

International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) Submission to the International Development Committee (IDC) Inquiry on the Effectiveness of UK Aid

www.ifes.org | Contact: cbarnes@ifes.org | 14 May 2020

1. The United Kingdom (UK) is a global leader in development, and delivers real impact in its elections, democracy and governance aid to protect and expand democratic space worldwide.
2. [The International Foundation for Electoral Systems \(IFES\)](#)¹ respectfully urges the International Development Committee (IDC) to consider how the Department for International Development (DFID) can retain its leadership by continuing good practices, while also pivoting to the new challenges posed by shifting demographics and populations (including the youth bulge, displacement and migration); cybersecurity and the digital divide; malign influence, disinformation and hate speech; and the follow-on impacts of the coronavirus pandemic.
3. **The UK must provide a clear vision for official development assistance (ODA)** that [enjoys the support of its citizens](#); commits adequate resources; and demonstrates flexibility, impact and value for money.
4. In an era of declining trust in democracy and institutions, and a rise in development and governance models promoted by authoritarian regimes, **the UK must affirm its commitment to pillars of democracy** – including credible elections; the right of people to have a say in how they are governed; individual liberties and human rights; the rule of law; the inclusion of traditionally marginalised populations; the value of political opposition; and free and independent media.
5. As the UK explores how national interest should be defined, and what weight it should be given in directing aid, **IFES encourages decision-makers to consider how credible elections and good governance support [“international prosperity, contributes to our security, reinforces global democratic norms, and bolsters the rules-based international system.”](#)**
6. The global challenges of our interdependent world – including the pandemic, terrorism, climate change, disease and migration – impact UK citizens and interests. Corruption, conflict and rights violations benefit authoritarian regimes, international terrorist, criminal and drug networks; restrict space for civil society to operate; preclude the effective delivery of health and humanitarian aid; and spread unfair economic practices that undermine UK businesses.

¹ The International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) collaborates with civil society, public institutions and the private sector to build resilient democracies that deliver for everyone. As the global leader in the promotion and protection of democracy and electoral integrity, our technical assistance and applied research develops trusted electoral bodies capable of conducting credible elections; effective and accountable governing institutions; civic and political processes in which all people can safely and equally participate; and innovative ways in which technology and data can positively serve elections and democracy. Since 1987, IFES has worked in more than 145 countries, from developing to mature democracies. Our vision is “Democracy for a better future” and our mission is “Together we build democracies that deliver for all.” DFID and IFES partner to deliver good governance for growth, sustainability and inclusive development.

How elections, democracy and governance “underpin all of DFID’s efforts”

7. All UK citizens benefit from cultivating democracy abroad. Stable, open and fair societies make for better trade partners; create new markets for UK businesses; and provide the stability so foundational to economic investment and innovation. Democracies also promote regional and international partnerships that make the world a safer, healthier place, and create work and travel opportunities for UK citizens.
8. Electoral, democracy and governance assistance also strengthens the UK’s relationship with Commonwealth countries, and supports the Commonwealth’s goal of shared prosperity, democracy and peace. In 2020 alone, [up to 16 elections may be held in Commonwealth countries](#), including in Africa, the Asia-Pacific and the Caribbean.
9. The pandemic has evolved beyond a health crisis to existentially threaten democracies worldwide. As the Integrated Review proceeds, **the UK must consider the “long-tail” impacts of coronavirus that will inevitably impact UK citizens and businesses**, including poverty; violent extremism (as tensions are exploited and government resources are diverted); a lack of confidence in governments and democracy, including citizen protests and unrest; and widespread corruption.
10. Coronavirus has clearly illustrated the impact government has in our day-to-lives, and elections will be the referendums under which government responses to coronavirus are assessed. This makes credible elections more central than ever to translating political expression into representative, responsive governance.
11. As Rt Hon Anne-Marie Trevelyan MP, Secretary of State for International Development, confirmed in her 28 April remarks to the IDC, poverty alleviation will continue to be central to DFID’s mission.
12. Open, inclusive, accountable governance can help end poverty by developing the resiliency and capacity of institutions to deliver services and solve problems; enhance two-way communication between citizens and government; help all citizens – including women, youth, people with disabilities and displaced people – achieve their full potential; and keep at the cutting edge of technology in governance.
13. Responsive governance that addresses citizen needs [delivers the Sustainable Development Goals \(SDGs\)](#), including Quality Education; Gender Equality; Reducing Inequalities; and Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions.
14. Viral misinformation; disinformation campaigns directed by anti-democratic actors; and the amplification and weaponization of hate speech create a range of electoral integrity challenges for democracies. As challenges multiply, authoritarian actors looking to capitalize on the confusion will continue to push narratives designed to undermine faith in democratic processes and institutions. This impacts individual countries and elections abroad; is a direct challenge to the UK’s foreign policy interests; and erodes democratic norms, institutions and processes as a whole.

