GPAF Impact Round 3 - Strengths and Weaknesses identified during assessment of 301 concept notes – October 2012

This table identifies some of the key strengths and weaknesses of concept notes submitted to the third round of the GPAF Impact window.   The table is split into three main sections: 1. Factors related to the project's potential impact on poverty; 2. Factors related to the capability of the applicant and, where relevant, the partners; 3. Other factors.

1. Factors related to the project's potential impact on poverty

1.1 Rationale/justification

Weaknesses	Strengths
Lack of reference to Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), especially off-track MDGs, and relevant government (or other recognized) data at both national level and for the specific target area and population.

Clear information provided on progress towards specific MDGs but with no clear linkage established between the proposed project intervention and its contribution to the identified MDGs.

The contextual analysis is too broad and therefore vague in terms of how it has informed the design of the proposed project intervention. Some provide contextual information at the national level only without clarifying specific circumstances in the proposed project location.

There is a tendency to identify the problem but with insufficient analysis of the causes.

The problem statement is not supported by appropriate data to clarify the nature or magnitude of the problem, or the data is not up to date (more than 5 years old), without reasonable explanation.

Where capital inputs are proposed to renovate or replace dysfunctional equipment e.g. water pumps, some concept notes do not adequately explain the reasons why the existing equipment is failing to function. | Very clear justification explaining why the proposed intervention is appropriate for this particular target group, at this time and in this place.

Clearly showing the situation of specified MDGs nationally and in relation to target group and area.

Strong concept notes present the national context for MDG progress, referenced by recognized data; and provide a thorough analysis of the local context and population in relation to the identified MDGs. They also identify particular gaps in responses and provision of services which justify an intervention in order to achieve more rapid or sustainable progress.

Only provide contextual information of direct relevance to the proposed intervention.

Demonstration of consultations with beneficiary target group or adequate justification for not doing so at this stage.

Good use of external references which are reliable and relevant to the application and the target population/location.

It is clear what beneficiaries have prioritised and said, and how the project design has taken this into account.

It is clear that other stakeholders (including |

Weaknesses	Strengths
Unclear reasons for selection of particular locations within countries other than in terms of existing presence.	government) have been similarly involved.
	The nature of previous work in the area or relevant work undertaken by others is explicit, and the proposed project builds on that work.
The characteristics of the target beneficiary groups not clearly and explicitly defined or the reasons for selection are unclear.	
	The information provided on the factors causing poverty within the target group is sufficient in detail and scope to justify the proposed interventions.
Insufficient evidence of consultation with potential beneficiaries during the project identification process.	
Insufficient analysis of the work of others who may be addressing similar issues in the area and inadequate consideration of 'gaps' in current service provision.	
Reference to international experience as proof that the proposed intervention will work in the proposed project context without due consideration of the specific local conditions.	
Weak justifications for the added value of multi-country approaches.	

1.2 Clarity of anticipated changes and link to GPAF programme objectives

Weaknesses	Strengths
The proposed changes are not clearly linked to the issues identified in the problem statement.	The concept note and logframe clearly define the outcome and outputs, the specific direct and indirect beneficiary groups, and the nature and magnitude of anticipated progress/growth in income, access to services etc..
Vague, general or global changes identified which could be applied anywhere and don't lend themselves to clear targets or indicators.	
	In concept notes using a rights based approach, the intended changes resulting from advocacy and their anticipated poverty impact are clearly explained.
Although not asked to complete targets in the logframe, some concept notes provided little or no indication of the rates or magnitude of the anticipated change (e.g. in income growth, crop productivity etc.).	
	Clear and realistic analysis of changes on different target groups; distinctions between short and longer term changes are clearly defined.
Too many activities addressing multiple issues and not forming part of a clear, coherent and logical project initiative. This tends to occur more in cases where applicants try to achieve impact across too	Clear evidence of the impact of previous work in a similar area. This might be previous work undertaken by the applicant

Weaknesses	Strengths
many MDGs. Many concept notes are too vague in this section, describing changes in only very general terms e.g. 'quality of education' will improve, or 'improved livelihoods'. Not attempting to differentiate the anticipated changes where relevant for sub-groups of beneficiaries e.g. for men and women, boys and girls. In concept notes where gender differences are important, reference to "women" as a category without differentiating their needs and interests, or assuming that reference to women in the narrative is sufficient without clearly explaining how their interests are affected, or linking this coherently in the design and logframe. In concept notes to extend or build on existing project initiatives, the specific nature of the proposed new project is sometimes not clearly defined. Insufficient information on prior success where it could reasonably be expected e.g. evaluation of previous work upon which the proposed project is based. Anticipated changes are not clearly defined or are complex and hard to unravel, or just an un-prioritised list of objectives. No or insufficient attempt to establish a clear 'line of sight' between empowerment and/or advocacy elements and poverty impact.	(to show that they are able to demonstrate impact), or evidence of the impact of similar work undertaken by others (to show that expectations of future impact are reasonable). Concept note and logframe sufficiently detailed for this stage in terms of nature and scale of poverty impact and with clear linkage to the problem analysis. A balance between 'technical' changes and necessary social and cultural considerations to ensure sustainable achievement of change. Strong concept notes tend to have a simple outcome statement which clearly shows the anticipated change in poor people's lives by the end of the project. Gender is appropriately addressed in terms of recognizing women and girls as a distinct sub-set in analysis and justification, clear strategies for addressing gender equality, and monitoring through disaggregated indicators.

