

2. BACKGROUND: SOCIAL AND POLITICAL RESEARCH

Chronic poverty is that poverty that is ever present and never ceases. It is like the rains of the grasshopper season that beat you consistently and for a very long time. You become completely soaked because you have no way out. Some poverty passes from one generation to another, as if the offspring sucks it from their mother's breast. They in turn pass it on to their children.
Disabled Women in Uganda – Chronic Poverty Research Centre.

1. DFID invested over £10 million in 2006/7 in research into social and political change, which is around 9% of the overall budget for central research. Research to advance understanding of the multi-dimensional nature of poverty; the intergenerational characteristics of poverty which may keep people poor; and the processes of institutional and social change which may help or hinder development efforts.

2. Research falls into two categories: **governance and political science research** that answers questions about how states do and don't work in the interests of poor people and **social research** on global trends and themes that fundamentally affect the context for development across DFID partner countries, ranging from women's empowerment to migration and faith issues.

3. DFID's current Research Funding Framework 2005 -2007 has as one of its four priority areas, research on what to do where states do not work in the interests of the poor, committing some £20m to research in this area. Around 340 million people, almost a third of the world's poor, live in fragile states – those states which are failing to provide basic services to poor people because they are either unwilling or unable to do so. Without progress in these countries the MDGs cannot be met. Research to improve our understanding for new approaches in this area covers issues of citizenship, crisis states, state building and human insecurity.

4. DFID currently supports 10 research programme consortia/development research centres in social and political research. These programmes typically run over 5 years, covering questions in the following broad areas:

- Women's empowerment and rights
- The role of religion in development
- State building, accountability, citizenship and participation
- State collapse and reconstruction
- Migration, globalisation and poverty
- Inequalities, human security and ethnicity

DFID is also supporting *Young Lives* a longitudinal research project on childhood poverty, tracking the lives of children born in 2000 through to 2015.

Putting the politics back into development - governance and political science research

5. Both the 1997 and the 2006 White Papers on International Development emphasised the importance of capable, accountable and responsive states in reducing poverty. DFID research seeks to understand better the “deep structures” that determine how states and politics operate, providing knowledge to a range of development practitioners on such new and enduring governance challenges as: the role of neo-patriotism; new forms of public authority needed by states to address the demands of globalisation; citizenship participation; tax and accountability; and issues underlying state instability and conflict.

6. DFID is one of few research funders to focus explicitly on political change research, including understanding what effective “operating principles” for donors in this area should be. In part for this reason, there have been strong links between the outputs of the research DFID has commissioned and the policies DFID has subsequently developed, most notably the 2006 White Paper on International Development.

Knowledge highlights from DFID Governance research

Taxation is crucial

DFID governance research has highlighted taxation as a crucial area of state/society engagement and accountability. It has found that large amounts of aid can weaken the links between tax and accountability, encouraging accountability to donors at the expense of domestic taxpayers and legislatures. Donors therefore need to think through the likely impact of different aid modalities on state/society relationships. Tax needs to be seen not just as a fiscal or economic concern but an essential ingredient of better governance.

Understanding the trajectory of state collapse and reconstruction

Recent research in Africa on state building in fragile or 'reconstructing' states shows that despite international pressure to move towards formal democratic procedures (Rwanda before the genocide, DRC) there is considerable doubt that state-making can best be pursued through modern liberal democratic models of governance. Too much pressure to introduce political competition can threaten the stability of a precarious polity. This means that elections, for example, may be divisive whereas inclusive coalitions have a better chance (in some contexts) of being effective-because they have popular support and are seen to be legitimate. Both the Tanzanian one-party state and the Ugandan 'no-party' system have acquired a degree of legitimacy by being inclusive.

Research on social change

7. The portfolio of social change research investigates a range of cross country and cross-cultural themes where significant gaps in international development knowledge about rights and inequalities, supporting for example DFID's work on reducing social exclusion and ensuring gender equality. Programmes include longitudinal research exploring the nature of childhood poverty, migration, the barriers to policy-makers tackling chronic poverty and effective strategies for women's empowerment.

8. Part of DFID's social research programme is run in collaboration with the UK Economic and Social Research Council. This partnership has been important in supporting the role of inter-disciplinary research through international research collaborations. DFID also support the UN Research Institute for Social Development and the International Council on Human Rights Policy.

9. DFID social research has been significant not only in revealing the social contexts for addressing development challenges but also in framing policy, for example work from the Chronic Poverty Development Research Centre provided evidence for the *Commission for Africa* for contextualising the extent and meaning of poverty, by mapping where the world's most poorest people are located; and also on Migration, both for DFID and HMG more broadly.

Joining up UK policy on migration

The DAC peer review 2006 noted how national and international coherence between migration and development policies can assist the UK to manage its migration more effectively while harnessing the benefits of migration as part of its strategy for poverty reduction in developing countries. DFID has played an increasingly active role in interdepartmental discussions on migration and development, promoting policies and practice to maximise the benefits of migration for poor people. Research in this area has been important both to support inter-departmental discussions, DFID policy, and international debates, informing the DFID policy paper *Moving out of Poverty – Making Migration Work Better for Poor People* and the *Global Commission on International Migration*.

Research impact at a National level - supporting national poverty strategies

In Vietnam, recommendations from the *Young Lives* project have been incorporated into the Social and Economic Development Plan 06-10; in Ethiopia the project carried out a detailed analysis of the 2002-05 Sustainable Development Poverty Reduction Programme, drawing on best practice from other Poverty Reduction Strategies and developed recommendations and indicators for Ethiopia's second PRSP.

Bangladesh – the Chronic Poverty Research Centre contributed background papers for the PRSP.

Uganda - Recognition by Government of Uganda Social Protection Task Force that the chronic poor need to be included in any major social assistance scheme. The research programme has been requested to design a cash transfer pilot programme for the Government's Social protection Task Force, to feed into the next Poverty Eradication Action Plan revision.

In South Africa qualitative work on social grants for the Treasury has already helped to correct misperceptions in government about the likely effects of grants on dependency.

Lessons learned and issues for the future

10. Research is typically organised around networks of research partners, usually lead by Northern institutions but with strong partners in the South. Experience of working through this mechanism has highlighted:

- the need for additional resources and dedicated strategies to develop further the research capabilities of southern partners
- the importance of strengthening inter-disciplinary research skills and approaches in partner countries.

11. Key issues to address in future are:

- ensuring that DFID research in other sectors take sufficient account of governance, rights and equity issues
- who will still be poor in 2015 and how can we tackle the needs of those people who fall outside of the MDG targets
- Understanding the role of social policy in development