

Developmental aid

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BAKU, AZERBAIJAN—I recently attended the 10th Annual Conference of the Parliamentary Network on the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund here at Baku with a delegation from the Global Organization of Parliamentarians Against Corruption which I currently chair.

I moderated a panel discussion— attended by fellow legislators, civil-society leaders and top officials from international financial institutions— on the role parliamentarians and even local officials have in overseeing and ensuring the success of developmental projects funded by foreign aid.

Such discussions are essential today less than two years away from the 2015 target when the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are supposed to have already been achieved.

Since 2000, the MDGs have galvanized multinational cooperation toward solving some of the world's biggest challenges. Because of the pledge made by United Nations member-states and some international organizations, the number of people living on less than \$1.25 a day has fallen tremendously, dropping in 2010 to less than half the 1990 rate of 46 percent of the world's population.

Within the same time frame, around 2 billion people gained access to safer, steadier sources of water. The past decade also saw at least 100 million more people moving out of slums and into areas where they enjoy improved standards of living.

For sure, these are formidable gains but the world continues to struggle with widespread poverty and chronic inequality. That only three out of the eight MDGs have been achieved thus far is prompting discussions, such as the ones here in Baku, on how the world must move forward and improve upon current initiatives.

As the international development community sets its sights on a “post- MDG” world beyond 2015, there is wide consensus that developmental aid must redound to better, more sustainable and measurable results. The focus has shifted toward development effectiveness—the emphasis no longer the quantity of the aid, but the quality.

This new direction is perhaps best embodied in three outcome documents from High Level Forums on Aid Effectiveness organized by the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development, namely, the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness, the Accra Agenda for Action and the Busan Partnership Document. These documents outline core principles aimed at improving and making developmental aid more effective.

Foremost among these principles is perhaps ownership and alignment, given that the norm now is for aid recipients or developing countries to craft their own national development strategies and for donor countries to support these and align behind them. This is where our legislators and local government officials should now play a very crucial role.

As elected representatives of their constituents, parliamentarians and local officials should be knowledgeable about how to best utilize international aid toward solving the developmental challenges faced by their localities. They should also be ready to measure and report on developmental results with scientific rigor.

Gone are the days of “one-size-fits-all” policy prescriptions and haphazard documentation, highlighting even more the importance of competence and commitment to public service.

As possible overseers of large infusions of funds, legislators and local officials will also have to adhere to the highest standards of ethics, transparency and public accountability to guard against corruption and indiscretion.

At stake are billions of pesos coming from such development partners as the Asian Development Bank, the United States Agency for International Development, the Australian Agency for International Development, the Korea International Cooperation Agency, and the Japan International Cooperation Agency, just to name a few.

Simply put, parliamentarians and local officials ought to take a more prominent and active role in ensuring that developmental aid is coursed through the proper channels and directed to the projects that yield the most benefit.

If anything, this is a formidable challenge but also an opportunity that I hope the incoming set of newly elected officials will face head-on and with utmost integrity.

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