

Management Response and Recommendations

Evaluation of the Responsible and Accountable Garment Sector Programme (£3.5 million, 2009/10 – 2013/14)

Response to Evaluation Report

The Responsible and Accountable Garment Sector Programme (RAGS) which set out to improve working conditions in the ready-made garment (RMG) sector in poor countries. Grants of between £100,000 and £450,000 were awarded through a competitive selection process to private sector and civil society, which also contributed to the project funding from their own and/or other resources. The RAGS programme supported 11 projects across India, Bangladesh, Nepal and Lesotho (majority India and Bangladesh).

DFID welcomes the findings of the evaluation, which was carried out at two levels:

- 1) **Facility level:** A high level review of the intervention logic for the facility and the programme's Theory of Change (ToC); an assessment of the governance and management arrangements as a mechanism for funding individual projects with an emphasis on the provision of Value for Money (VfM); and the fitness for purpose of arrangements for achieving RAGS' stated objectives.
- 2) **Project level:** A detailed review using a mixed method approach to assess five funded projects (two of which were carried out in greater depth through country visits) and a document review of the remaining six completed projects.

RELEVANCE AND RATIONALE – partially achieved/achieved

At the facility level, overall, alignment on DFID priorities was strong. The DFID consultation process was satisfactory and suitable for a small programme. In general, the focus on intended beneficiaries was strong. The activities and outputs were considered partly relevant to the expected outcome of the project *"RAGS acts as catalyst to better working conditions in garments industries through the identification and development of scalable and replicable interventions in key labour areas"* but they were remote from the stated overall impact of the programme of *"responsible, ethical production is the norm in the garment sector supplying the UK"*. The evaluators found little evidence of innovation in the projects selected for funding. At the project level, RAGS funded projects provided at least one initiative in each of intervention areas outlined in the initial project design. All eleven completed projects were found to be adequately designed, well adapted to the country context, and the majority were rated as closely focused on the intended beneficiaries.

RESULTS AND IMPACT – not yet achieved/partially achieved

The evaluation found gaps in the ToC logic chain especially between outcome and impact. As a result, RAGS funded some project activities that did not contribute to the desired impact, namely that responsible, ethical production is the norm in the garment sector supplying the UK. At the funded project level, although project planned activities were largely carried out and individual funded project targets met, expected outcomes of those projects were only partially achieved. Although there is evidence of a move towards ethical production for the UK garment market, this cannot be attributed to RAGS. It is difficult to assess the outcome of RAGS due to a combination of a lack of quantitative performance data on several projects especially baseline and endline data with the focus on qualitative lessons learnt, which prevents aggregation. Projects largely achieved the agreed indicators on the number of beneficiaries targeted and reached but in many cases there was a lack of follow-on assessment of the subsequent impact. This impact is difficult to measure and in most cases cannot be attributed given external factors. Evidence from the interviews conducted with beneficiaries and some of the reporting on grantee projects supports the assertion that individual project interventions have had a positive impact on lives

Management Response and Recommendations

of beneficiaries for some of the grantee projects, for example in the case of Global March, 1,345 children received statutory benefits including release certificates under the Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act, 1976'. The number of workers potentially benefitting from freedom of association, collective bargaining and industrial relations in targeted factories totalled 279,000 at 31 March 2013. The projects that contributed significantly to these totals are ActionAid (179,000) and Impactt Ltd (97,000).

EFFECTIVENESS – partially achieved

At the facility level the evaluation found that the logframe measures selected to represent the outcome failed to capture the evidence of RAGS acting as a catalyst and the replication aspect. The measures were selected retrospectively from funded projects, and not all of those related to the stated outcome. The monitoring and evaluation framework did not use indicators that might have allowed an assessment of the desired outcome. All RAGS India projects struggled with initial stakeholder engagement including those that scaled up or expanded into new areas but they largely completed their activities as planned. In Bangladesh, the findings were mixed.

SUSTAINABILITY – not yet achieved/partially achieved

At the facility level, the evaluation concludes that the benefits will continue to a limited extent. DFID will continue to support the RMG sector in Bangladesh as part of its Trade in Global Value Chains Initiative (TGVCI). At present, project interventions led by Impactt Ltd, Monsoon Accessorise Ltd, Tesco Stores Ltd, People Tree Foundation, SEWA, Action Aid Bangladesh and Global March Against Child Labour are continuing post-RAGS. Lessons learnt have been shared across the RAGS grantees through dissemination events, post-RAGS stakeholder networking and in a report published in November 2013. Post-RAGS, a number of factors relating to the RMG industry might be expected to provide a positive impetus. These include the rise of Asian consumer markets and the establishment of ethically-inclined demographic markets in the Asian tiger economies; a consolidation and simplification of value chains as buyers are expected to source from fewer factories and wholesalers in the future; an increase in value chain transparency; a new emphasis on environmental improvements in production; and stronger coalitions of buyers to change producers' behaviour. A number of funded initiatives will not be sustained without continuing donor support or considerable effort. In many cases, the recent completion of the grant funded activities meant it was too early to determine sustainability.

