

Evaluation of DFID's Policy and Practice in Support of Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment

COWI Evaluation Team
Rikke Ingrid Jensen et al

Recognition of the links between gender equality and poverty reduction has grown within DFID over the last decade. DFID has made important contributions to gender achievements at policy and practice level. However, contribution and impact is uneven. It is recommended that DFID strengthens efforts to influence on gender in national and international arenas, improves internal systems and develops understanding of gender among staff and partners, to support this.

DFID's gender policy and programming

1. DFID's commitment to pursuit of gender equality and women's empowerment was built from the 1980s and culminated in the adoption of a 'twin track' strategy combining specific activities aimed at empowering women with a commitment to pursue gender equality in the mainstream of all development programmes (gender mainstreaming). The principal elements of DFID's gender policy and strategy are contained in 'Poverty Elimination and the Empowerment of Women' (2000), and the 'Gender Manual' (2002). This evaluation assessed DFID's effectiveness in delivering on its external gender equality objectives, the suitability of its internal systems for promoting gender equality, and DFID's role in the international effort to address gender equality and women's rights. It assessed a sample of DFID's work:

- with international organisations, gender research and advocacy groups, and other donors;
- through field study in India, Western Balkans (Bosnia & Herzegovina and Kosovo), Nigeria and Ethiopia;
- through consideration of DFID's work on education, pro-poor growth, and justice and rights;
- through desk reviews of initiatives in Brazil, Jordan, Kenya, Mozambique, Pakistan, Peru, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe;

The study was based on interviews with staff and partners, focus group discussions with beneficiaries and documentary analysis.

Findings and Recommendations

2. The **overall conclusion** of the evaluation is that DFID has made important contributions to gender equality through both policy and practice. However, this contribution is uneven, and varies across sectors, countries and partnerships. DFID needs to do more to develop understanding among staff and partners of gender equality and how it contributes to economic and social development, and to DFID's overall objectives.

Main findings and recommendations

3. The effect of the move to greater country ownership of development plans and use of new aid modalities (budget support, sector approaches) on gender equality programming was not sufficiently anticipated. DFID's strategy on how to pursue gender equality through these new development approaches has not been clear. It is **recommended** that DFID pursue gender policy objectives in the new aid context through influencing and dialogue at country level. Specific recommendations:

- (i) DFID should influence on gender at country level by identifying ways to support local advocacy efforts for the promotion of gender issues in Poverty Reduction Strategies;
- (ii) DFID should give staff instructions and tools for influencing joint donor responses at country level on gender, including in donor gender co-ordination forums and PRBS working groups;
- (iii) DFID should revitalise its international lead on gender policy development by addressing gender concerns in the context of the DAC's aid effectiveness working groups;

4. Although DFID's gender policies establish an understanding of the links between gender equality, women's rights and poverty reduction, gender activities are often pursued in isolation, as an add-on, or gender is not addressed at all. It is **recommended** that DFID strengthens the consistency of its guidelines and tools for poverty analysis and programming, to ensure the link between gender equality and wider poverty goals is clear and programming is based on gender-sensitive poverty analysis. Specific recommendations:

- (iv) Policy Division should clarify DFID's interpretation of gender equality and women's empowerment, and the different approaches that can be taken to achieve these. In particular, the implications for gender equality of a rights based approach and a social inclusion approach should be clarified;
- (v) DFID's guidelines for tools such as Drivers of Change, Poverty and Social Impact Assessments, and social exclusion analyses should be reviewed for consistency in linkages between gender equality and poverty reduction;
- (vi) DFID's guidelines at programming level should be adjusted to ensure all programming is based on gender-sensitive poverty analysis. Minimum standards for the application of multi-dimensional poverty analysis tools should be stipulated (See para 5.19 Synthesis report). Training in the use of these guidelines should be reviewed;

5. DFID's performance management framework, drawn from the MDGs, has focused on gender in the areas of health and education. This has helped to institutionalise gender equality objectives in these sectors, but has been less successful in other areas of DFID's work. It is **recommended** that DFID broadens accountability measures on gender equality, through broadening gender targets in the performance management framework, and ensuring these are reflected in formal and informal monitoring and evaluation. Specific recommendations:

