

Gender Equality Action Plan (GEAP)  
Light Touch Review: Summary  
Document

**Department for International Development**

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## INTRODUCTION

DFID first published its Gender Equality Action Plan (GEAP) in 2007. In March 2010, Social Development Direct conducted a 'light touch' review which asked:

*What has been the impact of the GEAP initiative on DFID's systems for implementing commitments on gender equality, and how can DFID strengthen its approach in future, based on success stories and lessons learned?*

This paper contains the key findings, lessons identified and recommendations for the future.

***Implementation of the GEAP can be judged as highly successful within the constraints of what can be achieved pragmatically through personal leadership, working within existing resources and corporate priorities that were not, in the main, focused on gender.***

### Origins of the GEAP and development of the change strategy

External Pressure at national and global levels<sup>1</sup> led to the realisation that DFID needed to raise its game on gender. This challenge was accepted by senior management, creating an appetite for change and an opportunity for DFID to take a fresh and more ambitious approach. In 2005, the Development Committee resolved to improve DFID's work on gender equality, including:

- strengthening work with multilaterals on gender
- ensuring widespread commitment and expertise on gender, not just in the Social Development Adviser (SDA) cadre
- addressing gender through the Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS) process
- establishing incentives for working on gender equality.

A subsequent OECD DAC<sup>2</sup> peer review and an external evaluation as well as the Equality Act 2007 underlined the need for urgent implementation of the GEAP.

## HIGHLIGHTS AND OUTCOMES OF THE GEAP IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS

Five main features were distinctive about DFID's approach to the GEAP's implementation:

- Leadership
- Rigorous reporting processes
- Communications
- Partnering for change
- Incentive scheme

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<sup>1</sup> External evaluations and the consensus at Beijing +10 (2005) that across the globe, governments needed to intensify their efforts regarding gender.

<sup>2</sup> Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development - Development Coordination Directorate



## **1. Leadership**

This was the most important and catalytic feature of the GEAP implementation, especially with regard to the personal commitment of the Director General (Country Programmes) and the 'Gender Champions'.

The GEAP leadership arrangements signalled a break with the past – gender was no longer the sole responsibility of Social Development Advisors (SDAs) but to be overseen by newly appointed Gender Equality Champions, who were senior civil servants working within each Division, supplemented by a network of more junior gender champions working at country/department level. This gave staff both the incentive and encouragement to pursue new, gender-focused objectives and to bring gender into their existing work. Senior managers also now actively sought out the gender expertise of the Social Development Advisers. Overall leadership responsibility was vested in the Director General, Country Programmes – another signal that gender was not a specialist 'fringe' activity – but was to be owned and delivered at a very senior level, through the operational core of the organisation.

The leadership energy and drive associated with the GEAP implementation is something to celebrate unequivocally. It was arguably even more significant, given other factors in the environment in 2007; a relatively poor evidence base to make the gender business case, and staff in DFID experiencing multiple initiatives and priorities, in the context of a tight squeeze on resources.

Leadership and reporting mechanisms – together – achieved substantial progress, particularly demonstrable at the Regional and Country level, as described below.

## **2. Reporting – tracking progress and holding the organisation to account**

One of the most noticeable features of the GEAP implementation process, was the extent and scope of activity reporting since the publication of the original plan in 2007. A stringent, rigorous reporting process was necessary, given that the original GEAP was not explicitly resourced or prioritised in the context of other work. The leadership and commitment of those involved left no room for drift or complacency.

Since the GEAP's inception, DFID sought to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of corporate reporting processes. Some regions and countries were prompted to develop their own GEAP as a more relevant and tailored response to local issues and drivers. There was also a steady move to integrate gender related activities more fully into regional and country plans, and divisional performance frameworks; and to ensure that Evaluation Department's Quality Assurance Standards included questions on gender equality issues.

This move was greatly supported by the inclusion of a gender-related indicator in DFID's Departmental Strategic Objectives (DSOs) under the objective of promoting good governance which states "increased access by women and girls to economic opportunities, public services and decision-making"<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.dfid.gov.uk/Documents/DSO-measurement-methodology-dec2009.pdf>



The GEAP and subsequent two annual progress reports were deliberately designed to be externally facing documents; an invitation for the outside world to hold DFID to account for progress on gender. The first progress report reported on 86 indicative activities for 36 outputs. In the second progress report, more than 100 activities/objectives and corresponding outputs and outcomes were flagged up for delivery in the 2008/9 reporting year. The framework thus presented outsiders with an opportunity to scrutinise in great detail where and how progress had been made. Furthermore, views from a range of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) were actively sought on the degree of progress made after the publication of each report.

