have the greatest impact;
- II. Improvements to program delivery;
- III. More effective use of Canadian International Development Agency resources;
- IV. Clear accountability on the part of development partners in their commitment to achieving results.

I. Strategic focus

- The first of these objectives centres on the need to direct Canadian aid in a more strategic manner. Canada has begun to concentrate our aid in countries where there is the greatest need; in countries where aid can be used most effectively and where our actions will bring about concrete changes.
- I would like today to elaborate on two priority sectors of our actions in international development: democratic governance and gender equality.

Democratic governance

- Democratic governance is a crucial issue. In order to lay the groundwork for lasting progress, a society must maintain a climate of peace and security. This is only possible in a democratic society, one built on a foundation of freedom, human rights, the rule of law, justice, and the accountability of public institutions.

- It is for this reason that democratic development will be a vital element of all our bilateral programs. For its part, Canada assumes the task of assisting its main partner nations in their efforts to bring about democracy or further entrench it. That is why Canada has agreed to be the co-chair of the Great Lakes Initiative.

Support for economic and social development of women : A renewed commitment

- In many developing countries, experience has shown that in order to reduce poverty, create wealth, and safeguard human rights, nothing is more effective than concrete actions that permit women to take advantage of their great potential. That is why we need programs and funding that specifically target support to the economic and social development of women.
- On this note, I was very pleased that Dr. Yumus received the Nobel Prize for his work on micro-credit.

II. Improving program delivery

- The second part of our new agenda is intended to improve the delivery of our aid programs. This means examining and renewing our partnership programs, and evaluating what works and what needs to be improved, whether it is with our Canadian partners, with multilateral institutions, or with nongovernmental organizations in developing countries.
- To support our international development efforts in this area, the Government of Canada has resolved to engage all Canadians. It intends to make our partnerships with Canadian civil society organizations and the private sector more effective by creating a more efficient administrative foundation, focusing on results-based accountability from partners, and on the empowerment of our Southern partners.
- At the international level, Canada, through the Minister of International Cooperation, will

seek to promote the important role of civil society as laid out in the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness.

III. More effective use of resources

- The third objective is aimed at a more efficient use of our resources.
- This is what CIDA is aiming at, and we are looking at several paths to follow to accomplish it:
 - We will remain on track in the move to untie levels of aid.
 - We will strive to reduce our level of spending on administration.
 - The Minister of International Cooperation will see to it that CIDA's presence is felt even more in the field.

IV. Accountability for results

- Finally, the Canadian agenda seeks to strengthen performance measurements and reporting. Aid brings results when

each partner accepts accountability for the use of public money and sets out on a mission to achieve goals.

- We know that the right kind of aid works. By working with our national, international, and developing country partners, we have witnessed excellent results of our aid investments. For example, in Afghanistan, more than four million children have enrolled in school since the fall of the Taliban, and since 1999, more than one million children's lives in Africa have been saved through measles immunization programs.
- To increase accountability for results, our Minister of International Cooperation will table before Parliament the first Annual Report on International Development Results in 2007.

Role for Parliamentarians

- As Parliamentarians, we have a key role to play in aid delivery as we are the lawmakers. It is our responsibility to hold our governments accountable for their decisions and actions made at both the international and national level.
- The Paris Declaration upon which Canada's overseas development assistance is based highlights, promotes and encourages parliamentarians to play an essential role in monitoring aid effectiveness and holding governments accountable.
- The Paris Deceleration also highlights the role that Parliamentarians can play in cooperating across borders by undertaking a mutual assessment of progress that has been made as a result of the aid dollars spent.
- At the national level, aid effectiveness and government accountability can be achieved through mechanisms such as the budget

cycle were it is determined how aid will be spent and who will benefit from assistance, parliamentary debate where government priorities and programs can be questioned or, through parliamentary hearings and consultations with civil society.

- Furthermore the use of the Committee Structure can be a very effective tool for Parliamentarians on all sides to debate and question the priorities and programs of the government. It also offers the possibility of bringing before the Committee groups that have partnered with the Canadian Government for aid delivery as witnesses.
- Currently, Canada's Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development is playing an active role in evaluating our aid effectiveness in Haiti, by using Haiti as a case study.

Conclusion

- In conclusion, the Government of Canada believes that aid efficiency should be based on four key objectives: strategic focus, improvements to the delivery of aid programs, more efficient use of resources, and greater accountability on the part of our partners in spending public funds and achieving results.
- Our Prime Minister highlighted in his Speech from the Throne the importance that this Government places on aid effectiveness and accountability for dollars spent.
- For aid to be truly effective there must be some system of mutual accountability in place whereby donor and recipient countries can evaluate the aid process. This is why Canada supports the Paris Declaration which places great importance on mutual accountability between donor and recipient countries.

- Finally, we can not forget the vital role that Parliamentarians play in ensuring aid effectiveness and accountability through their oversight role.

Thank you.