

Country Ownership: Government or Peoples?

The EU is in the forefront of ensuring (partner) country ownership in its development cooperation, thus, promoting one of the crucial principles of the international aid effectiveness doctrine. Ideally, the principle of "country ownership" well balances the equation of give and take in a "development cooperation partnership" - the recipient partner country sets its own development priorities and the EU extend its cooperation in line with those priorities, fully complying with and respecting the partner country's ownership of its development agenda. All is rosy! Until we delve into the oft-disguised facts about country ownership!! That national development plans in the South in majority, are prescribed by the World Bank and the IMF in the name of their so-called poverty reduction strategies. That, therefore, the IFIs own national governments. That, national governments in majority - regardless of democratic or autocratic - pursue vigorous economic growth as a development indicator, never mind the ever widening rich-poor divide. That, therefore, there exists a perpetual conflict of interest between national governments and their peoples - the vulnerable, poor and marginalised majority - in their respective pursuit of befitting development agenda. The key question, therefore, arises around the principle of country ownership: Government ownership or Peoples ownership? For, governments are not poor but peoples are. For, development aid is to flow - and not trickle - down to the peoples. For, development is bottom-up, from below!

The EU on 18 May has released its response to *supporting developing countries in coping with crisis*; adopted by the Foreign/Development Co-operation Ministers in Brussels. One of the conclusions reiterate, *the Council encourages developing countries to elaborate, in the context of their national development strategies, national response plans to the financial and economic crisis in consultation with civil society and with the private sector. Member States and the Commission will review, as appropriate, their respective development cooperation programmes and activities on the basis of partner countries' priorities.* Now, the role of civil society as a significant stakeholder in the development process being well recognised and encouraged by the EU is all rosy again! Until we recognise that the waging struggle of the civil society in planning and decision-making - at home and beyond - is not for nothing. If only, the voice of the peoples was so easily taken into account in action like in rhetoric!! The key solution, therefore, lies in redefining "ownership" as peoples ownership and thus, ensuring such. If, development aid is to reach where it is meant to reach. After all, isn't (the EU) peoples' tax-money reaching (partner country) peoples, the best balance of equation in a development cooperation partnership?!