While some of those involved in reporting on the GEAP experienced the reporting framework as a burden, it was effective in highlighting whether or not progress had been made across a very large range of activities. This became a feature of Gender Champions' meetings, which in turn focused and shaped internal activity between meetings. Bi-annual, then quarterly meetings between the Gender Champions and the Director General were highly focused sessions, run primarily as bilateral reporting updates, with individual Champions held to account for progress in their own areas. Questions on progress were searching and detailed and little latitude was given for delays or explanations that some activities would take longer to assess than the three month progress reporting period allowed.

The GEAP existed outside the main corporate reporting structure and was therefore managed and reported on separately to divisional plans. This had its disadvantages but also advantages, one of which was to bring particular attention to the issue.

Evidence gathering and use were clear areas of focus for the original GEAP. The benefits of doing this properly include the following:

- Firstly, in order to get an accurate baseline of work on gender it is necessary to collect data at the project level. Three years after the original GEAP, with progress made in country planning and delivery, and the impressive list of new financial commitments on gender-related programmes and projects in the progress reports, it is necessary to better contextualise the information and assess its real use.
- Secondly, the quality of data shapes internal progress reporting. Comparative data and a reliable performance 'scorecard' allow for discussion on progress to focus on outputs and outcomes, rather than activities alone. This avoids a heavy reporting burden and allows resources to be dedicated to programming, rather than reporting. Moreover, good data increases the likelihood of acquiring new resources by making the hard business case for more investment.
- Thirdly, influencing policy development beyond the social sectors, health and education, requires a strong evidence base, not least to address the political complexity in confronting governments in societies with deep-rooted prejudices against women and girls.



The 'Gender Policy Marker' – a means of tracking work through DFID's policy and project data-base<sup>4</sup> was also identified as a key method of analysing progress. DFID took early steps to meet the need for good data by the introduction of a set of 20 standard indicators for projects and programmes and a target to ensure that 20% of all new logical frameworks (log-frames) had gender indicators. Spot checks carried out in 2009, however, revealed that only 6% of log-frames had gender targets at country level. It is not yet possible, therefore, to conduct a comparison with the 10-year retrospective analysis performed in 2006 of DFID's gender spend<sup>5</sup>.

The area of gender monitoring has been highlighted and identified as priority area through the 2009 White Paper. Furthermore, the completion of the Bilateral Aid Review process and a new framework for DFID results monitoring is expected to lead to the resumption of the following: (a) an organisation-wide review on data quality, leading to a quality assurance review on the Gender Marker; (b) the recruitment of a statistician to support the central ERT team; and (c) an action plan on improving gender monitoring for implementation in 2010/2011. Meanwhile, the Equity and Rights team have worked to ensure that gender impacts feature strongly across the all pillars of the new results monitoring framework.

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<sup>4</sup> Policy Marker Information System (PIMS)

<sup>5</sup> 'Current State of Play on Gender within DFID at Corporate and Divisional Level' Social Development Direct 2006



## Examples of Impact of the GEAP on Country Delivery

The combination of strong, dynamic leadership and rigorous reporting frameworks led to substantial changes at the Regional and Country level:

- **Africa** Division focussed on 'operationalisation'. The aim was to show how country offices were going to implement their plans and '*make the GEAP our own*'. High-level objectives were agreed by programme heads both with regard to existing commitments and in areas where urgent change was needed (such as political empowerment or the elimination of violence against women). The March 2009 assessment of the Africa Divisional Performance Framework (DPF) makes specific reference to the Africa GEAP and the four gender objectives. The country-specific Public Service Agreement (PSA)<sup>1</sup> reporting for the 2009 Annual Report provides clear evidence of the commitment to gender equality results. All PSA countries in Africa started to report consistently on MDGs 2 (education), 3 (gender equality) and 5 (maternal health). Eight of the PSA reports went beyond, looking at support to areas such as gender-based violence, legislative and land tenure reforms and access to financial services.
- **South Asia** division found that the GEAP created the space to discuss how gender affected their work. It also created the demand from senior management to address these issues. As a result, country offices made specific, country-level commitments and then built these up to identify regional gender equality priorities. The Division created Gender Champions at regional and country levels with gender task teams to support and monitor implementation.
- At **Regional level**, there is a new South Asia Regional Gender Policy Fund as part of South Asia's Gender Policy Commitment for 2009-12. At country level, individual GEAPs were prepared. Plans for most South Asia PSA countries now focus consistently on gender. These led to a set of high-level commitments to strategic gender issues: malnutrition, tackling gender-based violence and economic participation. In contrast with previous Director's Delivery Plan (DDP) progress reports, the South Asia DPF Annual Review 2008-9 demonstrates informed reporting by including reporting on sex-disaggregated data and staffing. It acknowledges that there are still enormous challenges to be met and that '*the status of women in South Asia remains the lowest in the world*'.
- In the **Middle East, Caribbean, Asia and British Overseas Territories** (MECAB) Division, after 2007, there is evidence of much greater attention to gender equality in terms of analysis and commitments in Cambodia and Vietnam (both PSA countries), including a specific Cambodia GEAP in 2008.



