

OHCHR's comments: DFID MAR Update 2013 progress ratings (Summary Assessment)

The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) is one of 43 multilateral organisations being assessed by the Department of International Development (DFID) through a review process that began in 2011 entitled the "Multi-lateral Aid Review", or the MAR. OHCHR welcomes the MAR as an independent external assessment of its performance against peers on the basis of a common set of standards. However, as a department of the UN Secretariat, OHCHR has less independence than the specialized agencies of the United Nations, and limited control over certain aspects of the financial and administrative services provided by the United Nations Office in Geneva (UNOG) as well as by implementing partners in the field such as for example the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

In this context, OHCHR has been defined as a "normative" organisation in that it helps set standards for governments and other stakeholders on the implementation of human rights worldwide. OHCHR services the international human rights machinery which consists of committees overseeing the implementation of nine international human rights treaties, as well as the Human Rights Council, an inter-governmental body that meets regularly in Geneva to discuss and debate the state of human rights around the world. OHCHR also provides support to 51 independent human rights experts called the "Special Procedures" focusing either on themes or on specific countries, and whose mandates have been provided by States.

In recent years, OHCHR has become increasingly operational and is now present in almost 60 countries. These presences range from stand-alone country offices to regional offices, human rights advisers working in UN country teams, and human rights offices embedded in peace keeping missions. Their objective is to assist governments in the implementation of international human rights standards, monitor the human rights situation in the countries they cover and report back to the High Commissioner and the international community on violations in order to seek justice and remedies for victims as well as accountability for perpetrators.

The following are brief comments on certain aspects of DFID's assessment of progress made by OHCHR during the period 2011 – 2013 on the four reform components as defined in the MAR:

Component 1: Contribution to Results

- ▶ **Baselines:** Human rights work is neither characterized by distribution of relief items, nor by the delivery of health services or the eradication of diseases. Therefore, baselines for human rights are not linear and it doesn't always make sense to compare one year to another. For example, if fewer National Human Rights Institutions were created or supported than in the previous period, it may not necessarily be a setback. It might be because the focus was shifted to another theme (anti-discrimination, women's rights, the rights of the disabled, etc.). OHCHR has six thematic priorities, and field offices select which priorities they will focus on in a given programmatic period.
- ▶ **Impact-level results:** Making progress on human rights is a long-term endeavour. It can also be challenging to attribute a specific result to OHCHR's actions only. Civil society actors working in close collaboration with the United Nations on certain issues can also

leverage their influence and bring change. OHCHR provides support and technical advice to States, but in the end responsibility for implementation lies with States.

Component 2: Strategic and Performance Management

- ▶ Measuring performance: OHCHR's Performance Monitoring System was rolled out in 2012-2013 and has now been implemented throughout the organisation. The System will be used to plan, monitor and report on all programmes starting with the 2014-2017 cycle. Therefore, programmatic decisions will begin to be taken on the basis of information available in the system as of 2014.
- ▶ Evaluation: OHCHR is audited by the UN Board of Auditors as well as by the Office of Internal Oversight Services. OHCHR is also a member of the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) which provides guidance, norms and standards for evaluation to UN member agencies. OHCHR's current capacity for evaluation consists of a small team that will be reinforced with an additional evaluation officer as of January 2014, within the Programme, Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation Unit. A new evaluation plan for 2014-2017 together with a vision and policy were recently presented to and endorsed by the Senior Management Team.

Component 3: Financial Resources Management

- ▶ Portfolio management: Over the past years, OHCHR has greatly improved its capacity to deliver, and concomitantly, its capacity to manage scarce resources in a climate of financial constraints. The Programme Budget Review Board, which is chaired by the Deputy High Commissioner and whose membership consists of four Division Directors and six Branch Chiefs, reviews the status of all projects on a monthly basis to assess implementation rates and to propose modifications or reallocate resources, as required.

Component 4: Cost and Value Consciousness

- ▶ Cost-savings: OHCHR is part of the UN Secretariat and as such does not have delegated authority for procurement or human resources management. While the office has limited delegation of authority on financial matters (e.g. it can accept voluntary contributions), most financial transactions are managed via UNOG. The same is true for travel authorizations, and the regulations that govern travel costs and per diem for staff. Furthermore, OHCHR has to apply the same level of programme support costs (overheads) as the rest of the Secretariat, in line with a decision by the UN General Assembly. Bulk purchasing contracts have been established by UNOG for items such as IT equipment and furniture. OHCHR has authority to purchase items or services up to USD 4,000 only.
- ▶ OHCHR would also like to point out that a reduction in staffing levels in a particular field office should not, in our opinion, be considered as a cost-saving measure but rather a result of its current funding constraints, especially in light of the fact that the organisation is not able to respond to the demands placed on it by the international community, and in particular States, for assistance on human rights in the field.

OHCHR, 9 December 2013