DFID Response

DFID Response to the Independent Commission for Aid Impact (ICAI) recommendations on: "Accessing, staying and succeeding in basic education – UK aid's support to marginalised girls. December 2016"

DFID welcomes the ICAI Review and its recognition that we have "adopted a prominent position internationally on girls' education", through our policy commitments, international advocacy and investment in research. We also welcome the Review's recognition of the Girls Education Challenge (GEC) as "an innovative programme that is making a significant contribution to learning on what works in supporting marginalised girls' education". Looking across the GEC and country programmes, the Review found that "DFID's level of focus on girls broadly corresponded with the level of need in terms of the number of girls out of school".

We recognise some of the challenges ICAI has identified, and the importance of continuing to improve our impact in this vital area which is at the heart of achieving Sustainable Development Goals 4 and 5. Over the past 11 months since the reporting period we have taken action on a number of the issues ICAI have raised, so that the recommendations in this review now largely align with current DFID practice. However, we have considered where we can further improve our performance. This is outlined below.

Recommendation 1: DFID should develop country-specific strategies for marginalised girls' education, based on detailed knowledge of the barriers in each context and learning from successful interventions. Its strategies should combine policy dialogue, system building and targeted interventions, and identify opportunities for cross-sectoral working.

Accept

- In July 2016, DFID developed a framework to categorise and define marginalisation for the second phase of the GEC. This framework is based on analysis of evidence of country-specific barriers from the first phase of the GEC, which has generated significant learning, as the ICAI Review recognises. We now want to go further and embed this framework across the DFID education portfolio, specific to each country. We also want to use learning from the GEC to inform multilateral engagement on education systems, for example through the Global Partnership for Education. UK Aid Country Business Plans already set out broad strategies for UK investments in education at the country level. We will ensure that implementation of Business Plans reflects learning from GEC on marginalised girls' education. To deliver this we will:

- Build a Community of Practice among DFID staff to facilitate learning on gender and education and ensure coherence.
- Set up in-country structures to ensure improved coordination between GEC Fund Manager personnel and the country office.
- Develop targeted influencing strategies with other multilateral and bilateral partners to ensure that lessons learned are embedded into country-level policies and systems.

- In doing so we will draw on the combination of evidence of the barriers and what works for girls' education used routinely in DFID programme design. This includes country-specific research, lessons from gender programmes not explicitly aimed at girls' education (such as the What Works to Prevent Violence Against Women and Girls programme), regional data, inputs from DFID advisers, and research generated and synthesised centrally.

- The inclusion of girls' education as one of the pillars of DFID's strategic vision for girls and women, allows education advisers to link girls' education to a range of other issues such as economic empowerment; sexual and reproductive health and rights; violence against women and girls; child, early and forced marriage; and, Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting. Several country offices have programmes that bridge these areas of work.

Recommendation 2: In its delivery plans and monitoring of programmes with objectives around girls' education and marginalisation, DFID should introduce measures to ensure that this focus is not lost during implementation.

Partially accept

- To ensure that our programmes deliver their objectives and value for tax payers' money, we continue to strengthen our programme management processes, as well as controls and systems, with a particular focus on risk management, due diligence, and management information systems. These areas all support the development and implementation of programme delivery plans and their associated monitoring.

- The application of DFID's Smart Rules means that education programme teams remain focused on and report against the objectives set out in an approved Business Case and related documents throughout the life of the programme.

- Programmes are designed and monitored regularly with the involvement of DFID staff and external experts and partners. Sometimes circumstances change, risks materialise and assumptions made at the design stage become invalid and are recast. In those instances, delivery plans are adjusted to respond to the changed circumstances. Moreover, where programmes are not delivering intended results and value for the UK tax payer, we work to improve them, but will not hesitate to restructure or close them where this is the right approach.

- The GEC exemplifies these approaches. It is focused on reaching marginalised girls and has robust measures in place to ensure that this focus is not lost. At the design stage, project planning sessions set out the different levels of marginalisation of girls and how these can be addressed. Quarterly monitoring ensures that interventions remain focused on supporting marginalised girls to access education and learn. In addition, given the focus of the programme on testing new approaches and learning from them, we have built in regular independent evaluation of progress made by girls in literacy and numeracy.

- In some instances the Review incorrectly categorises education programmes as being 'girl-focused' when they were designed to deliver learning outcomes for both girls <u>and</u> boys. Such programmes have identified key constraints around teaching quality and school management that are apparent in early years, prior to other gender specific barriers becoming prominent during adolescence. We do not agree that support for girls was 'deprioritised.' Rather in some contexts, we address systemic constraints affecting both marginalised girls and boys before taking targeted action benefiting girls specifically.

Recommendation 3: DFID should specify how to approach value for money analysis when targeting marginalised groups and harder-to-reach groups, emphasising equity as well as cost-effectiveness.

Partially accept

- DFID's Value for Money (VfM) guidance explicitly states that "DFID's approach to VfM does not mean we should take the easy options, ignoring difficult to reach populations or problems which are difficult to tackle[1]". There are efforts underway within DFID to make this commitment more explicit in various internal and external guidance documents.

- The education sector VfM guidance is linked to DFID's corporate guidance. The education guidance follows the NAO structure of the '3Es' (economy, efficiency and effectiveness) but also clearly highlights the importance of considering contextual factors affecting costs (e.g. hard to reach populations). It will be updated in 2017 to give more direction on incorporating equity and link explicitly to the government's 'Leave No One Behind' commitment. Equity considerations are embedded in our sector VfM guidance.

- A refresh of country-level VfM education data on input costs and learning metrics will be carried out in 2017. Data collection on these metrics will be piloted in a number of countries, and data sets fully updated if the pilot shows sizeable changes from previous datasets.

- The GEC exemplifies good practice in how to approach VFM analysis when targeting marginalised and hard to reach groups. The programme collects detailed information on both the costs of reaching girls with different characteristics and different levels of marginalisation, and learning outcomes.

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[1] link