International Development Committee inquiry: the effectiveness of UK aid to Pakistan

Evidence submission from the Institute of Development Studies

About the Institute of Development Studies

The Institute of Development Studies (IDS) is a global research and learning organisation for equitable and sustainable change. IDS is ranked best international development policy think tank (2020 Global Go To Think Tank Index) and first in the world for development studies with the University of Sussex for the fifth year running by the QS University Rankings.

This submission draws on evidence from IDS researchers including Dr Shandana Khan Mohmand, IDS Research Fellow and leader of the IDS Pakistan Hub and Prof Mariz Tadros, IDS Research Fellow and Director of the Coalition for Religious Equality and Inclusive Development (CREID).

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1. The UK’s strategic aims for its Pakistan aid programme, and the extent to which UK aid in Pakistan is focused on the poorest, most marginalised and most vulnerable people

At IDS we understand that FCDO-Pakistan’s main priority areas are defined by the ‘open societies’ agenda, as set out by the Foreign Secretary this year as one of seven priority areas for FCO, including a focus on media freedom, tackling the closing of civic space and protection of women and religious minorities’ rights. Given the widespread evidence of closing civic spaces in Pakistan, and the need to strengthen accountability, political governance, and women’s political participation and empowerment, we believe this is the correct priority focus for UK aid in Pakistan. UK aid through DFID has been notable for its focus on broader cross-cutting issues of governance in Pakistan, through programmes including the Action for Empowerment and Accountability (A4EA), particularly at a time when other country donors in Pakistan are more sector specific focused. The focus on areas of open society and minority rights are also appropriate in aiming to help achieve the Sustainable Development Goals as they play a cross-cutting role in achieving many of the goals and targets.

Currently, ahead of the UK aid budget cuts for 2021/22, it is not clear what the specific strategic aims and level of investment will be for FCDO in Pakistan for open societies, but given the clear and ongoing priority need on this issue in Pakistan, we hope the following will be supported by FCDO-Pakistan in the future:

1.2 Open Societies

The Government of Pakistan has clamped down on civil society in recent years and on NGOs working in Pakistan and receiving foreign funding in particular, making it less and less viable for them to continue operating. In December 2017, about 29 INGOs (some reports suggested 27 or 31) were issued with notices from the Pakistan’s Ministry of Interior ordering them to shut down operations within 90 days (Sayeed 2017). This is an example of the need for FCDO to continue prioritising its work on open societies in Pakistan and also of the difficult balance FCDO has to tread on this issue politically, and between diplomatic and development channels.
With a difficult operating environment for civil society in Pakistan it can be difficult for donors like FCDO to engage but evidence shows the importance of doing so. It also stresses the importance of long-term strategic commitment to progress on open societies, which can be difficult to evidence short-term results for. A study from the IDS-led A4EA Research Programme analysed the UK aid funded Consolidating Democracy in Pakistan (CDIP) and AAWAZ Voice and Accountability programmes explored the interaction between the two programmes to argue they produced strong synergies as an outcome of their adaptive programming approach. The synergising took place under conditions of growing constraints on civic society and the democratic process during the programme life cycles. The paper concludes that the beneficial interaction effects were an outcome of strategic partnerships with a common implementing agency (DAI) and deep engagement with civil society organizations, but without empowered local government and on-going donor support the empowerment effects are difficult to sustain.

1.3 Minority rights and Freedom of Religion and Belief

Working on minority rights has been a prominent issue within UK’s parliament and for DFID pre department merger. Yet, in Pakistan, one of many countries where the issue requires special attention, not many resources have been dedicated to this within DFID’s overall work. There is some focus on it through education programmes that work on primary and secondary education and curricula, but it has previously been a very small part of its overall programmes.

Pre department merger, DFID’s main focus on inclusion was through its governance portfolio, in which the issue of minority inclusion is considered to be implicit in its work on democracy and freedom of expression. It is not an explicit focus of its work, and the inclusion of minorities is considered to be a rights focus and not a development focus, and as such, something that has sat more comfortably in the FCO than in DFID. Since the department merger we hope this is an issue that will benefit from more coordinated, joint working and that a ‘religion aware’ lens will start to be applied to its development work.