COUNTERFACTUAL

It is probable that some RAGS grantees would have continued to provide support without RAGS but it would have been at a lower level of intensity and scale. RAGS was effective in enabling the UK government to demonstrate that it has long been committed to improving working standards in the RMG sector. More generally, the UK government has been constant in advancing the ethical trading agenda as a policy priority, in line with child labour and other international obligations. Without RAGS, an important opportunity to demonstrate commitment would be missed.

LESSONS LEARNT

A significant number of lessons learnt at the funded project level have been included in the publication "Working Together for a Responsible RMG Sector – Lessons Learnt" published by Maxwell Stamp PLC in November 2013. In addition:

- Economic empowerment activities cannot be confined to the workplace alone.
- RMG sector workers face critical issues outside of, but linked to, the workplace.
- Pre-existing knowledge and contacts in the RMG sector supported grantees to implement projects more efficiently.

Management Response and Recommendations

- When implementing programmes that relate to fair and ethical trade the influence of retailers and brands is critical in getting the local industry to participate.
- DFID country offices can play a greater role in the marketing of programmes and ensuring local ownership.
- Projects and milestone targets need to be flexible enough to capitalise on wider calls for change or major changes in the operating environment.
- Training materials need to be adapted to the local context. Without contextually informed materials buy in by factories is more challenging. Clear routes for sharing lessons need to be compiled during and at the end of programmes.
- Impact measurement requires baseline data and a robust monitoring and evaluation system to track progress indicators.
- Capacity for change and experimentation among factories will be limited where there is not explicit ownership of the change ideas by owners and managers.
- Effective engagement of local stakeholders takes time.

DFID's Management Response to the recommendations from the evaluations is set out in the table below. In additions to the recommendations below for DFID Country Offices, we note the recommendations for RAGS project partners and other agencies. The evaluation has been cascaded for these organisations to consider independently. We would like to thank the evaluation teams for their work.

Management Response and Recommendations

Evaluation of the Responsible and Accountable Garment Sector Programme

Recommendations	Accepted or Rejected	Action plan for Implementation
<p>DFID should support learning and sharing by putting in place a clear strategy for a) promoting the fund at the Country Office level b) supporting grantees to establish links with comparable programmes and initiatives.</p>	<p>Accepted</p>	<p>As the RAGS programme is not going to be continued, this recommendation will be implemented through other similar programmes. The most similar programme is the Trade and Global Value Chains Initiative (TGVCI) led by Trade Policy Unit (TPU), which has a strand focussed on the RMG sector in Bangladesh. TPU colleagues have ensured to link up with DFID Bangladesh priorities with the latter putting an additional £ 1 million in the programme. TGVCI projects in Bangladesh have established contacts with BGMEA and Alliance initiative.</p>
<p>If the purpose of DFID's engagement in the RMG sector is to impact on responsible, ethical production in the garment sector supplying the UK then DFID should only intervene in countries with significant RMG exports to the UK, where there are known issues.</p>	<p>Accepted</p>	<p>TGVCI is focussed on the garment sector in Bangladesh only, where issues related to the RMG sector are now tragically well-known around the world, following the Rana Plaza disaster. The garment sector accounts for around 78% of Bangladesh's export earnings, and 17% GDP. 60% of garments exports go to the EU, of which something like 10% go to the UK.</p>
<p>Focusing funding on industries employing high numbers of women does not necessarily lead to the economic empowerment of women. Tailored research and indicators need to be developed to ensure future interventions in the RMG section have a positive impact on women's lives, in and beyond their workplace.</p>	<p>Accepted</p>	<p>Further to RAGS, some TGVCI projects aim to have positive impact on women's lives, in and beyond their workplace: e.g. a project to up-skill factory based nurses and clinics in around 80 factories, which will benefit around 10,000 female factory workers. In Bangladesh, the UK is funding skills training for 100,000 low-skilled garment and construction workers, with women as the majority benefiting from capacity development in garment work.</p>