

ICAI follow-up of: Building resilience to natural disasters

A summary of ICAI's full follow-up

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Executive summary

ICAI's follow-up review is an important element in the scrutiny process for UK aid. It provides the International Development Committee and the public with an account of how well the government has responded to ICAI's recommendations to improve spending. It is also an opportunity for ICAI to identify issues and challenges facing the UK aid programme now and in the future, which in turn helps to inform subsequent reviews.

This document is a summary which focused only on the results of our follow up of Building resilience to natural disasters. The full Follow Up report of all our 2017-18 reviews, including overall conclusions from the process and details of our methodology, can be found on our website.

Findings

Building resilience to natural disasters

The review was concerned with how DFID embedded risk analysis and resilience throughout DFID's country offices, across DFID's programmes and with governments and development partners more broadly, how it disseminated evidence and supported country office staff in implementing disaster resilience mainstreaming, and how it measured and monitored its resilience results. We made five recommendations, as summarised in the table below.

Table 1: Summary of recommendations and the government's response

Subject of recommendation	Government response
In partner countries with significant risks from natural disasters, DFID should keep its risk assessments and resilience strategies up to date	Accepted
DFID offices in high-risk countries should adopt a portfolio approach to resilience, articulating how their efforts in different sectors and areas will work together to build resilience	Accepted
DFID should develop its guidance on how to measure resilience results, providing options that can be adopted by country offices according to their specific contexts and needs	Partially accepted
DFID should undertake a stocktake of its work on resilience in high-risk countries to inform its country strategies – periodically, or following significant natural disasters	Partially accepted
DFID should establish a community of practice to promote the continuing mainstreaming of resilience to natural disasters	Accepted

In partner countries with significant risks from natural disasters, DFID should keep its risk assessments and resilience strategies up to date

The ICAI review noted that DFID's multi-hazard risk assessments were not updated or incorporated as a regular part of country office business planning processes and was concerned that, without an up-to-date understanding of the evolving context, DFID would be less able to target its resilience work effectively. With more governments and development partners engaging on resilience to natural disasters, coordination would be difficult without a shared understanding of risks.

DFID has responded to ICAI's recommendation by 'baking' risk analysis and resilience approaches into its Country Development Diagnostics (CDD) process, prompting country offices to consider risks and resilience comprehensively and coherently as part of their diagnostics work. However, there is scope for country offices

to ignore these prompts, particularly when there are competing priorities. We would welcome a follow-up assessment by DFID in due course to see whether country offices have in fact implemented the results of this analysis into their portfolios.

In terms of external engagement, there are limits to the extent that DFID can influence governments and development partners, but it has made progress both practically and at the policy level. DFID has linked core funding to UN agencies to a set of progress indicators including on preparedness planning, which seems to have contributed to strengthening the quality and quantity of this. DFID has also sought to influence global policy on resilience through its participation in a range of international forums including the Global Resilience Partnership and Resilience Evidence for Decisions in Development Initiative.

DFID offices in high-risk countries should adopt a portfolio approach to resilience, articulating how their efforts in different sectors and areas will work together to build resilience

Resilience to natural disasters is best pursued as a cross-sectoral effort. Our review noted that DFID's country-level resilience strategies were in some cases little more than a short checklist of actions. Without a thorough and up-to-date country-level strategy, DFID is not well placed to identify mutually reinforcing approaches to resilience to natural disasters across its sector programming.

DFID accepted our recommendation to adopt a portfolio approach to resilience in high-risk countries, using the CDD process as its main vehicle for responding to ICAI's concerns. DFID told us that the CDD "ensures that each DFID country office takes stock of the current state of development, barriers and opportunities – including resilience – and considers whether programme portfolios are focused accordingly". The CDDs are peer-reviewed and guidance notes on how to cover resilience issues were issued at the start of the CDD process. In addition, resilience is also one of the cross-cutting issues in DFID's review of its approach to measuring results.

While these processes are ongoing, there are already signs that they are leading to a better understanding in DFID country offices of the need to address risks and resilience more systematically. However, we also saw that country offices with strong, competing demands struggle to prioritise the embedding of resilience. As noted above, since the CDD process merely *encourages* country offices to consider resilience as a cross-cutting issue, there is a risk that some of them will not do so.

DFID should develop its guidance on how to measure resilience results, providing options that can be adopted by country offices according to their specific contexts and needs

The ICAI review noted that although DFID embarked on the process of mainstreaming resilience across the department more than six years ago, DFID – like other donors – continued to struggle to measure resilience results. DFID accepted our recommendation to develop guidance on measuring resilience results that can be adapted to the needs and contextual demands of country offices, but progress has been slow.

For programmes that are specifically aimed at improving resilience, DFID has invested in revising its main key performance indicator on resilience, KPI4. It is also engaging in international resilience measurement forums and using lessons from its Building Resilience and Adaptation to Climate Extremes and Disasters (BRACED) programme's approach to measurement, monitoring and evaluation.

DFID has made less progress on measuring resilience results in programmes where resilience is a secondary aim, rather than a primary focus. Given the wide range of resilience objectives of these programmes, and the very different contexts within which they operate, there is inevitably no single measure of performance. However, the literature review of measurement practices currently being conducted by DFID Nepal may offer ways forward. The use, by a growing number of country offices, of specialist monitoring, evaluation and learning units or contractors also offers the potential to capture secondary resilience outputs/outcomes or to focus specific attention on resilience.