Since October 2018, DFID has funded the Coalition for Religious Equality and Inclusive Development (CREID) – an ongoing programme funded that works on various aspects of freedom of religion and belief in development, humanitarian aid and human rights. Pakistan is one of five countries the programme produces new research evidence and develops practical programmes for.

1.4 Women’s Rights

The areas of women’s rights in Pakistan intersects with both open societies and freedom of religion and belief. The CREID programme is currently working with minority women in Pakistan, with research investigations on the abduction and forced marriage of women and girls from the Hindu and Christian minorities. This work is ensuring that the voices of the marginalised women and girls shaped the discussions and subsequent analysis. It is an example of an issue that FCDO has so far been unclear on its future funding commitments to, but one we believe is vital that they include in their strategic aims going forward for Pakistan.

Another area that FCDO has supported through its funding of the A4EA programme in Pakistan is women’s political participation. This is fundamental to both women’s rights, open societies and governance, and an area when FCDO can continue to make a difference. New research Supporting Women’s Empowerment in Pakistan: Lessons for Donors recently found evidence for the importance of donors supporting women’s leadership through supporting their roles within civil society. It highlights that in a country where democratic
culture and civil society space are under threat, donors are finding it harder to engage with rights-based organisations and NGOs, but that donors should strategically support women’s advocacy organisations, in order to develop women’s skills and leadership and therefore better engage with political processes.

1.5 Abductions, forced conversions and forced marriages faced by women and girls in Pakistan

About 90 percent of the circa three million minority Christian and Hindu women in Pakistan live in Punjab and Sindh. Most work in the agriculture or domestic sectors, or in brick-kilns (some as bonded labourers, where parents’ income vulnerability means daughters are also at risk).

Religious identity also intersects with caste. Sanitation jobs are still advertised as ‘for non-Muslims’, from the Dalit ‘untouchable’ caste. Christians, about two percent of the population, do 75-80 percent of all sanitary/cleaning jobs across the major cities. Their daughters, often illiterate, lack education, compounding their vulnerabilities into ongoing generations. Rural minority women and girls cook, clean, collect firewood, water and fodder and tend livestock.

The CREID programme has researched this issue and identified a number of practical ways in which the FCDO can help address the situation of poor Hindu and Christian women who are vulnerable to targeting for forced marriage and conversion in Pakistan. Whether the aid programme is for poverty reduction, girls’ education, youth empowerment, civil society strengthening or security strengthening, the action points below apply. It should be ensured that:

- All scoping studies, including context analysis, include the voices of women who are religiously and socio-economically marginalised, as well the organisations that work with them.
- Programme design is mindful of the vulnerability and access challenges faced by women from religious minorities, especially those who belong to lower castes.
- FCDO staff engaging with programmatic oversight are sensitised and equipped to access questions regarding religious inclusivity in a sensitive and appropriate manner.
- Organisation partners with the FCDO recognise that UK aid has to be inclusive of all and cannot be exclusionary towards religious minorities (as for example it cannot be exclusionary towards people on the basis of gender).
- MEL (monitoring, evaluation and learning) framework is religiously inclusive.
- Development interventions are supported in the Sindh and Punjab areas (geographic targeting), particularly where there is an intersection of poverty, caste and religious affiliation leading to poor Hindu and Christian girls being highly vulnerable. The desired outcome is that these groups would be included in priority interventions, in a culturally sensitive way, so as not to generate a backlash against them within broader society.
- A whistle-blowers mechanism is incorporated such that if there is any religious discrimination in any project or programme funded by the FCDO, there is a clear, accessible mechanism through which people can share their concerns and grievances.
- There are better linkages between security and development interventions to ensure that the police force also receive adequate gender sensitisation when engaging with complaints from families of girls and women who have disappeared.
• There are better linkages between counter terrorism initiatives that engage with militant groups who consider targeting women from religious minorities halal and even in some cases a form of da’wa and the judicial system to ensure that they are held accountable for the hate speech they propagate.
• The UK uses its leverage in multilateral agencies with a significant presence in Pakistan, such as the World Bank, in order to ensure that their programming is religiously inclusive in demographic coverage, programmatic outreach and design and implementation.