### **3. Communications**

Another feature of the GEAP implementation that has been widely commented upon is the creative use of communications.

DFID recognised the centrality of communicating both the spirit of the GEAP and its implementation mechanisms to the entire staff body. A communications campaign was, therefore, developed in two parts: the first – the ‘Think Women’ campaign - was designed to raise widespread awareness of the impact of gender issues in all areas of work and was central to the internal communication of DFID’s main messages on gender, and the second part was focused on responding to demands for more practical ‘how-to’ information.

The ‘**Think Women**’ campaign comprised multiple strands of activity. It covered the range of communication methods, from simple, direct, messaging – strong ‘Think Women’ visuals – to over 30 Insight (DFID intra-net) articles, covering a huge variety of issues from reporting on country office activity to semi-academic articles on gender inequality and the main causes of child malnutrition in South Asia. The gender manual was re-launched with ‘Think Women’ branding. Photo displays and films were produced along with posters exhorting staff: “*You can’t beat poverty without equal rights for women and girls. Put gender equality at the heart of your work*”. ‘Think Women’ became synonymous with implementation of the GEAP for everyone who worked in or with DFID.

**Practical, ‘how to’ information** formed the second phase of the communication campaign. As ‘Think Women’ became embedded and DFID staff came to understand the imperative for putting gender at the heart of their work, a demand was expressed for more substance on what staff should be doing to respond in practical terms. Responding to this need, the second phase of the communication campaign included more articles from country offices that focused on practical examples and technical knowledge-sharing. There was also an innovative series from Heads of Profession showing how gender equality affected work in the different advisory professions (governance, economics, conflict etc).

**Policy papers** also constitute an important dimension of communicating to staff and partners alike. The original GEAP set the overall aim of ‘*A clear vision on gender equality and women’s empowerment supported by consistent policy and practice*’. The 2006 White Paper made only one gender commitment – to “*promoting women’s and girls’ rights particularly through partnerships between civil society organisations and governments*”. By contrast, the 2009 White Paper, as well as policy papers on priority issues, gave a clear message within and outside DFID that gender was to be integrated and that there were particular areas in which attention should be devoted to the impact on women and women’s capacities to contribute to development issues. These priority areas included mobilising partners to achieve outcomes at the World Bank and the UN, fragile states and tackling violence against women.

DFID’s policy on conflict and fragile states is a particularly strong example: whereas the 2005 paper on fragile states<sup>6</sup> contained no gender analysis, the 2007 paper:

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<sup>6</sup> “Why we need to work more effectively in fragile states” DFID 2005



“Preventing Violent Conflict” refers to UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women and Peace and Security, provides a gender analysis of the impact of conflict on women, case studies of how conflict affects women and on women and peace building and makes specific commitments to gender. This is continued through to the June 2009 Emerging Policy Paper: ‘Building the State and Securing the Peace’, which also contains some gender analysis.

#### **4. ‘Partnering for Change’ – leveraging effort with and through external organisations**

The ‘Partnerships Focus Area’ accounts for nearly half of the outputs and indicative activities in the GEAP<sup>77</sup>, demonstrating that working with partners formed a central part of the overall plan. Partnership working was both an important feature of DFID’s approach to delivering change and one of the four result areas under the GEAP. Right from the start, there was explicit recognition that working with partners needed to form a central part of DFID’s gender strategy. This was articulated as the need to rebuild or strengthen links with organisations such as the Development Banks, the EU and regional organisations such as the African Union to work on gender issues. DFID also built on the comparative advantage of other organisations by putting resources into UN or global funds.

