

## UNESCO RESPONSE TO THE UK MULTILATERAL AID REVIEW

UNESCO always welcomes scrutiny and greatly regrets that the framework for this review, based on DFID's own mission, did not allow any evaluation of the large area of UNESCO's mission which falls quite outside DFID's chosen parameters. UNESCO is not an aid organization. UNESCO is an intergovernmental organization whose work benefits not only developing countries, but the whole of humanity. The UK is as much a beneficiary of many of UNESCO's initiatives as all other Member States. We appreciate the review's positive comments on some aspects of our work, such as our "*vital input into climate debates*" and our ability to rally experts world-wide on a volunteer basis to provide such important services as the Global Tsunami Early Warning System.

Disappointingly, the review does not take into account the particular mandate of a UN Specialized Agency and its larger relevance for multilateral cooperation and foreign policy objectives of individual countries. The poor score attributed to UNESCO against quite limited indicators close to DFID's own mission often reflects a failure of the evaluation tools to capture important aspects of UNESCO's work rather than any actual poor performance.

The review, undertaken in 2010, coincided with the launch of a reform process by the new Director-General. Some of its findings accord with her own analysis of the Organization's shortcomings and weaknesses and this concurrence should strengthen her hand in mobilizing support for the transformations she is seeking. However, the Organization believes the negative impact of its rating against a largely inappropriate set of indicators will serve neither the interests of the British tax-payer nor of international development. UNESCO will continue to strive to improve its efficiency and to respond to valid criticism, but cannot ever expect to match all of DFID's evaluation criteria.

A key reason for the low score attributed to UNESCO in the review is that, according to DFID's own categorization (DFID: **Focus on Poor Countries (FoPC)** component), it fails to concentrate on poor countries. The fact that UN Specialized Agencies have a global mandate – entailing in particular extensive normative functions - and service a wider constituency than multilateral Funds and Programmes, is not discussed or acknowledged.

Yet the UK National Commission for UNESCO, an independent civil society organization, only last November issued a [study](#) showing how the UK benefits from its membership of UNESCO, not only in terms of furthering its international development and foreign policy objectives, but also through domestic benefits to its citizens, communities and UK-based institutions.

With 28 World Heritage properties, eight Biosphere Reserves, three UNESCO Creative Cities, 15 UNESCO Chairs and three UNITWIN Networks at UK Higher Education Institutions, a *Water Law, Policy and Science Centre*, 15 Memory of the World inscriptions, 66 UNESCO Associated Schools and eight Geoparks, this appears to be a major oversight. Just one example from that long list, the Edinburgh City of Literature designation, is expected to generate approximately £2.2m for the city and £2.1m to the rest of Scotland each year. Such economic spin-offs are more than matched by other benefits identified in this study: these initiatives support cultural diversity, dialogue and community cohesion and foster a sense of identity and community pride among citizens in the UK.

While the DFID focus on poor countries means these benefits to the UK are ignored, the method of calculation of '**FoPC**' for Specialized Agencies also works to UNESCO's disadvantage. The Review states that "As a group [specialized agencies] spend 43% of their resources in the countries in the top quartile...This is low compared with most of the other

multilaterals assessed by this index... In addition they spend significant resources in middle income countries with low absolute poverty numbers including upper middle income countries.”

In other words, the UK appears to have divided up UNESCO's expenditures equally across all Member States, or possibly across developing countries, thus failing to reflect UNESCO's prioritization of countries in all its programmes – education, the natural sciences, the social and human sciences, culture, and communication and information. For example, UNESCO's education sector allocates some 32% of its regular activity budget to Field Offices in Africa, in addition to other forms of support designed for Africa from global and regional levels. It spends some 57% of its activity budget on developing capacities in the four sub-sectors of teachers, literacy, work skills and planning, with 20 target countries receiving enhanced support, all of which are LDCs with heavy challenges and deficiencies in the education field, carefully measured by their ranking on the scale of the UNESCO-produced EFA development index, a universally acknowledged benchmarking tool for education attainments and needs. Yet the method chosen by the DFID review overlooks this and fails to assess UNESCO's real investment in favor of the poorest countries.

