

House of Commons
International Development
Committee

**DEPARTMENT FOR
INTERNATIONAL
DEVELOPMENT:
DEPARTMENTAL
REPORT 2002:
GOVERNMENT
RESPONSE to the
Committee's Sixth Report of
Session 2001–02**

First Special Report of Session 2002–03

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FIRST SPECIAL REPORT

The International Development Committee has agreed to the following Special Report:

**DEPARTMENT FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT:
DEPARTMENTAL REPORT 2002: GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO THE
COMMITTEE'S SIXTH REPORT OF SESSION 2001-02**

The International Development Committee reported to the House on the Department for International Developmental Report 2002 in its Sixth Report of Session 2001-02, published on 14 November 2002 as HC 964. The Government Response to that Report was received on 13 January 2003 in the form of a memorandum to the Committee. It is reproduced as an Appendix to this Special Report.

APPENDIX

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO THE SIXTH REPORT FROM THE COMMITTEE IN SESSION 2001–02, ON THE DEPARTMENT FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT: DEPARTMENT REPORT 2002

MEMORANDUM FROM THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

DFID and the Millennium Development Goals

Conclusion 1: Care must be taken to ensure that the MDGs are not used excessively or inappropriately to drive DFID's activities and to set the framework for external accountability and monitoring (paragraph 10).

Conclusion 2: It would be helpful if the Departmental Report included an explicit statement of DFID's objectives, as it has in previous years, rather than simply restating that DFID works in support of the MDGs (paragraph 10)

Answer:

The MDGs are hugely important to improving the effectiveness and focus of international development work. They also provide the basis for improved partnership, harmonisation of donor systems and better measurement of progress. The two White Papers set out how the UK aims to contribute towards these targets. DFID's aim is the elimination of poverty in poorer countries and we are pursuing this by focusing on achievement of the 2015 MDG targets, to which the entire international community is committed. Our Public Service and Service Delivery Agreements break the MDGs down into specific objectives and performance targets for 2003-06.

We monitor progress against our Public Service Agreement (PSA) objectives by using internationally available data which is supplemented by local statistics. All the international data we use is derived from the information which national governments supply to the relevant international agencies. We do not impose new monitoring systems. The full PSA for 2003-06 was published in July 2002 and will be presented in the 2003 Departmental Report.

DFID's Public Service Agreement

Conclusion 3: Given its importance in shaping DFID's internal structure, its relationships with external stakeholders, and its effectiveness, it is surprising that the Departmental Report fails to outline DFID's organisational structure. We recommend that subsequent Departmental Reports do this, and as a minimal step, at least include an organisation chart (paragraph 11)

Answer:

The 2003 Departmental Report and subsequent reports will include an organogram and also provide information about major developments in the organisation during the year.

Conclusion 4: The Departmental Report fails to provide an analysis of spending either by Public Service Agreement objective or by MDG target. In the absence of such information it is difficult to ensure that resources allocated to objectives, properly reflect Departmental policies and priorities. We are pleased that DFID has taken the opportunity offered by the Spending Round to define new PSA objectives

against which it will be possible to map budget allocations more clearly. In addition, if the PSA is the clearest statement of its objectives, DFID ought to give serious consideration to structuring its Departmental Report around its PSA so as to make itself more accountable for progress towards its objectives. We would also like to know what would happen were DFID to fail to meet its PSA objectives (paragraph 18)

Answer:

In the Departmental Report for 2003, we will provide a breakdown of expenditure against the new PSA objectives (2003-2006). The structure of Departmental Reports is determined centrally by the Treasury and we will draw their attention to the Committee's comments.

The Secretary of State and DFID's Management Board are accountable for delivery of the PSA, and we have refined our PSA targets to ensure that individual members of staff can work with the targets in a way which gives them a sense of their own contribution to delivery of the MDGs. If DFID were to fail to meet our PSA objectives, we would explain the reasons why we are off course and what would be done to get back on course. It is important that progress against PSA targets is intelligently reviewed. It is desirable that departments set stretching targets to which they are committed. Targets might not be met for good reasons out with our control. Action will depend on the extent to which it is within our control to get the target back on track, for example:

- On the EC aid to poor countries, DFID is working very hard but there is a limit to what we can achieve on our own;
- For outcome targets such as primary enrolment rates, working within the international system, DFID can work to address slippage but cannot deliver this alone.