1.3 Design and Approach

Weaknesses	Strengths
Weak linkages between the problem analysis and the proposed interventions and anticipated changes. Project design fails to recognise the need for linkages with other programmes or government initiatives.	The best concept notes are clear, practical, free from jargon and rhetoric, and clearly address the issues identified in the rationale. Clear engagement of beneficiaries and other key stakeholders in the design process or clear justification of why this has not

Where initiatives were effectively continuations of on-going work, either tried in other areas or in the same place, there was inadequate analysis of the previous project's success or how the new initiative would build on that success or introduce changes to design and approach as a result of learning through past experience.	happened and how his will be addressed in the preparation of a full proposal.
	Clear, logical hierarchy of objectives where analysis provides justification for the intervention; the outcome contributes to the achievement of the impact and the outcome is achieved through the delivery of the outputs.
The approach is not justified in terms of cost-effectiveness, or adequately compared with other approaches which have been less effective, more costly etc. to demonstrate value for money.	Clear evidence that the approach has been proven to be successful and known challenges or concerns about the approach are acknowledged and addressed through the project.
Long and overly complex outcome statements in logframe and poorly defined outputs. Indicators not disaggregated by gender (or any other factors).	Use of standard indicators, where relevant from general authority (such as DFID or UN) or from sector specific authority such as WHO.
Trying to do too much in a single time-limited project e.g. including income generation, health, water and good governance, without demonstrating clear linkages or demonstrating how all could be realistically achieved within the project lifetime.	Clear demonstration of why the initiative is considered to be the most cost-effective approach, and how this will achieve real cost-effective impact.
The role of partners appears to overlap with government service provision with no clear explanation of whether this has been negotiated with the relevant government actors.	Clear demonstration of how the intervention would challenge and/or hold to account; and/or support government work, and therefore make it more strategic and likely to lead to a significant impact on poverty.
Insufficient evidence of consideration of issues related to the sustainability of interventions, particularly regarding capital inputs and infrastructure.	The design presents a clear and logical progression from start to finish.
	There are high levels of participation by beneficiaries and other stakeholders in the proposed project, not only in implementation but also in governance.
Proposed interventions are too small to have a significant impact on the identified problem.	The application is realistic about future sustainability (and gives evidence of how previous work has been sustained); builds on existing structures rather than introducing new structures; builds on what already exists in local culture rather than assuming a blank slate.
Many weak concept notes do not use existing standard indicators but try to design their own, which are often incomplete, unspecific, and inappropriate.	
Insufficient clarity regarding how the project will actually be implemented in terms of	Clear linkages to Government services and/or Acts, Policies. Alignment with work of

direct engagement with the target groups.	government and/or other agencies is clear and adds to both value for money and probability of sustainability of outputs and potential for further scaling-up. Consistent attention to disaggregation by gender and/or other relevant aspects of diversity within the target group.

2. Organisational capability

2.1 Technical experience

Weaknesses	Strengths
Applicant and partners do not appear to provide any or only very limited evidence of previous experience in the sector/project area to be addressed. Weaknesses in not defining expertise in key areas of the project, particularly when working on new initiatives. For projects covering a range of technical areas (e.g. water supply and sanitation plus health and HIV): not demonstrating how all the necessary technical skills will be available to the project. In many cases organisations stated that they had implemented similar projects but did not give specific examples or evidence of success.	Clearly demonstrating that the organisation(s) have learned lessons from previous relevant experience and how learning has influenced the project design and will inform project management. Clearly describing the range of expertise needed to undertake project activities and how this is, or will be provided by the applicant and partners. The best examples of technical experience showed not only that the applicants had implemented similar projects in the past, but that these projects had been successful. The management and partnership arrangements are clearly explained.