DFID's unique value-add in the global development community, and recommendations to improve aid effectiveness

15. The UK's commitment to spend 0.7 percent of national income on ODA contributes to its reputation as development superpower, and ensures a safer and more prosperous world for UK citizens. ODA spent by DFID has unique value adds that makes it stand out from other major bilateral donors, including its geographic emphasis on Commonwealth countries, as well its prioritization of safeguarding; inclusion; and thinking and working politically.
16. **DFID must maintain its global leadership in adaptive management.** DFID excels at modifying approved workplans to course-correct, adapting to new opportunities as they emerge and evolve.
 - a. For example, in Malawi, IFES-DFID programming² sought to improve civil society oversight and engagement. Through regular review of programmatic evidence and the political context, it became clear that the election management body (EMB) must be a larger part of the solution. To maximize impact, DFID allowed IFES to shift emphasis to the Malawi Electoral Commission (MEC). This enabled IFES to help the MEC train judges on electoral dispute resolution; establish an online election Early Warning/Early Response (EWER) system to track and mitigate electoral violence; and provide technical assistance on strategic communications before, during and after the elections. DFID continues to be flexible and adaptable in their support in-country, particularly following the annulment of the election results and resulting electoral reform process.
17. **DFID is a uniquely nimble donor**, and has proven effective in cooperating with other bilateral donors and non-traditional actors to achieve maximum results and meet real needs on the ground (e.g., training law enforcement on election security).
 - a. In Nigeria, through an in-country agreement with the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), IFES provides national-level capacity building to the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) on electoral management, inclusion of traditionally marginalized groups, voter education, electoral conflict monitoring and alternative dispute resolution processes. IFES is also providing technical support at the state level. This project builds on the gains made during IFES' previous "Support for Electoral Reforms Project" (2014-19), which was also co-funded by USAID and DFID.
18. From the perspective of our field leadership, and in comparison with other donors, DFID decision-making is devolved to the mission level. This is both a strength and a weakness. If the UK decides to tie ODA to the national interest, or if DFID and FCO are merged, **the UK must consider how to operationalise and socialise new central policies at the mission level, enabling its uniform application.**
19. To improve the effectiveness of ODA and achieve DFID's goal of delivering "a stronger interdisciplinary approach" to governance, **DFID should prioritize breaking down silos and encouraging coordination across staff focusing on elections, governance, anti-corruption and inclusion.**

² The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) also contributed to this project.

20. DFID understands the value of political economy analysis and encourages implementers to think and work politically. However, in complex operating environments, overly simplistic theories of change can result in a disconnect between external voices for change and political incentives to drive reform from the inside out. **DFID must ensure there is not only ample funding and opportunities for partners to conduct political economy analysis, but also the bandwidth, resources and expertise for DFID missions to unpack complex situations and avoid makeshift entry-points for change.**
21. Effective elections, democracy and governance programming is a balance of supply – in the form of credible political processes, administered by professional and independent institutions – and demand – in the form of an activated citizenry with protected rights and full access to the systems that impact their lives. **DFID must build institutional and civil society capacities in tandem, to cultivate resiliency, sustainability and ensure that all actors can collaborate on development challenges.**
22. In the context of a possible DFID/FCO merger, **IFES encourages the UK to consider how it will achieve immediate diplomatic goals, without degrading long-term development goals that require continuous and uninterrupted investment.** For example, credible elections require consistent and early investment spanning several years in advance of the election date and continuing in the period between elections (see Figure 1). This approach develops both the institutional capacity of EMBs and the long-term needs of civil society.

- b. Consistent, long-term support throughout the electoral cycle enhances stability during uncertain democracy building processes. Furthermore, long-term capacity building of electoral processes, EMBs and ancillary stakeholders provides key entry-points for broader governance efforts such as human rights interventions; gender-responsive programming; judicial independence and inclusive representation; and critical non-state accountability mechanisms such as civil society and free media.

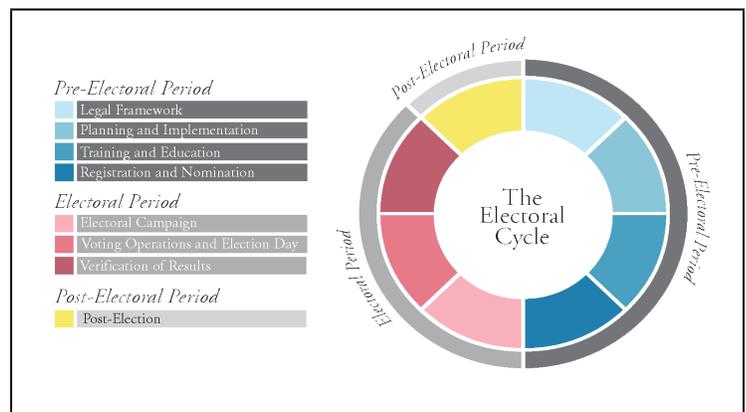


Figure 1 The Electoral Cycle

DFID leads the world in the inclusion and empowerment of marginalised populations.

23. **UK aid is particularly effective in strengthening the electoral and political participation of the world’s most vulnerable, including women, youth, people with disabilities and displaced people – this must be not be lost.**
24. Inclusion and democracy programming are symbiotic: a government that delivers for all facilitates meaningful participation by those on the margins of society in politics, economies and public life.

