

**ICAI follow-up of:  
Accessing, staying and succeeding  
in basic education – UK aid’s  
support to marginalised girls**

A summary of ICAI’s full follow-up review

**June 2018**

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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 focuses only on the results of our follow up of Accessing, staying and succeeding in basic education – UK aid’s support to marginalised girls. The full follow-up report of all our 2016-17 reviews, including overall conclusions from the process and details of our methodology, can be found on our website.

## Findings

### Accessing, staying and succeeding in basic education – UK aid’s support to marginalised girls

Some 62 million girls worldwide are missing out on a basic education. DFID has made substantial investments over several years to improve this statistic. Our performance review awarded an amber-red score to DFID’s work to help marginalised girls access, and stay and succeed in, basic education. We made three recommendations, outlined in Table 1, aimed at ensuring that the strategic focus on marginalised girls is not lost and that value for money calculations do not discourage efforts to target hard-to-reach girls. The recommendations have had a strong impact. Despite initially only partially accepting two of the three recommendations, DFID has since made impressive improvements to address the shortcomings identified by all three, both within individual programmes and in its education policy as a whole.

Table 1: Summary of the government’s response to ICAI recommendations

ICAI recommendation	Govt’s initial response	Our assessment of progress since then	
		By recommendation	Overall
<b>Accessing, staying and succeeding in basic education – UK aid’s support to marginalised girls, December 2016</b>			
Develop country-specific strategies for marginalised girls’ education to ensure coherence across programmes.	Accept	DFID’s new education policy has a strong focus on marginalised groups. Measures have been taken to improve coordination and coherence between the Girls’ Education Challenge Fund and DFID’s other education work.	<b>Positive action in most areas</b>
Ensure that the focus on marginalised girls is not lost during implementation.	Partially accept	The emphasis on marginalised groups in the new education policy will help, but DFID has not yet introduced any new practical measures to support this in programme design and monitoring. Significant improvements have been made in those programmes where we had noted a loss of focus.	
Specify how to approach value for money when targeting marginalised groups.	Partially accept	New internal guidance explains how and when to consider equity within a comprehensive value for money framework, but could be more detailed.	

### Develop country-specific strategies for marginalised girls’ education

The ICAI review identified a lack of a clear strategic approach on marginalised girls’ education to help promote coherence and complementarity across the various strands of DFID’s work.

DFID’s response to this recommendation has been positive. In particular, its new education policy, published in February 2018, provides a clear direction for all education programming to focus on marginalised groups. It shows DFID’s commitment to “step up targeted support to the most marginalised” and to “champion hard-to-reach girls”. DFID has allocated £500 million to phase two of the Girls’ Education Challenge (GEC). The fund

manager has increased the GEC's country-based capacity, and DFID has created new regional adviser positions to help ensure that GEC learning informs wider policy and programming, and that the GEC and DFID's bilateral programming is coherent. DFID has also bolstered mechanisms for using learning within the GEC and for sharing learning between the GEC and DFID's wider education portfolio. We are very encouraged by these actions, although it is too early to tell how effective they will be in practice.

### Keeping focus on marginalised girls during implementation of education programmes

The challenge of focusing attention on marginalised girls goes beyond including their needs in education programme design and business cases. Our review found a range of obstacles that hindered the implementation of objectives set out in the business cases of DFID's bilateral education programmes. These included: a lack of expertise in girls' education among implementing partners; girls' education objectives being overridden by other priorities within the programmes; a lack of influence with partner governments' priorities in government education programmes that DFID helps fund; poor programme design; and the challenges of implementing programmes in difficult operating environments.

DFID has not yet introduced any new practical measures to ensure that a focus on marginalised girls is retained during the implementation of bilateral education programmes. Nevertheless, the clear direction provided by the new education policy is likely to help ensure this. We are also pleased to note that programmes we had criticised for having lost focus on girls, and especially marginalised girls, have made significant improvements since our review (see Box 1).

#### Box 1: Strengthening education programmes' focus on marginalised girls since the ICAI review

As part of our follow-up, we asked for updates on the programmes we had criticised for losing focus on marginalised girls, and found that they had improved markedly. Some of the actions taken since our review include:

- The **Education Quality Improvement Programme Tanzania** has developed and is implementing a girls' education strategy. It is training teachers and programme implementers on gender and inclusion, and it is piloting a new approach to preparing girls for secondary school.
- As part of the **Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Education Sector Programme** in Pakistan, DFID has encouraged the government of the province to develop an equity strategy to identify key barriers to education and adopt measures and allocate funds to overcome these. It is also introducing gender targets in the programme's school voucher scheme and in its new school initiative.
- The implementing partner for the **Girls' Education in South Sudan** programme has brought in expertise to design gender sensitivity and behaviour change training for staff delivering radio programmes and community mobilisation activities, and has focused more on gender issues within the research component of the programme.

### How to approach value for money when targeting marginalised groups

DFID's approach to value for money focuses on maximising the impact of each pound spent to improve poor people's lives. Simple value for money calculations such as cost per beneficiary can become obstacles for targeting harder-to-reach groups, which often warrant higher per capita costs. Our marginalised girls' education review found examples where the emphasis on cost-efficiency worked against a focus on the most marginalised, and we recommended that DFID pay more attention to equity when looking at value for money in education programmes. In its response, DFID noted that its value for money guidance encouraged consideration of equity, in addition to the '3Es' of economy, efficiency and effectiveness, and it therefore only partially accepted the recommendation. However, DFID recognised that the commitment to equity could be made more explicit.

Since then, DFID has pursued an approach to value for money in education policy that emphasises more firmly the principle of leaving no one behind. New and updated internal guidance, including formally changing to a '4E framework', explicitly explains how and when to consider equity in programming and value for money assessments. For phase two of the Girls' Education Challenge, the fund manager has strengthened its approach to equity as part of its value for money approach. It has created a value for money index to assess and score proposals based on a range of variables, including equity measured in terms of the level of marginalisation of the girls being targeted.

## **Conclusion**

The publication of the ICAI review was timely. The review's recommendations fed into the education policy and helped drive its emphasis on the goal of assisting marginalised girls in accessing, and staying and succeeding in, education. With the policy in place, DFID now has the opportunity to put equity at the centre of its education programmes, so that the commitment to leave no one behind translates into practical measures to ensure that education opportunities reach the hardest-to-reach girls.



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