

## **G8-G20 ACCOUNTABILITY**

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The Muskoka G8 summit held on 26-26 June 2010 had been dubbed in advance the “accountability summit” by the Canadian host government. Indeed, accountability was a principal theme at the summit, along with Prime Minister Stephen Harper’s maternal and child health initiative.

G8 accountability has long been a concern for civil society organizations (CSOs), think tanks, some G8 governments and, more recently, to the G8 itself which came to realize that much of its claim to legitimacy rested on the fulfilment of its promises and that it would be held accountable for its actions to those who are affected by those actions (or lack of actions as the case may be) – not just in G8 countries but global populations, including the marginalized.

A number of CSOs and think tanks have assessed G8 performance for some time before the G8’s self-assessment exercise started. For example, the G8 Research Group at the University of Toronto has, since 1996, issued compliance reports on summit commitments. Its assessment of implementation of G8 undertakings at the 2005 Gleneagles summit identified 212 commitments and selected 21 of those for detailed evaluation; these included, among others, peacekeeping, good governance, HIV/AIDS, official development assistance, transnational crime, climate change, and tsunami relief.<sup>1</sup> Another evaluation of fulfilment of the Gleneagles commitments has been undertaken since 2006 by the Debt AIDS Trade Africa (DATA) group. In its latest annual report, released in 2010, DATA assesses progress on debt cancellation, development assistance, trade and investment, HIV/AIDS and other infectious diseases, child survival, primary

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<sup>1</sup> G8 Research Group (2006) *Gleneagles Final Compliance Report*.  
<[www.g8.utoronto.ca/evaluations/2005compliance\\_final/2005-g8compliance-final.pdf](http://www.g8.utoronto.ca/evaluations/2005compliance_final/2005-g8compliance-final.pdf)>

education, and agriculture.<sup>2</sup> Another example is Transparency International, which has monitored the G8's role on fighting corruption.<sup>3</sup>

Previous G8 steps in this direction included an accountability report on G8 anti-corruption commitments at the 2008 Hokkaido summit and a *Preliminary Accountability Report* at the 2009 L'Aquila summit<sup>4</sup> which, taking a sectoral approach, tracks commitments and their fulfilment on food security, water, health and education. At that summit the G8 leaders established the G8 Accountability Senior Level Working Group, tasking it with: identifying key development-related G8 commitments since the Gleneagles summit; identifying indicators for assessing those commitments; developing a reporting methodology; exploring ways of measuring the impact of G8 commitments beyond merely assessing progress; consulting with the OECD and other organizations with expertise in data manipulation and reporting; preparing their report for G8 leaders in time for the Muskoka summit; and making recommendations on regularizing (“institutionalizing”) accountability practices after Muskoka.

How well did the 88-page *Muskoka Accountability Report*<sup>5</sup> fulfil this ambitious mandate? The working group identified and analyzed 56 development-related commitments, most of which were made at the Gleneagles summit, some as far back as Kananaskis in 2002, and others at summits subsequent to Gleneagles. The 56 commitments are grouped in nine thematic areas: aid, aid effectiveness and debt relief; economic development; health; water and sanitation, food security; education; governance; peace and security; and environment and energy. The main sources of the report are “data and narrative evidence” from G8 governments themselves and from what the report calls “relevant” international organizations, mostly OECD/DAC. The report arrives at a fairly positive self-assessment.

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<sup>2</sup> *The DATA Report 2010: Monitoring the G8 Promise to Africa* (2010). <[www.one.org/report/2010/en](http://www.one.org/report/2010/en)>

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Transparency International (2007). *G8 Progress Report*. <[www.transparency.org/publications/publications/g8\\_progress\\_report](http://www.transparency.org/publications/publications/g8_progress_report)>

<sup>4</sup> G8 (2009) *G8 Preliminary Accountability Report*. <[www.g8italia2009.it/static/G8\\_Allegato/G8\\_Preliminary\\_Accountability\\_Report\\_8.7.09,0.pdf](http://www.g8italia2009.it/static/G8_Allegato/G8_Preliminary_Accountability_Report_8.7.09,0.pdf)>

<sup>5</sup> G8 (2010). *Muskoka Accountability Report*. <[http://g8.gc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2010/06/muskoka\\_accountability\\_report.pdf](http://g8.gc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2010/06/muskoka_accountability_report.pdf)>

On aid (Theme I), the report notes that G8 spending on ODA to Africa has increased by about 50%, reaching almost \$30 billion in 2008, representing 70% of global (G8 and non-G8) ODA. This still leaves an acknowledged shortfall of \$18 billion from all donors. For individual G8 countries the record is mixed. Canada is on track to reach its (rather modest, I add) commitments. France has made steady progress in increasing its aid, having doubled its ODA since 2000. Italy is off-track but it “reconfirmed commitment” toward achieving the 0.7% ODA/GNI target. Japan fell short. Russia is on track for debt cancellation. The UK is on target. The US has met its commitment one year early; and the EU as a whole showed slower-than-expected progress.