2.2 Added value of the applicant

Weaknesses	Strengths
Some only referred to general capacity and not capacity for the specific focus of the project initiative. For UK-based applicants, the added value is sometimes stated in terms of administrative tasks only, such as liaison with the donor and financial oversight, rather than specific skills, experience or capacity required for delivery of proposed project.	Added value is clearly defined in specific, technical areas such as policy advice, networking, advocacy support and monitoring and evaluation. Tried and tested approaches being applied in a new context; networks and wider geographical programme from which to draw experience; technical expertise in a challenging area e.g. micro-finance.

	Clearly showing where lessons have been learnt and the monitoring and evaluation outcomes of previous work are fed back into project design and implementation.
	Showing added value beyond the actual project; e.g. global experience of similar projects which may learn from each other.
	Showing how projects will be linked to others for support and learning.

2.3 Management and partnership

Weaknesses	Strengths
Respective roles and responsibilities of applicant and partners not described or confused.	The partnership arrangements are described in a way which clearly demonstrates the need for the proposed partnerships in the context of this project.
No clear indication of proposed staffing arrangements.	
Unclear description of relationship and respective roles of project partners and government agencies.	Clear and complementary roles and responsibilities. Right balance of leadership roles across the consortium; clear lines of accountability for contract management and delivery.
Complex partnerships not well explained. Roles and responsibilities especially of local partners not defined.	Good partnerships and linkages between project / project partners and government departments (where relevant).
Inconsistencies between different sections of the form relating to partners, who will be undertaking the work, partnerships and capacity.	The governance arrangements are clear, and enable both beneficiaries and other stakeholders to be able to influence the direction of the project as it is implemented.
Lack of information about infrastructure needed for project management, especially in multi-country projects.	Where appropriate, showing how the institutional relationships developed for the project would enable the project interventions to continue beyond the period of GPAF support.
Governance documents are unsigned and/ or undated.	

3. Other areas

3.1 Value for money

Weaknesses	Strengths

Weaknesses	Strengths
Projects targeting a small number of beneficiaries but with a high budget, and no clear explanation of why the costs should be so high.

Target number of direct beneficiaries is either unclear or inconsistent.

Large budget and short timeframe and unclear how the funds could be effectively spent within the proposed time.

Concept notes including a significant capital investment and the budget is high compared to the number of beneficiaries, but with no clear explanation of why the investment is considered to offer value for money.

No clear justification for multi-country initiatives (e.g. in terms of either value-added or economies of scale); or mention of 'economies of scale' without further clarification.

Little evidence of consideration of alternative, potentially more cost effective approaches. | Clear balance of overall cost to anticipated nature and extent of impact.

Proposed staffing levels appropriate to type of initiative proposed.

Clear explanation of what aspects of the project promote cost-effectiveness e.g. tested approaches which have been adapted to reduce costs; key savings in national and international resources made possible through the project etc..

Project intends to make use of existing resources/facilities and make them more efficient and/or effective.

Explaining why the proposed approach is considered to be the most cost-effective and that alternatives have been considered. |

3.2 Gender and Diversity

Weaknesses	Strengths
Many organisations stated that women and girls were to be involved in project activities, but they did not show either the specific barriers faced by women and girls within the project context, or how the project has been designed to overcome these.

Few concept notes differentiate the needs and perceptions of men and boys or the power relationships which underpin gender relations. In some cases, projects target women and girls but do not clarify how men and boys will be included.

Even where issues related to gender (in problem statement) are strong and gender specific objectives are stated in the concept | Clear analysis of the differentiated needs of men, women, girls and boys are reflected within the problem analysis, project design, activities, and monitoring/evaluation plans.

Where relevant, concept notes incorporate gender analysis in terms of power relationships and identify why this is important for the achievement of the project outcome.

Applicant clearly identifies specific gender-based barriers that are relevant to the project and shows how they will be addressed.

Being realistic in how barriers are to be broken down and clear about who needs to |

note, the attention to gender issues is often not adequately reflected in the logframe and activities log. The proposed intervention is described as a 'gender project' but with no evidence that gender-related issues have been appropriately analysed and understood. Some concept notes appear to be based on the assumption all activities targeting women will lead to 'empowerment' of women without exploring the issues related to women's role in decision-making. Failure to address common issues related to 'women's economic empowerment' such as the risks of creating increased workload, and inability to control economic assets.	be involved to support the processes. Concept notes which focus on socially marginalized groups and clearly integrate their analysis of gender relations with other aspects of exclusion and discrimination, and acknowledge the repercussions of changing the status quo. Address multiple exclusions for example disability plus gender, gender plus caste, caste plus disability etc.. Clearly articulate how girls/women will have a role in decision-making or management within the project scope. Recognition of complexities in achieving change and addressing issues through project design e.g. by working with men and boys. Demonstration that consultation with beneficiaries has been thorough and that methods used provide a space for women, girls and other potentially marginalized groups to express themselves freely.