2. To what extent is UK aid spending in Pakistan integrated, coordinated and responsive to:
   (i) the priorities and commitments of the Government of Pakistan?
   (ii) the views and needs of communities in Pakistan

As indicated by the ongoing closing of civic space in Pakistan, the strengthening of FCDO aid programme for open societies, religious and media freedoms is not in line with the vision and commitment of the Government of Pakistan. However, from IDS’ research across a number of projects with communities in Pakistan, we note there is much support from communities themselves for investment in and prioritisation of addressing the issues of open societies and minority rights.

A priority for the Government of Pakistan that does align with FCDO areas for Pakistan is on the issue of tax. The Government of Pakistan is agreed on its need to improve its ability to raise more revenue through taxation.

3. How effective are the partners (NGOs, private contractors and multilateral agencies) through which UK aid is delivered in Pakistan?

Given the restrictions placed by the Government of Pakistan on INGOs in Pakistan receiving overseas funding, the ability for INGOs to deliver programmes has become more challenging in recent years. Evidence from the Navigating Civic Space research (part of the A4EA programme funded by FCDO) identifies that in an environment of closing civic spaces in Pakistan, large advocacy NGOs are accused by the Government of Pakistan of working for western interests and undermining local values and culture, and therefore face limits to their legal registration to operate and access to foreign funds. Researchers heard concerns from NGOs in Pakistan on this issue and stress the need for the FCDO to push harder for being able to work with those NGOs who have the experience and capacity to deliver large rights-based agenda programmes. The risk is that otherwise FCDO, through its new AWAAZ II programme will work predominantly with much smaller NGOs who have permissions to operate due to their associations with the military but have little or no track record in the field of delivery.

On a broader point of delivery, there is the opportunity for a lot more engagement with universities and research. Universities, together with development actors can build and improve the research capacity in the country, to provide the evidence base needed to inform policy, and in improve the effectiveness, efficiency and value for money of aid in Pakistan. Investing in research capacity around the priority areas identified for Pakistan, on open societies, media freedom, minority inclusion and women’s rights, is particularly an opportunity for UK aid to help make real progress on those issues.

5. Covid-19 in Pakistan
The pandemic has hit marginalised people particularly hard, exacerbating the existing inequalities and demonstrating further the need for FCDO to prioritise supporting minority rights in the country.

5.1 Covid-19 impacts on religious minorities in Pakistan

The CREID programme found evidence of religious minorities groups facing widespread negative impacts from Covid-19. For example:

- Pakistan is among countries where religious/ethnic minorities have been blamed for the spread of the virus. From calling it ‘Shia virus’ to ostracizing members of Christian and Hindu communities on the basis of their religious identity, religious minorities, who were already persecuted, experienced further marginalisation.

- In Pakistan, the blame for the spread of Covid-19 targeted at Hazara Shias through misinformation campaigns built on pre-existing prejudices against this minority and a poorly managed public health response, which meant they found themselves firstly experiencing appalling quarantine conditions. Volunteers from within the community stepped up to help those caught up in these centres.

- Christian and Hindu sanitation workers in Pakistan, working in quarantine centres, morgues and hospitals were laid off, or experienced delayed payment of their wages (which meant their families went hungry and could not access medicines when sick). They were given no time off, and no protective equipment for despite their high levels of exposure to Covid-19.

- In Karachi, Pakistan, Hindu vendors were arrested by local police for trying to keep their food stalls functional as there was no financial compensation from the government for small businesses, some of which provide the only source of income for their families.

5.2 Covid-19 impacts on women in Pakistan

The Covid-19 pandemic has serious implications for women’s lives in Pakistan within their households, for three distinct but interrelated reasons — the health shock created by the pandemic, the economic shock created by lockdowns, and the increased focus on the household as the main location of all economic, personal, and schooling activities.

A study with almost 3000 respondents between Aug and Oct 2020 in Lahore in Pakistan found that women’s burden of housework has increased significantly during the pandemic, despite the fact that men are now at home more, indicating that the division of housework is a deeply gendered phenomenon. There is, however, variation in this — women who live in households that have experienced a greater economic shock during the pandemic and those where men hold more regressive views on gender equality are more likely to have experienced an increase in the burden of housework.