

GEG Memo

Translating Rhetoric into Reality

Paolo de Renzio – November 30th 2011

Despite the cold, wind and rain outside the BEXCO Conference Centre, the celebrity line-up for the Opening Ceremony of the HLF4 tried their best to get delegates excited about the importance of the event and of its outcomes for the future of foreign aid and development. Ban Ki Moon of the UN and Angel Gurría of the OECD both emphasized the need for donors to do more and do better, given the less than encouraging results of the Paris Declaration Monitoring Survey released earlier this year. The need for emerging donors to "step up" and recognize that with more influence comes more responsibility, was another recurring theme. The experience of host country South Korea from war-ravaged, impoverished country 50 years ago to OECD member and donor nowadays, was time and again indicated as an example to follow. But my favourite speeches were delivered by Rwanda's president, Kagame, who eloquently showed donors' failure to deliver on their promises, and accused them for their "unending questioning that no answer can fully satisfy", and US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, who was quite honest about some of the political realities that donors face, and called for increased mutual responsibility in aid relationships, in which both sides take the necessary steps to make aid work better.

While sherpas continue to work at the draft Outcome Document, plenary sessions called Building Blocks were meant to push for more far reaching commitments from sub-sets of actors. I've been working on preparing the BB session on transparency for a few months, and it went quite well. All speakers, including Swedish Development Minister Gunilla Carlsson and Sri Mulyani Indrawati, former Finance Minister of Indonesia and now at the World Bank, agreed with the need to link and deepen both aid and budget transparency, in order to promote better accountability and results. What went missing in the rush to give space to the following session, was a clear sense of next steps, and of how this rhetorical commitment can be monitored and followed up on. I made a note to make sure we don't let this drop off the agenda...