DFID's Resource Allocations: Sectoral targets and country planning

Conclusion 5: The explanation given to us as to how DFID's resource allocation process works, fails to illuminate the extent to which DFID's resource allocation is driven by its stated policy objectives, a situation which is not improved by the lack of information about spending by sectoral objective in the Departmental Report. In addition, it says little about the role of historical inertia in determining resource allocations. We do trust that DFID seeks to spend its money wisely, but for the purposes of accountability, trust is not sufficient. We were pleased to hear DFID state: "we are currently reviewing our resource allocation system in order to identify how better we can relate resource allocation to our objectives and the MDGs" (paragraph 20.)

Answer:

In 2002 DFID undertook a Strategic Review of Resource Allocation with the aim of enhancing DFID's contribution to the MDGs, and making resource allocation judgements more structured and better informed. The study considered how DFID funds for country programmes might best be allocated between countries and regions, how choices might be made between allocations to developing country governments and other intermediaries (multilaterals or other partners), and how to make choices between investing in international public goods and funds available for other programmes. The conclusions of this study have informed resource allocations for 2003/04 to 2005/06. However, the Committee should be clear that DFID's bilateral programme is only part of the international system. It would not be desirable to seek to make DFID a microcosm of a perfect international distribution. We have to play to our comparative advantage and to contribute

in areas where others are failing to act country by country. These decisions require judgement on progress in individual countries and cannot be settled mechanistically.

As noted above, our 2003 Departmental Report will provide a breakdown of expenditure between 2003-06 PSA objectives. We also publish details of DFID expenditure by objective in our Departmental Resource Accounts and a sectoral breakdown is given in our annual publication 'Statistics on International Development'.

Conclusion 6: We look forward to the inclusion in future Departmental Reports of information about the interplay between DFID's plans for realising its policy objectives-in part by attaching conditions to aid-and its support for locally owned development strategies (paragraph 22)

Answer:

Our next Departmental Report will address this question as the Committee requests. DFID's Country Assistance Plans, (which have replaced Country Strategy Papers), set out in detail how DFID will contribute to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals by working as part of the international development effort to support a country's own priorities for reducing poverty. This is consistent with our commitment to encourage better decision-making and use of resources, along with greater co-ordination of support from development partners. We are also developing new partnership arrangements, which set out clear principles to guide the overall relationship between DFID and its partner governments including our respective responsibilities and obligations, and how to respond to weakening performance.

There is no simplistic way of enhancing local leadership and commitment to the achievement of the MDGs, and maintaining our own focus on the MDGs when countries' own commitment weakens. This requires a real spirit of partnership, and the fostering of mutually respectful relationships and dialogue. We are currently lengthening our commitments and sharing lessons across our programmes for how best to maintain and drive forward commitment to achieving the MDGs in each country in which we work.

The 2003-2006 Public Service Agreement and Country Assistance Plans

Conclusion 7: We welcome the fact that DFID seeks to learn and develop as an organisation, and has been re-designing both its PSA and its country planning processes (paragraph 23)

Answer:

We have noted the Committee's comments.

Conclusion 8: We accept that indicators sometimes need to be revised, but do have some concerns about the extent to which targets and objectives might be driven by data availability. We appreciate too that statistics need to be collected and assessments made even whilst data collection is not ideal. But, we do think that an important medium-term response to problems of data collection is to improve the capacity of developing countries to monitor progress towards the MDGs and associated targets and indicators. Future Departmental Reports might usefully include more information about what DFID is doing to build the capacity of developing countries in this regard. We will monitor closely DFID's selection and use of targets, and any changes to measurement methodologies (paragraph 24)

Answer:

We agree and have been working to this end very actively through the Paris 21 Initiative, and now through the UN's new Millennium Development Goals Monitoring Initiative. In many countries data collection is very weak and this work requires patient, long-term commitment.

We of course accept the need to use data intelligently and supplement this with qualitative information. Our 2003 Departmental Report will include information on DFID's work to help improve the capacity of developing countries to monitor progress against the MDGs.

The substance of the targets in the next PSA (2003-06) is similar to the current PSA. Both PSAs set performance targets for value for money, poverty focus, coherence of international policies, sustainable development and support for health and education. The lack of availability of reliable data to inform policy and performance management is a constraint faced by most developing countries. It is a characteristic of poor systems in poor countries. We have therefore highlighted improving data quality as a specific target in our new Service Delivery Agreement.

