

ICAI follow-up of: DFID's efforts to eliminate violence against women and girls

a summary of ICAI's full follow-up review

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Executive summary

Each year, ICAI follows up on the response to the recommendations it made in reviews published the previous year. The process is a key link in the accountability chain, providing Parliament and the public with an account of how well DFID and other government departments have responded to ICAI reviews. It also provides feedback to the responsible staff, and serves as a useful learning exercise for ICAI in our quest to achieve greater uptake of our findings and recommendations.

This document is a summary which focused only on the results of our follow up of DFID's efforts to eliminate violence against women and girls. The full Follow Up report of all our year five reviews, including overall conclusions from the process and details of our methodology, can be found on our website.

Findings

DFID's efforts to eliminate violence against women and girls

The UK government has made a strong commitment to leading efforts to tackle violence against women and girls (VAWG) around the world. As this is a relatively new area for the aid programme, we chose to make this the subject of our first learning review, published in May 2016. We assessed DFID's efforts to build an evidence base on what works, and its progress in developing a relevant and credible programming response. We awarded DFID an overall **green** rating for its work in this area, in light of its active learning stance, a strong research portfolio and some good-quality programming, combined with a strong leadership role at the international level. However, we noted that the programmes remained small relative to the problem they sought to address, and that the key challenge for the future would be taking successful initiatives to scale. We made four recommendations, in the areas indicated in Table 1.

Table 6: Area of recommendations and DFID's response

Subject of recommendation	DFID's response
Scaling up programming	Partially accept
Improving internal learning processes	Accept
Disseminating research results	Accept
Tracking expenditure and results	Partially accept

On the whole, DFID has responded reasonably well to our findings and recommendations, despite a disappointing initial departmental reaction. However, we are concerned that the scale and intensity of VAWG programming does not appear to have increased since the review was published.

Scaling up programming

The future challenge of scaling up VAWG programming was a central concern of our review. We found that DFID had developed some good-quality pilots and learning programmes, but had no clear plans for how to implement them at scale. We also found that quality tended to fall away when VAWG activities were incorporated into wider programmes. DFID has now prepared a draft theory of change for scale-up, which among other things considers how VAWG can be successfully addressed within large sectoral programmes.

While this is a useful initiative, we are concerned that a recent provisional mapping suggests that the number of DFID country programmes with VAWG elements has declined. This may be linked to DFID's programming cycle; we were told that new programmes may be developed over the coming year. It is important that DFID maintains the intensity of its work in this area in order to build on the solid foundations it has established.

During our field work in Ethiopia, we visited the Girl Effect programme, which was using innovative branding techniques to encourage girls to challenge the acceptability of violence. We were disappointed to learn that DFID has withdrawn its support for this programme, which was subject to critical media reporting, for reasons other than evidence of unsatisfactory results. While it was too early to assess the results of that particular initiative, in our report we identified the use of marketing techniques to challenge social norms as an important area for further learning. It would have been preferable, in our view, to give this initiative more time to demonstrate its effectiveness.

DFID has identified working with multilateral partners as an important route for scaling up VAWG programming. It has encouraged the World Bank to develop a new gender strategy and is conducting a formal dialogue with UN Women to address organisational issues identified in the Multilateral Development Review.¹ DFID has also worked with other donors to raise the profile of VAWG within OECD donor forums.

1. *Gender Equality, Poverty Reduction and Inclusive Growth: Gender Strategy 2016-2023*, World Bank Group, 2016, [link](#).

Improving learning

In our review, we noted the need to improve learning – not just among specialist VAWG practitioners, but across DFID, to support scaling up. In response, DFID has appointed a knowledge and learning adviser for the VAWG portfolio. So far, the adviser has reviewed the VAWG community of practice and help desk facility to identify how they can be improved, and is preparing a learning plan. The policy team conducted a VAWG session at the professional conference of DFID social development advisers in November 2016, and plans further sessions with the economists and education advisers. There has also been an increase in internal communication on VAWG, including dissemination of 'how to' notes. These are useful initiatives and we encourage DFID to maintain this momentum.

Disseminating results

In our review, we found that DFID had positioned itself well as a leading global investor in VAWG research. Its £25 million WhatWorks research and innovation programme was making a major contribution to knowledge in the field. However, we found that its work was not well known beyond DFID, and therefore recommended an increased focus on dissemination. WhatWorks has now reoriented itself towards outreach and uptake. It has produced a research uptake and stakeholder engagement strategy, which will be regularly updated, and included uptake measures in its results framework. We found that the programme's dissemination approach, while thorough, was not particularly innovative. DFID and its implementers could do more to understand the evidentiary needs of its target audiences, including civil society, and make use of a wider variety of communication techniques.

Tracking expenditure and results

DFID has been less convincing in its response to our recommendation that it track VAWG expenditure and results more systematically through its management information system. DFID only partially accepted this recommendation, as it had decided not to introduce a VAWG target into its new single departmental plan. However, it is beginning to collect data on VAWG expenditure more systematically, and has put in place plans to update its mapping of VAWG programming on a six-monthly basis.

Conclusion

DFID informs us that ICAI's award of a green rating has helped to raise the profile and status of the VAWG portfolio and given the central policy team a platform to raise VAWG issues across the department and with international partners. There has been a good response to the recommendations on learning and the dissemination of research. On the key issue of scaling up, while we welcome the efforts of the central policy team, we are concerned that we cannot yet see evidence of a greater intensity of effort across country programmes, which is essential to achieving transformative impact. DFID appears to face a significant challenge in maintaining its commitment to cross-cutting issues like VAWG across a decentralised programme. We have therefore decided to revisit this issue in next year's follow-up work, looking in particular at what progress has been made in integrating VAWG initiatives into DFID's wider sector programmes and into the Conflict, Stability and Security Fund portfolio.



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