

## **Response to the Voluntary Services Overseas (VSO) 2015 'Women in Power' campaign.**

March 2015

Thank you for contacting me about the Voluntary Services Overseas (VSO) 2015 'Women in Power' campaign.

I welcome the work of VSO and other civil society organisations in promoting the rights of girls and women in developing countries and raising awareness of the issues they face. Women's equal participation in political process is a human right. It is also important for effective development and poverty reduction. We know that where women have no voice, societies under-achieve.

Women's political participation is central to the Department for International Development's (DFID) work. DFID's Strategic Vision for Girls and Women commits us to ensuring that women have a voice in decision-making at all levels. We address long term structural barriers to women's political inclusion through work on elections, parliamentary and political reform and girls and women leadership programmes.

The UK currently supports parliamentary and political party reform work in at least 15 countries, including in Ethiopia, Pakistan, Nigeria, Ghana, Egypt and in the Democratic Republic of Congo. In Ethiopia, our work with MPs helped improve the gender balance and oversight function of many standing committees. DFID has also been designing new civil society programmes in Afghanistan and Pakistan to increase government accountability at all levels and increase women's voice in decision-making.

The UK wants to ensure that the post-2015 development framework demonstrates a strong commitment to achieving gender equality, the empowerment and realisation of the human rights of girls and women. We are supportive of the call for a stand-alone gender goal incorporating a comprehensive package of targets to address the underlying causes of gender inequality, including girls and women's leadership and participation.

With approximately six months of negotiations to come, we want to build on the outcomes of the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals to achieve a simple, inspiring and relevant framework that will encourage collective action, resulting in meaningful accountability and achieve positive outcomes for the world's poor people.

JUSTINE GREENING