Conclusion 9: We welcome the new PSA as a serious attempt to develop a set of objectives and we hope, increasingly SMART-specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and timed-targets which will both drive performance and facilitate accountability, and which will map onto DFID's evolving organisational structure. We also welcome the continued efforts to grapple with the issue of attribution. However, we do have some concerns about the focus on a limited number of countries. We are uncertain whether this is for measurement purposes, or whether this is part of a move to greater selectivity in the number of countries which DFID is involved in. There may well be good policy reasons-beyond making the measurement of progress more practicable-for a sharpening of DFID's focus; these should be re-iterated. We, along with DFID, also feel that a three-year time frame does not provide a fair or realistic time-span within which to assess DFID's contribution to international development, and urge HM Treasury to think seriously about the suitability of such a framework for DFID. We also note with some concern the lack of targets or indicators as regards the effective response of multilateral agencies to humanitarian crises (paragraph 32)

Answer:

The PSA intentionally focuses on a limited number of project/country activities. These focus countries are used to indicate overall progress made in specific regions and represent DFID's largest investments. The PSA targets do not seek to measure DFID's entire portfolio. They are intended to provide focus, drive lesson learning and are not a measure of all the work of the Department.

We agree with the Committee that a three-year time frame is insufficient for measuring progress. For our 2003-06 PSA we have established a baseline of 2000 (on which data was generally available in 2002) and will measure progress over a longer period ending in 2006 (but final data will only become available in 2008). HM Treasury has agreed that DFID will report on progress for 2006 when the data becomes available in 2008.

DFID works with multilateral agencies primarily through Institutional Strategy Papers (ISPs). There are currently ISPs with the Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs, World Food Programme, United Nations Development Programme, United Nations Children's Fund, International Committee of the Red Cross and, International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. Each ISP is agreed with the agency, setting priorities for the multi-year partnership drawing on the agencies' own corporate objectives. An annual work plan is then agreed, based on these priorities. Each ISP is subject to an annual review process, usually encompassing one or two field reviews of

performance on the ground, as well as discussions with the agency's senior management at headquarters.

In addition to these institutionalised performance management systems, DFID country programmes and field offices provide valuable first hand information on agency performance. DFID's Humanitarian Operations Team (part of our Conflict and Humanitarian Affairs Department) often works side by side with multilateral agencies in emergency response situations, and can assess first hand the effectiveness of the agency's response. In this way, DFID is able to closely monitor the performance of those multilateral agencies which work in humanitarian crises, and is able to target the support to address those areas where the agency is weakest. We also have an SDA target to improve international humanitarian response.

Conclusion 10: We welcome the inclusion of joint targets as a useful mechanism to encourage the joined up Government which international development so clearly demands (paragraph 33)

Answer:

The Committee's comments are noted.

Conclusion 11: We applaud the development of Country Assistance Plans as an attempt to fill the “missing middle”, and welcome the integration of CAPs with PRSPs and the implicit recognition that DFID needs to engage with different countries in different ways (paragraph 35)

Answer:

We agree and welcome the Committee's comments.

DFID's Portfolio of Countries: Country selection and the nature of engagement

Conclusion 12: Historical links and organisational inertia are not good reasons to be involved in a particular country; we are pleased that DFID is thinking about concentrating its efforts in a smaller number of countries (paragraph 39)

Answer:

Please see DFID's response to Conclusion 5, which also refers. The Committee noted in paragraph 38 of its Report the general trend in DFID to concentrate our resources on fewer countries where we are best placed to assist.

Conclusion 13: We expect subsequent Departmental Reports to provide clear information about DFID's assessment of its comparative advantage, its portfolio of countries, and the extent and nature of DFID's involvement in particular countries. We would also welcome further information about how DFID determines which countries will graduate from one form of development assistance to another, and ultimately beyond development assistance (paragraph 39)

Future Departmental Reports will continue to report on DFID's progress in taking forward our work over the past year, as part of the international community, highlighting our partnership approach, challenges faced in particular countries and our collective efforts to address these.

The Departmental Report will illustrate and provide high level aggregate information on DFID's work. More detailed information about individual countries is available in our Country Assistance Plans.

We have a PSA target for increasing the percentage of DFID's bilateral expenditure in low-income countries. The decision on the use of different aid instruments in a specific country (including graduation) is made on a country-by-country basis. We will include in the 2003 Departmental Report material on the process by which countries graduate from receiving emergency to development aid, and from low to middle income status.

Conclusion 14: We were fascinated to hear about the Russian competition for aid. We feel that the wider use of such an approach, with selection criteria made explicit, might help to focus recipients' minds on why the UK is offering development assistance, and what potential partners are expected to deliver in return (paragraph 45)

Answer:

It is too early to evaluate the success of DFID's partnerships with the two oblasts in Russia or to assess whether this approach to selecting sub-national partners has wider application. An evaluation of the partnerships will be carried out when they expire, at the end of 2005. In the meantime DFID's Russia team will continue to feed through lessons and experience from the partnerships to other country programmes.