DFID should undertake a stocktake of its work on resilience in high-risk countries to inform its country strategies – periodically, or following significant natural disasters

ICAI's review found that DFID had not fulfilled its commitment to report bi-annually on its progress with mainstreaming resilience and recommended that DFID should undertake regular stocktakes of its work on

resilience in high-risk countries. DFID only partially accepted this recommendation, arguing that it already assesses resilience and preparedness in high-risk countries through internal ‘lessons learned’ reviews in the wake of significant natural disasters and as part of the programme management cycle.

There have so far been no specific actions in direct response to this ICAI recommendation. DFID’s resilience contributions (to conflict, instability and natural disasters) have been reviewed in recent evaluations of the department’s humanitarian responses to the conflict in South Sudan, the Rohingya refugee crisis and the Somalia famine. The CDD process will also prompt routine analysis of risk and the mainstreaming of resilience, but it is too early to judge how adequately this process will ensure that country offices consider resilience as part of their country strategies (see Recommendation 1).

DFID should establish a community of practice to promote the continuing mainstreaming of resilience to natural disasters

Since resilience is a cross-cutting theme across all of DFID’s work, responsibilities for advancing different aspects of its resilience agenda have been spread across the department, and in particular split between the Conflict, Humanitarian and Security Department and the Climate and Environment Department. A central repository of knowledge and technical expertise on resilience could help ensure that dissemination of learning on resilience between programmes and across sectors takes place. We recommended, also based on DFID’s own aspirations, that a community of practice should be established to promote the continuing mainstreaming of resilience across the department.

Since the publication of our review, DFID has established an internal, department-wide community of practice, managed and moderated by a DFID staff member, which can host resources and facilitate cross-programme links and peer-to-peer support. The community of practice is supported by the development of a ‘one-stop shop’ for learning material on DFID’s intranet, including evidence generated by programmes and research from a range of policy areas. A learning strategy for resilience is in the process of being developed. The success of the community of practice will depend on sufficient resources being allocated to maintain its functions. DFID should continue to draw on good practice from similar communities of practice elsewhere (such as in the Rockefeller Foundation) to identify and replicate the ingredients necessary for success.

Conclusion

The actions proposed and under way are relevant and useful responses to the ICAI resilience review’s recommendations and concerns. However, the community of practice is not yet sufficiently established and improvements in response to our other recommendations remain mostly at the preparatory stage. There is scope for DFID to provide clearer guidance on strengthening measurement of resilience at the portfolio level.

Summary of findings

Subject of recommendation	Recent developments	ICAI's assessment of progress
<p>In partner countries with significant risks from natural disasters, keep risk assessment and resilience strategies up to date.</p> <p>Government response: Accepted</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DFID has introduced a series of risk management tools and processes to support resilience and preparedness, including as part of its CDD process. • DFID has linked core funding to UN agencies to a set of progress indicators, including on preparedness planning. • Influencing activities through participation in international forums. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Including these tools and processes in the CDD process is a good way to prompt country offices to consider resilience and risk comprehensively in their diagnostic and planning work. • There is a risk that country offices ignore the CDD prompts.
<p>DFID offices in high-risk countries should adopt a portfolio approach to resilience.</p> <p>Government response: Accepted</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The CDD is the main vehicle for change in response to this recommendation: resilience is one of the CDD's cross-cutting issues. • Guidance notes to country offices on how to cover resilience were issued at the start of the CDD process. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This process is ongoing, but there are already signs that it is leading to a better understanding in country offices of the need to address resilience and risks systematically. • We would welcome a follow-up assessment by DFID in due course of whether country offices have in fact implemented the results of this analysis into their portfolios.
<p>Develop guidance on how to measure resilience results, providing options that can be adapted by country offices to their contexts and needs.</p> <p>Government response: Partially accepted</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For programmes where resilience is the main objective, DFID is revising its main key performance indicator on resilience. • It is participating in international forums on resilience measurement and using lessons from its Building Resilience and Adaptation to Climate Extremes and Disasters (BRACED) programme to develop its approach to monitoring, measurement and evaluation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There has been a range of significant actions to improve guidance for programmes where resilience is the main objective. However, there has been little action in the case of programmes where resilience is not the main objective but an important cross-cutting and secondary aim. • The growing use by country offices of specialist monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) units is very likely to improve the capacity to capture secondary resilience outputs and outcomes.
<p>Undertake a stocktake of resilience work in high-risk countries to inform country strategies.</p> <p>Government response: Partially accepted</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DFID said it already assesses resilience and preparedness in high-risk countries, as part of internal 'lessons learned' reviews in the wake of significant natural disasters and as part of the programme management cycle. • DFID's resilience contributions have been reviewed in recent evaluations of UK humanitarian responses, such as in South Sudan. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There have so far been no specific actions in direct response to ICAI's review, but the recent series of evaluations to ensure that DFID programmes routinely analyse risk and resilience is positive. It is too early to tell if this will be sufficient.
<p>Establish a community of practice to promote the mainstreaming of resilience.</p> <p>Government response: Accepted</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DFID was already planning to establish a community of practice on resilience, and has now done so. It is moderated by a staff member, hosts resources and facilitates cross-programme links. It is supported by a 'one-stop shop' for learning materials. • A learning strategy is in the process of being developed. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We are pleased that DFID has now established a community of practice. Its continued success will depend on sufficient resources being allocated to maintain it.



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