The Review states that this FoPC method does not disadvantage Specialized Agencies:

“The denominator is each MO's (gross) **core total country based aid**; this excludes other types of aid expenditure such as regional funding, funding for normative standard setting roles etc. This is a very important point, it means that MO's with a mainly normative mandate are not penalised, they are only assessed on how they allocate their country level funding, their normative role doesn't affect their score. »

However, the assistance provided by Specialized Agencies to developing countries through their normative role, as well as their regional role is not factored into the UK's FoPC calculations. Reflecting this, the Specialized Agencies score a low 16 or 18 in the UK's FoPC ranking, while UN Funds and Programmes score higher and Global Funds take the lead. The FoPC methodology thus shows a systemic bias in favor of funding channels and against UN specialized agencies with their more diverse and complex mandate of policy advice, capacity building, normative and standard-setting functions, benchmarking endeavours and operational field activities. Interestingly, DFID has used a separate ranking for “humanitarian” agencies. This distinction introduces a parallel ranking system in the DFID review, which UNESCO considers could have equal justification for Specialized Agencies. This would enable future reviews to avoid a “one-size-fits-all” approach which cannot recognize the specific mandate of Specialized Agencies.

Turning to **education**, DFID argues that “*UNESCO is under-delivering significantly in its leadership of the education sector*”. Without having access to the full review document and so without knowledge of what led to this conclusion, it is difficult to use to the full this “right to reply”. Certainly, the leadership role in this sector is a challenging one. UNESCO's Education Sector is one of the foremost priorities of the current reform effort. It does have weaknesses that are being addressed. But DFID itself is a prime user (as well as a supporter) of the EFA-Global Monitoring Report (GMR), an outstanding and quite unique policy tool whose uncontested quality attests to the positive leadership role UNESCO performs in the EFA partnership. Since taking office in November 2009, Director-General Irina Bokova, has worked to strengthen this EFA lead role and brought together all Executive Heads and senior education managers of the five convening EFA agencies. Closer collaboration was already evident during the UN MDG summit in September 2010.

In addition, the Director-General has taken the lead in pushing for concrete action in support of girls' and women's education (MDG 3) and will launch a new international initiative later in

2011. UNESCO has also taken the lead in energizing and mobilizing teacher education, technical and vocational education and training, literacy programmes, HIV AIDS education, education for sustainable development, and above all the building of sustainable and effective education systems, not least in countries in post-conflict and post-disaster situations (for which environments UNESCO staff receive specific training and guidelines, contrary to assertions in the Review). In many countries, UNESCO staff are leading the thematic group on education in the context of UN country teams (UNCTs). This has a palpable impact of the inclusion of education in UNDAFs and One UN programmes. UNESCO is currently reinforcing its leadership of the education sector rather than “significantly under-delivering”.

Possibly it is a further consequence of the limited framework of this evaluation, that some of the **stakeholders** chosen for interview appear to not to have much experience with or exposure to our Organization. Appropriate consultations would have been with such immediate stakeholders as line Ministers for Education, Culture, Science and Research or Communication and Information. University staff, NGO leaders active in the fields of the Organization, scientific researchers or private sector representatives are partners whose opinion and experience it would have been valuable to assess. Clearly, if African Finance Ministers are asked about the value of UNESCO’s contribution to a country’s or the continent’s development, they are not so well placed to have specific knowledge and understanding of the workings and performance of this Organization.

To turn to the critically important issue of **results-based management**: UNESCO has been applying RBM for almost a decade, supported a few years ago by DFID extra-budgetary funding for staff training and capacity-building. In interventions to the UNESCO Executive Board, the UK delegation at that time commended UNESCO’s approach and practice. Providing impact assessments of results has recently become a new challenge for *all* organizations. UNESCO and its Member States are examining how to tackle this challenge of introducing the impact dimension into the Organization’s work, while being conscious of the inevitable additional costs involved in such methodology. The United Kingdom has its part to play in the search for a satisfactory response.