Conclusion 15: We support the move towards budget support where suitable partners can be found, and outcomes - closely aligned to the MDGs - can be reliably predicted (paragraph 58)

Answer:

We have noted the Committee's comments.

Conclusion 16: We would like to see more information on the use of budgetary support contained with the annual Departmental Report and suggest that next year's Departmental Report provides a breakdown in the bilateral allocations between money given through direct budget support and allocations for programmes and projects (paragraph 58)

Answer:

We will be able to provide the information requested on direct budget support in the next Departmental Report. However, our figures for this first year of reporting on direct budget support will be estimates as the system to collect the data has only recently been introduced. From 2004, figures for future years will be published annually in our "Statistics on International Development".

Conclusion 17: We were interested to hear about DFID's decision-making processes as regards involvement in all the cases mentioned; Latin America, the Sahel, Nigeria, Russia, Mozambique, Uganda and Kenya. We would welcome the inclusion of similar material in future Departmental Reports. Such information improves DFID's accountability by demonstrating the link between DFID's objectives and spending plans, and by making more explicit DFID's overall strategy. In addition, by facilitating open discussion and learning about what works, a move in this direction might help to improve DFID's effectiveness (paragraph 59)

Answer:

We welcome the Committee's comments and will use similar examples in the next Departmental Report to illustrate our work on direct budget support. There is, however, limited space available in the Departmental Report. Our Country Assistance Plans provide greater detail on our work in individual countries and will be available on DFID's website over the coming few months.

Monitoring and Evaluation for Accountability and Learning

Conclusion 18: The various tiers of monitoring and evaluation-of the international development system, of DFID as a whole, and of DFID's specific interventions-should be well-integrated, with monitoring of progress towards top-tier targets such as the MDGs informing bottom-tier data collection, and data collected at the bottom-tier feeding into the monitoring of top-tier targets. This is currently not the case (paragraph 60)

Answer:

Although the Bank and OECD are heavily involved with international monitoring it is the UN which has the responsibility internationally for monitoring progress towards the MDGs. This is a new system. Implementation is way behind conceptual commitments. DFID is a leading player in trying to improve the effectiveness of the system.

DFID has recently amended our indicators for project performance to fall in line with the MDGs. We henceforth will be able to track new programme commitments made in support of the MDGs. This is an important step towards making DFID's internal information systems coherent with the MDGs.

Information to track global progress towards the MDGs comes from the countries themselves for the most part. We are encouraging countries to include the MDGs within their own development plans and working with the international system to improve support for data collection and use at country level. However it is for countries to determine their own development priorities and targets. Whilst they have all signed up to the MDGs and should be eager to assess their own progress there is a fine line between supporting them in this effort and imposing top down, centrally determined goals. We are exploring with the World Bank, EC and others the idea of a core set of indicators from the MDGs that every country will sign up to monitoring, either directly or through appropriate proxy indicators, which will help address this.

We are actively seeking to ensure that various performance monitoring initiatives being implemented by various development agencies are coherent with the MDGs to the greatest possible extent - IDA monitoring by the World Bank and EC monitoring of programme performance being two notable examples.

Conclusion 19: DFID faces major problems in collecting the data needed to monitor progress against the MDGs, and has made the first step towards addressing this issue by recognising its importance. We urge DFID to continue its work with developing countries, other donors, the World Bank and the OECD, to improve the provision of statistics on international development in both the short and longer term, and to provide progress reports in future Departmental Reports (paragraph 65)

Answer:

Please refer to the answer given to Conclusion 8.

Conclusion 20: We welcome the fact that DFID plans to increase its spending on evaluation from £1.136 million in 20001/02 to £1.625 million in 2003/04. We are also glad to hear that DFID has commissioned an independent evaluation to address comprehensively for the first time the question of "How effective is DFID?", and look forward to its publication. But, evaluation must itself be made more effective. We join with the Public Accounts Committee in recommending joint evaluations, and in urging a closer relationship between country teams and the evaluation unit, to ensure that lessons are learnt and implemented quickly and effectively. In addition, to ensure the independence of evaluation-something which we have previously asked of the European Commission-we urge DFID, first, to increase the proportion of evaluations conducted by external evaluators, and, secondly to ensure that the results of all of its evaluations are made publicly available without undue delay. Above all, careful thought must be given to the ways in which the monitoring of DFID's progress against the top-level MDG targets can be more closely integrated with the monitoring of DFID's individual programmes and projects (paragraph 68)