This reveals some problems of reporting. First, country-to-country reporting is uneven, seemingly based on differing emphases and data selection. Particularly striking is the case of Russia which is not an OECD member and thus basing its report on national statistics. This makes comparability difficult. Second, being a self-assessment of G8 governments, the report necessarily uses diplomatic language, contrasted with, say, the DATA report which is free to criticize countries that have fallen behind, even though DATA, too, largely bases its report on OECD statistics. Third, there is a problem of time-lag (a problem both for the G8 and DATA): OECD statistics are at least a year behind so reporting is not quite up-to-date. Fourth, the *Accountability Report* does not adjust for level of ambition of commitments – admittedly a difficult challenge but one that should not be beyond the G8’s capacity.

I will comment on the rest of the report’s themes more briefly in the interest of time and space. But some of the problems noted above, under Theme I, are applicable to the other themes as well.

Theme II, economic development, comprises the sub-themes of remittances; trade and development; and infrastructure and investments. The report notes progress in some areas but acknowledges that more needs to be done. While the report as a whole is quite good at identifying commitments (the first item of the working group’s mandate), it is striking under this theme that some “commitments” are not very firm: “working toward the objective...”, “we will work to achieve...”; “we welcome the initiative...” That said,

the tables and charts illustrating this section show increasing G8 aid-for trade flows and the report catalogues important G8 national programmes in this area. And “key findings and lessons learned”, ending this and the other thematic sections, is a useful and concise summing-up.

Theme III, health, identifies some firm commitments, including promises of specific amounts to fight infectious diseases and build stronger health systems in developing countries. These commitments, too, are set out in the framework of the Millennium Development Goals. The report notes that, if current contributions continue on the present scale, the G8 will meet its commitment to provide \$60 billion by 2012. Financing the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria is more problematic and remains a concern. On child mortality, there has been a global reduction, but maternal deaths remain high.

On water and sanitation assistance (Theme IV), the G8 has mobilized some \$18 billion for 2002-2008. On food security (Theme V), the record is more mixed and the report acknowledges the difficulty of assessing the contributions of G8 countries, since this sector is strongly dependent on the private sector and civil society, not just on governments.

On education (Theme VI), the report notes G8 support (for example, for the Education for All initiative) but laments the adverse impact of the financial crisis on education financing (an impact, by the way, that is also evident, for example, on food prices). This is one of the few sections that present, in a tabular form, comparative figures for pledges and actual disbursements – a good way to assess compliance with commitments. Doing this consistently throughout the report would have enhanced its usefulness significantly.

On governance (Theme VII), G8 commitments centred on anti-corruption measures – support for good governance in Africa, and building capacity in this sector. The report cites the African Peer Review Mechanism as a good example of accountability, but this really touches on accountability by African states and not by the

G8 *per se*.

On peace and security (Theme VIII), the G8's role has played out mostly in capacity-building, post-conflict reconstruction and support for African peacekeeping programmes. The report notes that "limited but important progress has been made."

On environment and energy (Theme IX), the report remarks on some G8 contributions but, as for climate, it essentially passes the ball to the UN process (notably the Copenhagen Accord and the forthcoming Cancún COP16. On energy, some progress is noted but the report acknowledges that other targets, for example on biodiversity, "will not be met in 2010."

In its conclusions, the report sees a positive overall balance in the G8's progress on meeting its commitments but notes that in some areas "it has further to go to fully deliver on its promises." The recommendations emphasize the importance of improving transparency in reporting by using a comprehensive and consistent methodology, but the working group, in the body of the report, shows the difficulty of advancing this objective. Laudably, the working group underlines that G8 commitments must be assessed in a multi-year context, and the report goes some way toward that. Wisely, it cautions that "aspirational and policy commitments" make them difficult to track and report ... in any meaningful or quantifiable manner."

A final observation: it is known that in the process of compiling this *Accountability Report* G8 officials talked with, and looked at, the work of CSOs and think tanks that have accumulated a good record and built useful experience in G8 performance evaluation (see, for example, the G8 Research Group, DATA and Transparency International, all cited above). Yet, other than rather general references to civil society, there is no explicit acknowledgement in the report of the role of these groups.

To sum up: the *Accountability Report*, despite inherent problems, is an important step in improving G8 accountability (including transparency). It is an honest effort

within the confines of what a governmental body (as the G8 is) can do diplomatically. So, CSOs will have a continuing role in prodding the G8 toward greater accountability.

If the G8 builds on the findings and resources of *Accountability Report* in a meaningful and comprehensive way, that will be welcomed by all. But, judging by the *Muskoka Declaration* issued at the end of the G8 summit,<sup>6</sup> the leaders, despite referring numerous times to accountability, signalled their intention to devote future accountability reports to specific sectors rather than treating accountability comprehensively; the 2011 accountability report will focus on health and food security only.

What about the G20? Accountability (democratic, open accountability) in that larger group is more problematic, yet there are some encouraging early signs that this may happen. One way the G20 could move toward this would be to allow public reporting of the IMF mutual assessment reports done for G20 countries. This is another goal that CSOs could advocate.

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<sup>6</sup> G8 (2010). *G8 Muskoka Declaration: Recovery and New Beginnings* <[http://g8.gc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2010/07/declaration\\_eng.pdf](http://g8.gc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2010/07/declaration_eng.pdf)>