Access to and inclusion in political and electoral processes on the one hand, and transparent, responsive, accountable government on the other, are essential to economic opportunity and growth, and benefit development recipients and UK citizens alike.

25. DFID plays a critical role in politically empowering internally-displaced people (IDPs):
 - a. In Myanmar, IFES has begun to implement “She Leads: Leadership and Empowerment Program for Women in Conflict Affected Areas” program, which is specifically tailored to women in IDP camps in Kachin and conflict affected areas in Shan. “She Leads” empowers women with the skills and knowledge to participate in political and electoral processes, and has resulted in “She Leads” alumnae developing formal and informal personal networks, increasing their self-confidence and taking on leadership roles.
 - b. In Ukraine, IFES and DFID have worked to increase the capacity of the Group of Influence, a regional coalition of IDP rights advocates. As a result, the Group of Influence has developed into an increasingly self-sufficient leader in electoral and human rights advocacy in Ukraine and beyond. In response to civil society advocacy efforts (including those of the Group of Influence), Ukraine’s Central Election Commission simplified the procedure for changing one’s place of voting ahead of and for the 2019 parliamentary elections. This was a key step toward fully removing the barriers for electoral participation that both IDPs and other mobile groups of citizens face.
26. **DFID must continue its world-class commitment to the one billion people in the world with a disability.** DFID has drafted comprehensive disability inclusion strategies; organized the very first Global Disability Summit to encourage international [commitments on disability inclusion](#); and [co-founded GLAD](#) to coordinate bilateral and other donors on disability-inclusive development.
 - a. **DFID can enhance this leadership role by considering approaches from other governments.** For example, Australia requires mainstream development implementers to disaggregate indicators by disability and requires a disability inclusion strategy in proposals.
 - b. **As the UK develops its new National Disability Strategy, it must consider how disability rights abroad will support the domestic disability rights community** (i.e., by making traveling and working abroad more accessible).
27. **DFID must continue to support young people worldwide, particularly in the context of civic education to provide the necessary knowledge about their rights in the electoral and political processes.** If youth are equipped with the critical skills and competencies to peacefully participate, they can make positive contributions to their communities and democratic processes.
 - c. Through the Electoral and Legal Enhancements through Civic Engagement and Technical Assistance (ELECT) program, supported by UK aid, IFES Ukraine has expanded IFES’ global university-level civic education curriculum to 30 Ukrainian universities in 16 regions during the 2019-20 academic year, reaching more than 2,000 students. The course

provides students with the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed to increase democratic engagement and citizenship in Ukraine.

- d. In Bangladesh, through the Democratically Engaged, Peaceful and Inclusive Citizens (DEPIC) project, IFES has engaged with and trained nearly 700 university students across nine universities as part of the Students Against Violence Everywhere (SAVE) program. SAVE programming empowers university students to interrupt the drivers of student violence and instills young leaders with the tools to resolve conflict in a nonviolent manner among their peers, within their communities and on university campuses. In response to the pandemic, IFES will work with SAVE to develop and launch a campaign to counter disinformation and hate speech related to coronavirus.
 - e. **Moving forward, DFID must continue to play a significant role in Africa.** It's estimated that Africa's population will double to reach 2.4 billion by 2050, with more than half the population under 25 years old. This will create a youth bulge of historic proportions, and place unprecedented pressure on Africa's economic, political and other systems.
28. DFID's [2018 Strategic Vision for Gender Equality](#) emphasizes "the importance of increasing the meaningful and representative participation and leadership of women." On 29 April 2020, however, [the National Audit Office published a report](#) stating that DFID must make "significant further progress" before it will have "a good understanding of whether it is on track to secure value for money" in gender equality. As the IDC Chair [has stated](#), this should be a "wake-up call." **As the IDC considers how ODA is administrated in other parts of the world, it can consider the feminist foreign policies of other governments:**
- f. In October 2014, Sweden became the first country in the world to launch a feminist foreign policy, applying a systematic gender equality perspective throughout the whole foreign policy agenda. One method Sweden uses to realize its feminist foreign policy goals is through international development cooperation and its international aid efforts [allocating SEK 1 billion](#) to gender equality efforts in 2018.
 - g. [Canada's Feminist International Assistance Policy](#) recognizes that supporting gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls is the best way to build a more peaceful, more inclusive and more prosperous world. It supports targeted investments, partnerships, innovation and advocacy efforts with the greatest potential to close gender gaps and improve everyone's chance for success.
 - h. IFES works to support DFID and other national governments in releasing their foreign aid goals for gender equality. Across its programming, IFES integrates a gender perspective to ensure that women can equally and meaningfully participate in politics. IFES also works to [engage male allies](#) for gender equality to create an enabling environment for women's participation and to shift harmful social norms that may create barriers for women's participation. In [Tunisia](#), IFES worked with male family members of women who were part of outreach activities to help men understand the importance of women's participation in elections.

