DFID Response

DFID Response to the Independent Commission for Aid Impact recommendations: The UK's humanitarian support to Syria,

July 2018

DFID welcomes this Independent Commission for Aid Impact (ICAI) report. The review rightly recognises the unprecedented scale and complexity of the humanitarian situation within Syria.

DFID welcomes ICAI's conclusion that UK aid is reaching vulnerable people and bringing positive changes to households and communities in Syria.   DFID has led the international response to the crisis in Syria. Since 2012, across Syria and the region, DFID has provided over 27 million food rations, over 12 million medical consultations, over 10 million relief packages, and over 10 million vaccines.

ICAI recognise that DFID is supporting those most in need in acutely challenging circumstances. DFID is committed to continue to provide humanitarian assistance to those most in need in Syria through our programmes and policy and will remain flexible and responsive to respond to emerging challenges and needs.

Since 2012, DFID is the second largest bilateral donor to the humanitarian response inside Syria. In 2018, DFID continues to be among the top 3 bilateral donors to the humanitarian response inside Syria.

The DFID humanitarian response in Syria has adapted over time in response to the complex and challenging situation. DFID welcomes the lessons identified in this report and will ensure that they are used to good effect to inform our continued humanitarian response in Syria and across other current and future humanitarian situations.

Recommendation 1: As conditions allow, DFID Syria should prioritise livelihoods programming and supporting local markets, to strengthen community self-reliance.

Partially accept

DFID has been relatively successful in ensuring that our humanitarian programmes in Syria focus on those in the greatest need, as well as remaining flexible to the specific context and needs on the ground. A consequence of this is that in the locations where our programmes work, the needs on the ground may be more immediate (eg for food or health inputs) and the pre-requisites for successful livelihoods programming are often absent with poor security and local governance, limited access for livelihoods inputs or non-functioning markets.

DFID believes that livelihoods interventions contribute to humanitarian and resilience building objectives and livelihoods will continue to be an important part of our programme. But at present time DFID assesses that the ongoing need for immediate humanitarian and protection assistance coupled with ongoing displacement and conflict within mean that the conditions are not appropriate to significantly scale up current livelihoods support. DFID will continue to monitor and review this as conditions continue to change.

Recommendation 2: DFID Syria should strengthen its third-party monitoring approach to provide a higher level of independent verification of aid delivery, and continue to explore ways of extending it into government-controlled areas.

Accept

Without direct access to our projects in Syria, DFID relies on information from our partners and our independent third party monitors. DFID agrees with ICAI on the areas identified by ICAI where our monitoring could be further strengthened. DFID took a conscious decision to pilot our monitoring approach and scale up over time in order to ensure value for money and not compromise the safety of our partners.

DFID continues to adapt and strengthen our monitoring approach to provide assurance and lessons. In line with ICAI recommendations DFID Syria has already expanded third party monitoring to regime-controlled areas, included more project verification and is updating how we independently sample projects to monitor.

Recommendation 3: DFID Syria should support and encourage its partners to expand their community consultation and feedback processes and ensure that community input informs learning and the design of future humanitarian interventions.

Accept

DFID will work with our partners in Syria to ensure they have adequate feedback processes to inform learning and programme decisions. We will collate evidence on our partners' feedback systems, which we have gathered through the independent reviews of our partners' monitoring and evaluation systems, and use this information to review with our partners how they are incorporating beneficiary feedback in the design and delivery of their programmes.

Recommendation 4: DFID Syria should identify ways to support the capacity development of Syrian NGOs to enable them to take on a more direct role in the humanitarian response.

Accept

DFID is aware of the key role that Syrian organisations play as downstream partners and direct implementers in the Syrian response. As ICAI highlighted, despite a number of applications for funding from Syrian NGOs, DFID was not able to fund any Syria NGOs directly as they lacked the capacity to work at the required scale without the support of an international partner.

DFID does provide funding to a number of Syria NGOs as downstream partners for international NGOs and UN agencies, and we provide funding to our direct partners to build the capacity of a number of Syrian NGOs. DFID will use the lessons from this work to inform future capacity-building of Syrian NGOs and keep under review whether we are able to provide them with direct support.

Recommendation 5: DFID Syria should develop a dynamic research and learning strategy that includes an assessment of learning needs across the international humanitarian response in Syria and a dissemination strategy.

Accept

DFID Syria will build on the research, evidence and learning activities that are currently in place and develop a more structured learning and evidence strategy. As part of this we will use the evidence from the outcome evaluations we now require from our partners. We have also updated our approach to commissioning independent research to assess its relevance and impact.

Recommendation 6: DFID should ensure that lessons and best practices from the Syria response are collected and documented, and used to inform both ongoing and future crisis responses.

Accept

DFID will include organisational learning as a component of our new Syria learning and evidence strategy. DFID Syria will continue to engage in formal and informal networking and information sharing across the organisation through professional cadres and cross team working groups.

DFID has developed a systematic approach to capturing and sharing lessons from previous and ongoing humanitarian responses across the organisation. This work has included a review of humanitarian monitoring and evaluation approaches. We have also established a new role to support greater information sharing on the use of data in humanitarian settings.

Recommendation 7: In complex crises, DFID should plan for the possibility of a lengthy engagement from an early stage, with trigger points to guide decisions on when to move beyond emergency funding instruments and staffing arrangements.

Accept

DFID's humanitarian reform policy published in October 2017 is clear that longer-term plans and funding are needed for countries affected by long-term conflict. DFID has carried out an internal review of its policy and programmes in protracted crises contexts and is working with DFID country programmes to bring together humanitarian, development and stabilisation expertise from the outset of a crisis, to strengthen the DFID response.

Recommendation 8: Building on DFID Syria's reporting system; DFID should invest in reporting and data management systems that can be readily adapted to complex humanitarian operations.

Accept

DFID is working to strengthen its reporting and data management systems including learning from DFID Syria's CASCADE reporting system. DFID will be working closely with partners to look at ways to strengthen and streamline the supply of data to reduce the burden on partners and to improve data quality. DFID is working with the UK Office for National Statistics to build the right architecture to support automated data transfer and will strengthen data governance and data standards.