Civil society, as well as multi-lateral partners, featured as a recognised and valuable source of partnerships for DFID in designing and tracking the GEAP.

The GEAP progress reports reflect the priority given to partnerships and the progress made. The 2007/08 report mostly outlines work to get processes underway, such as preparations for the Accra High-Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness: *“Most activities have taken place under the Partnerships area of the GEAP. This is not surprising given DFID’s focus on working towards Paris Declaration principles of harmonization and alignment, the focus on country programmes and working with partners.”*

The 2008/09 progress report placed a greater emphasis on results. In the largest and most detailed section of the report, on the Partnerships Focus area, the report sought to clarify both why DFID works with partners and how it does so. It explained the chain of results, from internal process, through work with partners, to delivery at country level. At the same time, the report explains DFID’s focus on making gender equality the responsibility of all: *“DFID will help build a stronger international framework for gender equality and women’s rights by promoting a greater focus on gender equality in international discussions and with the multilateral partners with whom we work.”*

The emphasis placed on partnerships signaled very clearly to external parties that DFID could not take sole responsibility for progress on gender equality, and that the agenda could only be advanced through collective effort with influential partners. It was also an approach that may have strengthened internal accountability and motivation, since DFID’s efforts were visible and open to challenge from external

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<sup>77</sup> 14 outputs out of 36 and 32 indicative outputs out of 83



perspectives as the work progressed. It also helped DFID to manage its external reputation during the period of the GEAP and benchmark progress with comparable organisations.

Organisations across the development community find it challenging to measure the impact of partnerships. By definition, the more successful a partnership, the more difficult it is to attribute change to one partner. This is reflected in the fact that 'Partnerships' is one of the least clearly defined Focus Areas of the GEAP; objectives are often vague and process-based: '*take forward work on...*', '*increasingly mention gender in...*' '*inform the UK's contribution to...*' are some examples. The six outcome indicators do not add further clarity, two of which call for better indicators. While greater clarity of intention seems to have emerged over the three year period, the links between what DFID does, such as lobbying, negotiating and influencing and clear evidence of outcomes are still hard to track.

Despite these constraints, examples of achievements in this area include:

- a) The outcomes of the Accra High-Level Forum reflect the specific commitments for taking forward the Accra Agenda for Action and for promoting mainstreaming of gender equality in all of the World Bank's (WB) work. DFID had not only provided funding for the WB Gender Action Plan (GAP), it had also been active in ensuring that the WB was held to account for its commitments on gender. The UK's, and others, sustained lobbying resulted in the World Bank's announcement that the World Development Report 2012 will have a focus on gender equality and that gender will be a special theme under the World Bank International Development Association (IDA) 16 replenishment round. DFID showed strong leadership in organising an informal group of OECD/DAC 'Gendernet'<sup>8</sup> members to lobby for increased IDA investments for Gender Equality.
- b) DFID's International Finance and Europe Division (IFED), commissioned an assessment of how organisations such as the EC and the development banks were addressing gender. This assessment constituted a base-line for IFED's work on gender and guidance for the future<sup>9</sup>.
- c) In September 2009, as a result of intensive lobbying across Whitehall, in conjunction with other Member States, the UN General Assembly agreed unanimously to support the creation of a single gender equality entity for the UN.

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<sup>8</sup> The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) Development Cooperation Directorate (DAC) convenes 'Gendernet'; an international forum where gender experts from development co-operation agencies meet to define common approaches in support of gender equality.

<sup>9</sup> Watkins, F: "Assessing the work of multi-lateral organisations to deal with gender equality – revised assessments" Social Development Direct 2007



- d) Since 2008, the United Nations and Commonwealth Department (UNCD) Performance Frameworks for UN partners<sup>10</sup> include gender indicators. These are used to measure performance and to trigger disbursement of core voluntary funding to agencies. These targets have been tightened up for 2010 to align more closely with agencies own gender strategies and plans. A benchmarking exercise is planned for 2010 to enable UN Conflict and Humanitarian Division to fine tune support to priority agencies which are under performing on gender. In return, UNICEF states that DFID is one of only two bilateral donors having systems that are of significant relevance in assisting UNICEF with the development of their internal systems<sup>11</sup>.
- e) In reputational terms, partners such as CIDA, WB, UNIFEM and OECD/DAC now see DFID as a '*strong player on gender*', '*an active player at the country level*', '*cutting edge*' and '*a leader in the field*'.

