

Submission by Interact Worldwide to the UK/EU Balance of Competences Review on development aid and humanitarian policy

Interact Worldwide (IWW) has contributed to, and is supportive of BOND's response to the Balance of Competences Review. These comments are offered by IWW in addition to BOND's submission, providing sector specific comments on the UK's relationship with the EU, considering the UK's commitment to put women and girls at the heart of international development, and its focus on meeting the unmet need for family planning.

About Interact Worldwide

Interact Worldwide (IWW) is a specialist sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) organisation working in Africa and Asia. IWW works with partners across the spectrum of service delivery, advocacy and demand creation.

Interact Worldwide is the UK partner of Countdown 2015 Europe, a cross European Consortium of 16 leading European non-governmental organizations working to ensure sexual and reproductive health and rights in developing countries.

General comments in response to the Balance of Competences Review

The added-value of the EU depends on the degree to which each Member State is willing to allow shared competencies to work. The EU can be a major asset if each member state effectively invests time, funding and strategic collective thinking in this.

Being in the EU can allow the UK to have a stronger influence on the other member states – for example in shaping the European position on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights, or with the development agenda more broadly– whether through UK MEP Michael Cashman authoring the influential report on the MDGs in 2010, or in current discussions on the post 2015 framework, for example at the Informal EU Development Ministers meeting in Dublin, in 2013 where Secretary of State Justine Greening set out the government position about the need for development of a single framework.

Strategic fit with UK priorities

EU institutions support UK objectives on Reproductive, Maternal and Newborn Health (RMNH) both financially and politically. EU Institutions in 2010 (latest available data) were in the top ten of donors for family planning (1.47 USD million), and the top five of donors for reproductive health (113.43 USD million) (Source: UNFPA/NIDI Resource Flows Project Database). This supports the UK's objectives around the Family Planning Summit in 2012 (FP2020) by leveraging funds from other EU Member States who would otherwise spend little in this area.

The EU consensus for Development (art 94 on ICPD and SRHR) provides for a sustainable and long term policy approach on sensitive issues like family planning, reproductive health and LGBT rights. The EU has maintained specific thematic lines for sensitive or neglected issues like these. Doing so enables the EU to “fill in the gap” of areas not taken up in large projects and by country programmes. The EU made sure to always

guarantee a “complementary” line. This supports the UK objectives on sexual and reproductive health in countries where few donors are present or are able to provide significant aid.

The EU can limit the impact of other large donors withdrawing support for vital issues like population assistance. As a politically sensitive area, bilateral support by national governments such as the US varies substantially. The EU has continuously supported MDG 5b on universal access to reproductive health, and in doing so provides an essential counter-balance when other large donors withdraw. During the global gag era under President Bush, where US funding for family planning was effectively halted, the EC Commissioner for Development filled in the decency gap, preventing thousands of women from facing unwanted pregnancies.

The UK’s 2010 Multilateral Aid Review highlighted gender strategies as an area where the EU has work to do in transitioning from policy to implementation. Given the size and scope of these Institutions it is important that this transition is made. The comparative strength of DFID in implementing gender strategies makes this an area where further support and engagement by the UK could strengthen the effectiveness of the EU.

Geographical reach, complementarity and coordination

The UK’s selective engagement in countries is predicated on a balance of competencies with the EU. Reduced support for the EU would require DFID to review its country strategies. The EU can give the UK a presence in countries where DFID is not present.

With its worldwide network, the EU is uniquely positioned to coordinate and harmonise development programmes through health sector reviews and to prevent the omission of SRHR. This is increasingly true with the trend towards joint country programming with the EU as lead (see the EU Code of Conduct on Division of Labour in Development Policy and Council Conclusions on the EU role in Global Health, and Fast Facts: Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights at the Heart of EU Aid: DSW + MSI and IPPF EN)

The EDF has a strong focus on LDCs and LICs- including the most fragile countries in the world. According to recent figures, 93% of the EDF geographic funding is directed towards LDCs and LICs. The EDF also offers longer term aid predictability under the 6-year budget of the EDF. The EDF is based on the Cotonou Partnership which highly values the participation of civil society and recognizes it as a key actor in development.

The European External Action Service

A common challenge among Member States is the tension between prioritising the national perspective and allowing space for the EEAS in international meetings. A strong and competent EEAS is predicated on sound investment by Member States in the European political processes from which the EEAS draws its position. The UK can support the effectiveness of the EEAS by sending detached staff who are clear about their role in representing the EU collectively rather than the UK.

A concern remains over the appropriateness of the EU delegation being led by the EEAS, insofar as it merges the development and foreign affairs efforts at country level. This can reduce coherence and the focus on poverty reduction. The lack of overall poverty focus in the EU delegation may lead to inefficiencies. Through its detached/seconded UK staff in the EU delegation the UK could invest work in clarifying the coherence for development at the country level.

European Investment Bank:

To the extent that the European Investment Bank focuses on supporting health investments outside the EU it plays an important and defined role in contributing to the broad spectrum of development tools, and in supporting emerging markets in the field of health. Questions arise as to the extent that this support should be classified as ODA. This debate sits within the context of complex and multifaceted engagement with developing countries that will likely be a key feature of the post2015 landscape. It is essential that ODA remains separate from loans with the burden of repayment that this entails. As such, caution and further debate is necessary regarding the scope of the EIF to fit with DFID's mandate.