

Marie Stopes International

Submission to the International Development Committee - Effectiveness of UK Aid and the work of the Department for International Development (DFID)

Introduction

Marie Stopes International (MSI) is one of the world's largest providers of sexual and reproductive health (SRH) care, delivering quality information and services across 37, mostly middle- and low-income, countries. By the end of 2019, over 32 million women globally were using a form of contraception supplied by MSI. As a key partner to ministries of health, the services we delivered in 2019 averted an estimated 6.5 million unsafe abortions, 14 million unintended pregnancies and 34,600 maternal deaths. As a key development partner to HMG we welcome the opportunity to contribute to this critical inquiry.

The definition and administration of UK aid – who should be responsible, and accountable, for targeting and spending aid?

A stand-alone Department for International Development (DFID), with a dedicated cabinet minister should be responsible, and accountable for targeting and spending aid, working closely across government to better align foreign, development, trade and commercial policies, in line with the SDGs, and domestic and international human rights commitments.

This will ensure that the focus of ODA remains on poverty alleviation and building the capacity of recipients. Experiences in Canada, Australia and New Zealand demonstrate that amalgamation can lead to a diffusion of expertise, a dilution of the aid budget, and a slowing of progress in terms of aid effectiveness.

DFID's leadership and expertise is valued across the world, by partner governments, other donor agencies and non-governmental organisations. This is an endorsement of the UK's decision, with the establishment of DFID in 1997, to dedicate specific technical and financial resources to understanding the drivers and solutions to poverty, focussing on for example gender equality, migration, governance and climate change. Within the international community, DFID is particularly appreciated for its focus on sustainability and results, and the UK has played a unique role in strengthening global aid and development architecture. Global attention would not have been as focussed on women's rights, specifically family planning, safe abortion and FGM, in the way it has been in recent years without a dedicated department. The evidence is clear that with authority and clear purpose, single entities - such as DFID - are more effective and cohesive in achieving their goals than entities with varied and multiple briefs.¹

DFID's 2,700 personnel have solid technical expertise, policy experience and professional relationships that enable delivery of programmes with proven results. Retaining experienced, dedicated development staff in London and around the world is needed to safeguard this record of effectiveness. The Australian experience of integration is important here: since the merger of AusAID and DFAT, significant numbers of locally engaged, highly qualified AusAID staff have left the department taking with them years of specialist expertise and contacts.²

This leadership role gives the UK access to diplomatic, trade and business opportunities, and allows the UK to 'punch above its weight' in the world. Integrating DFID into another department, particularly at a time when we are exiting the European Union, would inevitably mean the loss of capacity to influence, both in developing countries and with other donor countries, as well as a loss of intellectual leadership.

How effective and transparent is the UK aid spent by DFID compared to aid allocated to other Government departments and to the cross-Government funds?

DFID through a dedicated department staffed with experienced development personnel has been crucial to effectively deliver aid and to ensure the **best investment on return for the UK taxpayer**. Recent achievements in poverty alleviation, and aid effectiveness, and the UK's leadership in developing and

¹ Carol Lancaster in [Foreign aid: diplomacy, development, domestic politics](#) and by Erik Lunsgaarde in [The domestic politics of foreign aid](#).

² Ben Davis and Rivandra Royono, August 13, 2014, 'Local staff and aid effectiveness: does integration matter?' Devpolicy Blog [online]. Available at <http://devpolicy.org/local-staff-and-aid-effectiveness-does-integration-matter-20140813/>

implementing the Sustainable Development Goals have been made possible, or have been far easier to achieve, with a dedicated and resourced department.

The number of people living in extreme poverty has declined from 36% in 1990 to 8.6% in 2018. Globally, health is improving. Since 1990, with a significant contribution from DFID programmes, the number of girls and women dying during pregnancy and childbirth has fallen by 45%. DFID spent around \$1.3 billion on maternal health including reproductive health and family planning between 2011 and 2015. A dedicated department has been able to invest resources where they are most needed to deliver impressive progress in poverty reduction both in terms of speed and reach.

The UK should be proud of its commitment, now enshrined in law, to spend 0.7% of GNI on ODA. A dedicated department has streamlined the delivery of this commitment, tracking results and reporting on its impact. It has ensured UK ODA directly contributes to poverty reduction and is consistent with international human rights standards. **In a dedicated department, there are clear lines of responsibility and accountability for ODA ensuring effective management of these funds on behalf of the UK taxpayer.**

DFID play a critical role in supporting UK-based agencies to deliver development assistance. DFID has developed innovative performance-based funding mechanisms that deliver high-quality results and support communities that would otherwise not be reached. By funding evidence-based, cost effective health interventions, through support to agencies such as Marie Stopes International, DFID has saved millions of lives and helped build more effective and equitable public and private health systems.

DFID's emphasis on sustainability means that the support provided by UK-based agencies has a longer-term impact on poverty alleviation. DFID's focus on value for money obliges partner UK agencies to use taxpayers money efficiently, demonstrating economy of scale, and clear, measurable progress.

DFID has been able to experiment with cutting edge approaches to achieve development, for example working across health markets and with the private sector to improve access to reproductive health services. These examples call into question the value of integrating DFID with other departments, if there are already ways to identify and invest in non-traditional mechanisms to achieve development goals.

A dedicated department also ensures the capacity and resources to respond to specific global emergencies (e.g. the Ebola crisis) and ensure that the UK has the expertise and ability to operate in and support short and medium term aid delivery in conflict situations and fragile states.

In addition some development issues may not be appropriate within a foreign policy portfolio, for example DFID are global leaders on sexual and reproductive health and rights both politically and programmatically and their contribution has been particularly effective in:

- Tackling the most challenging issues that underpin wider development goals (e.g. access to safe abortion and comprehensive sexuality education) however politically or culturally sensitive. They are the second biggest donor in the global AIDS response.
- Programming that reaches the most excluded and left behind (for example access to family planning, safe abortion care and support to survivors of sexual violence in humanitarian crises).
- Nurturing the global partnerships that deliver change - for example DFID are the largest donor to UNFPA's Supplies Programme without which lifesaving donated commodities would not be available in 47 countries.

Providing financial, technical and programmatic support through the Foreign and Commonwealth Office would potentially politicise these issues and be counterproductive to progress.

How should the national interest be defined, and what weight should it be given, in relation to targeting UK aid

It should be broadly defined – UK aid in working to end extreme poverty and to building a safer, healthier and more prosperous world for UK citizens is acting in the 'national interest.' DFID's investments for example to family planning, good governance, education and gender equality help to tackle issues such as disease, terrorism, conflict, migration and climate change. COVID-19 reinforces the need for global co-ordinated responses to creating a safer, healthier and more equitable world and how UK aid to strengthen national health systems across the world is critical for both the citizens of those countries and the UK.