## 5. **'Hard Incentives' – the gender bonus scheme**

After a year of steady - but not spectacular - progress under the GEAP, individual behavioural change at senior level was identified as the key to effecting greater change. The GEAP implementation was then made part of the senior managers' bonus scheme - rewarding efforts by senior staff to promote gender equality.

At the start of the period of assessment, senior managers were asked to develop their own personal performance objectives on gender and a separate list of sample objectives for Gender Champions. At the end of the reporting year, these personnel were asked to write a one page note stating what they had achieved in relation to their gender objectives.

The outcomes of the scheme in its first year of operation, particularly the one-page submissions, yielded some highly valuable evidence on the extent and patterns of contribution by senior staff on gender issues.

There was some controversy about the scheme as a number of staff saw it as unfair (senior staff being rewarded for work that was being delivered at a lower level) or unethical (senior leaders receiving an incentive for something that DFID should be championing as a matter of course). Nevertheless, the scheme's first year was effective in both galvanising action and providing a rich source of data on successes, gaps and challenges. There were case studies of initiatives taken and evidence of innovative work, particularly at country level.

There is little doubt that the scheme achieved its original objective of 'getting people talking about gender around the water cooler'. The incentive scheme was designed

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<sup>10</sup> UNDP, UNFPA, UNAIDS, WHO and UNICEF; reflected in UNHCD Business Plan – DSO1

<sup>11</sup> UNICEF: Financing Gender Mainstreaming, A Review and Analysis of Gender Equality Programmes of UNICEF's Partners: Assessing the Effectiveness of their Systems and Tool for Tracking Resource Allocations and Expenditures Advancing Gender Equality Results, L. Fox, September 2009



to create a shift in attitudes and awareness. Once that outcome had been achieved, DFID recognised that a different approach was required to sustain senior commitment to gender equality in the long term.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Centrally, DFID needs to make a decision again about the genuine and realistic level of impact that it can have on gender issues, and how this needs to be reflected in the day to day work. This will require renewed engagement at the most senior levels of management to get broader senior support for the level of gender equality work that is appropriate in light of DFID's strategic goals. Senior managers should invest time in a central, strategic planning meeting, involving those who have been Gender Champions. It is thus recommended that a two-day, facilitated strategic planning meeting takes place. .

- (i) From this process, a **new, strategic plan** is needed that:
  - a) Is integrated within core corporate business planning processes
  - b) Identifies and costs appropriate levels of resources and incorporates these into the relevant divisional performance frameworks;
  - c) Underpins future objective setting for all senior managers and teams who can influence progress on gender. It should reflect a discussion of what the most high impact and cost effective actions would be and how to implement them in a coordinated way. These agreed actions should then translate into individual objectives which are reported upon, recognised and rewarded in the normal way;
  - d) Shapes the way DFID works with external stakeholders to develop the next phase of the GEAP; using partners to press the case for greater political attention to the issue needs to continue and needs to be approached in a strategic, focused way
  - e) Is based on 'SMART' objectives and manageable goals;
- (ii) **Progress should be tracked** on projects and programmes and this progress linked to gender equality results.
- (iii) **Tracking spend** is an immediate and urgent task for DFID – it is a key means of monitoring trends within the organisation and is seen as vital by partners. DFID needs to be able to follow the money – particularly in the current climate. Existing actions to address reporting issues should be supported and accelerated.
- (iv) **Policy development** and research work needs to strengthen and demonstrate the links between poverty reduction and gender. DFID is now in a much better position as a result of the GEAP to harvest learning about what works and what makes a difference, and how to translate this into activities and outputs on the ground.
- (v) **Staff capacity** needs particular attention. GEAP commitments in this area need to be reviewed. If found to be still relevant and useful, they will need project planning and dedicated resources. In particular, greater investment



- (vi) **A contingency plan** needs to be developed to support gender issues if DFID is not willing or able to invest in any further expertise e.g. through training.
- (vii) **A dialogue with partners**, including multi-laterals, bilateral donors and civil society would give DFID the opportunity to explain how it intends to meet external expectations – or not, when these do not fit within internal commitments and priorities. DFID also needs a clearer, rigorous definition of success in working with partners.