- (vii) DFID should broaden the established PSA targets on gender equality beyond education and health:
 - Review PSA 1 target;
 - Institutionalise MDG3 expanded targets including sexual & reproductive health & rights and violence against women into DFID's performance management framework;
 - Integrate revised priorities into key programming documents (IS, PPA, DDP, RAP and CAP);

- (viii) DFID should improve monitoring of gender equality targets at institutional and intervention level, and put in place an audit mechanism to ensure updated monitoring and evaluation guidelines are adhered to;

6. The internal environment has not sufficiently supported the pursuit of gender equality. Given the many goals of DFID's development assistance, uneven leadership across the organisation and lack of strong incentives for work on gender equality, there is a danger that gender equality goals fall by the wayside. Improving results in gender equality requires staff and other resources especially at country level. It is **recommended** that management at DFID headquarters and country offices demonstrate continued commitment to the importance of gender equality, to act as an incentive to staff. Specific recommendations:

- (ix) DFID should nominate a top management champion and country office gender champions, preferably from outside the Social Development Advisers (SDA) cadre, and
 - Gender-specific indicators should be integrated into personal objectives of gender champions;
 - Learning and sharing of best practice on gender equality should be strengthened through retreats for gender champions;
- (x) Strengthen learning and sharing of best practice on gender equality through mainstreaming gender equality into the retreats of all professional advisory groups;
- (xi) Policy Division should provide improved guidance on locating and accessing existing gender tools and should update resources as required, to enable staff to pursue suggested broadened PSA targets;

Findings on the impact and contribution of DFID's policy and practice on gender equality goals

7. The evaluation was not able to assess DFID's contribution to international targets on gender equality. On the impact of interventions, a correlation was found between gender sensitive design and increased impact / contribution.

Findings on the effect of the move to country-led approaches, new aid modalities, and harmonised and aligned aid delivery

8. The reflection of DFID's central policy objective of gender equality at country level varies. Including gender in background analysis for

8. The reflection of DFID's central policy objective of gender equality at country level varies. Including gender in background analysis for country planning, or developing specific gender strategies, were found to be important means to strengthen the gender focus of a programme.

9. Increased use of new forms of aid, particularly budget support, is both a challenge and potentially an opportunity for the achievement of gender equality gains. The gender orientation of DFID's budget support depends on how gender is dealt with in a country's PRS. This means that DFID has given budget support where a partner country's PRS is weak on gender issues. However, in the context of budget support, DFID has played important roles in increasing attention to gender issues in Tanzania (integrating gender issues into the poverty monitoring system) and in Uganda (influencing the process of gender budgeting).

Findings on DFID's organisational structures and incentives in support of gender commitments

10. DFID's gender strategy is widely regarded as optional guidance rather than a commitment for which country offices are accountable. However, DFID's performance management system has helped to embed gender equality in the education and health sectors.

11. Leadership on gender across the organisation and at senior management level has been inconsistent. Gender achievements outside the PSA targeted areas are not considered to be as highly rated by senior management as other achievements, and gender equality work can be seen as being in competition with other priorities at country level. Instead, leadership has been left with committed individuals or professional groups, in many cases the SDA.

Findings on DFID's role and comparative advantage in the international effort to address gender issues

12. DFID has played significant roles in policy leadership and knowledge development on gender. DFID-funded gender research and studies have had worldwide influence on gender knowledge and on other donors' efforts (for example DFID's support for research on gender in Sector approaches, and on gender budgeting). Internationally, DFID's sector specific contributions on MDG-related gender goals (education and health) are commended. At country level there

is an ad hoc approach to sharing of tasks among donors, and within this, DFID takes a varied role between different country programmes.

Findings on the level of resources (funding, staff, knowledge) for gender equality programming

13. The variable results found on gender are also linked to the level of resources available for gender work. The current level of staffing in the organisation does not support broad-based gender mainstreaming. The heavy prioritisation of tasks resulting from the reduction in staff numbers in relation to DFID's overall budget is detrimental to gender focused work (among others).

14. Analysis of funding for gender work based on the Policy Information Marker System is inconclusive. Data from the system suggests a consistent increase in gender marked expenditure over the period 1995-2005. However, this normally represents intentions at project design stage and does not reflect the actual implementation of gender mainstreaming or gender achievements.