Answer:

DFID has a strong commitment to evaluation. In general, development agencies tend to submit themselves to regular evaluation in ways the rest of the public sector does not. We agree that evaluation needs to be used more effectively to inform our work. DFID has worked to strengthen its monitoring and evaluation functions in the last few years and to increase lesson learning around performance and evaluation. We are committed to making greater use of all evaluation lessons, increasing the number of independent evaluations conducted and continuing with improvements to our performance management systems. Some of the key steps we are taking are outlined below.

The independence of evaluation continues to be assured in two ways; the process is managed by DFID's Evaluation Department, which is independent of the programme, and the engagement of independent consultants through a competitive process to undertake policy management structure and studies. Additionally, evaluation reports remain the property of the consultants.

Changes have been introduced to ensure programme and policy personnel are involved in all stages of independent evaluations. This approach improves interaction between evaluators, strengthens the design of activities and supports improved decision-making by ensuring evaluation findings are communicated across the organisation as they emerge.

Evaluation dissemination methods are routinely reviewed in order to strengthen lesson learning. Greater use is now made of workshops, within DFID and in partner countries, to communicate evaluation findings. A number of activities intended to identify how people learn are in hand. The findings will contribute to a new evaluation communication strategy which is being prepared.

DFID shall continue to publish reports of all independent evaluations undertaken. These documents are free, and available both electronically and in hard copy from DFID or through the OECD/DAC's Evaluation Inventory. Emerging evaluation findings are now regularly posted on the DFID Web-site.

Joint evaluations currently account for one third of DFID's independent programme of studies. This percentage will continue to grow as the programme develops to reflect DFID's influencing agenda and increased emphasis on joint approaches e.g. budget support and SWAPs.

Conclusion 21: In oral evidence, no mention was made of DFID's Performance Reporting Information System for Management (PRISM). This makes us question whether PRISM is being used effectively for the monitoring of DFID's development activities, and if not, when this system will be implemented fully (paragraph 69)

Answer:

We can confirm that PRISM is being used extensively throughout the Department as the basis for monitoring progress on our programme and project activities. We have a specific target on this in our 2003-2006 PSA - (to achieve "A sustained increase in the index of DFID's bilateral projects evaluated as successful) - and we use PRISM as the means of reporting against this target. It is also used to provide key information on programmes and projects to the DFID Management Board on a quarterly basis.

We also use PRISM as a means of knowledge sharing and lesson learning and are currently piloting new approaches to structure and analyse the latter. We have recently carried out a revision of the coding structure for our programmes and projects and introduced new Policy Information Markers based on the Millennium Development Goals which will enable us to monitor individual programmes and projects against MDG targets.

Conclusions: The missing middle

Conclusion 22: The Departmental Report fails to make DFID's strategy-the ways in which it integrates the cycle of development policy and practice, and the role it identifies for itself within the international system-sufficiently clear (paragraph 71)

Answer:

We will attempt to provide more detail in our 2003 Departmental Report.

Conclusion 23: It is our belief that by setting out more clearly its strategy and distinctive role, DFID will become more accountable, and-by facilitating learning and improving its organisational performance-make itself a better partner and a more effective development agency (paragraph 72)

Answer:

We note the Committee's conclusion and have been working in this way for some years. We will continue to make every effort to this end, but the annual report is limited in scope. We have since 1997 published a wide range of documents that were not previously published by the Department in order to enhance our accountability.

Conclusion 24: We expect next year's Departmental Report to make further progress towards the goal of providing clear answers to the following questions:

- **What are DFID's objectives and how is the achievement of these objectives expected to contribute to the achievement of the MDGs?**
- **What resources does DFID have to achieve its objectives, and how have these resources been allocated, both by objective and by country?**
- **What is DFID's model of poverty and of the obstacles to achieving its poverty reduction objective, and how does this model inform DFID's policy, activities and spending?**

- **What activities has DFID been engaged in in pursuit of its objectives, and where, and what have been the results of these activities?**
- **How does DFID monitor and evaluate its activities and their contribution to achieving the MDGs, and test and develop its model of poverty and its overall strategy for the elimination of poverty? (paragraph 73)**

Answer:

We note the Committee's requests and will ensure the 2003 Report contains links to other publicly available material which provide this detail.

Secretary of State for International Development
13 January 2003

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