Against this background, it is surprising to read in the DFID Review that UNESCO is ranked “unsatisfactory” under the category “Contribution to Results”. The specific comments are:

- + UNESCO is well regarded by some partners for the quality of its technical expertise and products.*
- UNESCO is unable to identify its impact. Systematic results reporting and evaluation is not adequately practiced.*
- UNESCO is under-delivering significantly in its leadership of the education sector.*
- = UNESCO has poor systems, an inability to identify its results and performs poorly in key sectors.”*

Without access to the full Review, it is unclear what kind of “impact” the UK wishes to focus on. Impact goes well beyond the output/outcome of an Organization. UNESCO’s impact is largely dependent on what Member States and other stakeholders do themselves with the policy advice they get and the tools they have been provided with. UNESCO cannot possibly take full credit for the education-driven successful development of the Republic of Korea and marked down when progress is not achieved in LDCs. Possibly, this negative score is due to a focus on quantitative measurement of success (% of reduction of illiteracy, for instance), rather than qualitative measurements and modalities (such as improved policy frameworks). Also, sustainability, quality and equity issues may not be considered relevant. UNESCO with its diverse mandate and programmatic scope would welcome a full discussion of DFID’s expectations and how they match or mismatch UNESCO’s performance.

The Review states that “*Systematic results reporting and evaluation is not adequately practiced*”. This is also surprising, in light of the fact that UNESCO practices six-monthly reporting to its Executive Board against all results approved by the General Conference accompanied by management assessments and identification of shortcomings and lessons learned. Evaluations are carried out by the independent Internal Oversight Service (IOS) according to an Evaluation Plan approved by the Member States every other year at the General Conference. The results of evaluations are also reported to the Executive Board and discussed there. Certainly, the quality of reporting and evaluation can always be improved, and such improvements are introduced regularly. But it is unclear what type of “results” the UK would want to see. The Review also states that UNESCO “*has a cumbersome governing body*”, yet the nature, role and functions of that governing body are determined by the UK and its fellow Member States, not by the Secretariat.

The review states that UNESCO’s **financial resource management** is weak, particularly in resource allocation, timely closure of programs and dealing with under-performance. As the framework of this Review does not allow for any distinction to be made between the respective roles and responsibilities of UNESCO’s Secretariat and its Member States, as represented in its governing bodies which play a central role regarding financial resource management, there is again a structural bias unfavourable to Specialized Agencies. UNESCO’s relatively small regular budget compared to its broad mandate is allocated through elaborate and long negotiations of its 193 Member States, one of which is the United Kingdom. This resource allocation process inevitably leads to less than optimal results. In equal measure, UNESCO receives voluntary contributions for specific projects from many donor countries and other institutions. These funds are provided to UNESCO on the basis of the donors’ targeted intervention. UNESCO management ensures that these funds are complimentary to its main lines of actions and fits with its strategic objectives. We certainly acknowledge the fact that there is substantial room for improvement and it is incumbent upon Member States, including the UK, to work with the Secretariat to further improve resource management systems.

In order to strengthen its accountability mechanisms, UNESCO is engaged in a continuous improvement program. It has the most up to date management information systems to enable it to produce audited financial statements. It has consistently obtained “**Clean Audit Opinions**” from External Auditors. It is one of the few UN organizations which has already adopted the International Public Sector Accounting Standards (IPSAS). It has an independent Oversight Advisory Committee, an Ethics Office and an effective Internal Oversight Services.

In conclusion, it is extremely regrettable that the Review does not cover the entire scope of UNESCO’s mandate. One example of a significant omission is our vital contribution to the defense of press freedom and freedom of information. UNESCO is the only member of the UN system with this mandate to defend freedom of expression and that alone should have justified its recognition and an assessment of this core dimension of our work. We welcome scrutiny, but ask for that scrutiny to cover the whole of our work. We readily accept a ranking system within the review process, but ask that equitable parameters be used to ensure the fairness of that ranking. We recognize the need to improve efficiency and effectiveness, but ask that the considerable role of the Member States, including the UK, in the functioning of Specialized Agencies, be fully acknowledged also.

Let there be no doubt, UNESCO is hearing the wake-up call the Review represents and will work intensively towards further improvements. We nevertheless believe that our track record is significantly better than painted in the DFID Review.