15. DFID is at the forefront of funding for gender specific research, but there are bottlenecks in internal dissemination of knowledge and there are some areas where guidance and tools are yet to be developed, particularly on gender in budget support.

Findings on DFID's systems for tracking progress and monitoring effects on gender equality goals

16. DFID's corporate monitoring system based on the MDG-led performance management system focuses on gender in education and health sectors. Results outside these two sectors are invisible through corporate reporting.

17. At intervention level progress reports and reviews have been important instruments to correct weaknesses in project design on gender, and there were good examples of monitoring of progress towards gender equality outcomes, particularly in India. However, the overall quality of monitoring and evaluation of gender equality is inconsistent.

Management response
(from Governance & Social Development Group, Policy Division)

18. We welcome the evaluation findings which offer a useful diagnostic on which to base strengthened efforts to promote gender equality and women's rights as a key dimension of poverty reduction. We agree with the evaluation report's overall conclusion that, whilst DFID is having clear impact in many areas, we need to do more to ensure that gender is addressed more systematically in our programming. Many of the factors identified by the evaluation contributing to this uneven performance have resonance in other more limited assessments, internal feedback and discussions (for example that work on gender is frequently seen as separate from core poverty reduction efforts and in competition with other development objectives; and on the challenges of ensuring gender is prioritised in partners' poverty reduction strategies). The main findings are also in line with the outcomes of similar evaluations carried out by other bilateral donors on their own gender work. This would suggest that some of the problems identified are symptomatic of a wider systemic problem in addressing gender inequality.

19. It is clear from the evaluation findings that we need to look at how DFID's internal structures, systems and processes can further strengthen our work on gender equality. The findings also have implications for levels of expertise within DFID on gender.

DEPARTMENT FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The Department for International Development (DFID) is the UK government department responsible for promoting development and the reduction of poverty. The government first elected in 1997 has increased its commitment to development by strengthening the department and increasing its budget.

The central focus of the government's policy, set out in the 1997 White Paper on International Development, is a commitment to the internationally agreed target to halve the proportion of people living in extreme poverty by 2015, together with the associated targets including basic health care provision and universal access to primary education by the same date. The second White Paper on International Development, published in December 2000, reaffirmed this commitment, while focusing specifically on how to manage the process of globalisation to benefit poor people.

DFID seeks to work in partnership with governments which are committed to the international targets, and seeks to work with business, civil society and the research community to this end. We also work with multilateral institutions including the World Bank, United Nations agencies and the European Community.

The bulk of our assistance is concentrated on the poorest countries in Asia and sub-Saharan Africa. We are also contributing to poverty elimination and sustainable development in middle income countries in Latin America, the Caribbean and elsewhere. DFID is also helping the transition countries in central and eastern Europe to try to ensure that the process of change brings benefits to all people and particularly to the poorest.

As well as its headquarters in London and East Kilbride, DFID has offices in many developing countries. In others, DFID works through staff based in British embassies and high commissions.

DFID's headquarters are located at: 1 Palace Street, London SW1E 5HE, UK and at: DFID, Abercrombie House, Eaglesham Road, East Kilbride, Glasgow G75 8EA, UK

Switchboard: 020 7023 0000 Fax: 020 7023 0016

Website: www.dfid.gov.uk

Email: enquiry@dfid.gov.uk

Public Enquiry Point: 0845 3004100

From overseas: +44 1355 84 3132

ISBN: 1 86192 838 6

20. To respond to the evaluation findings and in line with the commitment in DFID's White Paper – 'Eliminating World Poverty : making governance work for the poor' – to give greater priority to work on gender equality and women's rights, we are in the process of developing a Gender Action Plan to be completed in late 2006. This will set out key actions over the next 2-3 years to strengthen our work on gender and ensure that gender equality and women's empowerment remain central to our work on poverty reduction. It will include work on the following priorities:

- how to help our partners better integrate gender into their policy frameworks (such as poverty reduction strategies), for instance by broadening our partnerships and discussions at country level, in line with DFID's emphasis on supporting a country's own approaches to poverty reduction;
- making gender equality a more visible part of DFID's measurement of its own performance at all levels;
- ensuring that staff have the knowledge and skills to support work on gender and understand the links between gender equality and other development objectives, including poverty reduction; and
- increased cooperation on gender with other donors and international agencies.