



BRIEFING PAPER

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DFID's Civil Society Partnership Review (CSPR)

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Contents:

1. Launch of the Review
2. Methodology
3. Results and reaction



Contents

Summary	3
1. Launch of the Review	4
1.1 DFID's work with Civil Society Organisations before the Review	4
2. Methodology	5
3. Results and reaction	6
UK Aid Match	6
UK Aid Direct	7
UK Aid Connect	7
UK Aid Volunteers	8
Broader reaction	8

Summary

DFID has historically provided a significant level of funding to Civil Society Organisations (CSOs). In 2014/15, DFID's contributions to CSOs (£1.4bn) made up 25% of its total bilateral aid spending.

DFID has historically provided a significant level of funding to Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), both through its country officers (many of which outsource particular projects to CSOs) and through direct funding from DFID headquarters. In July 2015, DFID announced its intention to conduct a Civil Society Partnerships Review. The review was to cover all aspects of DFID headquarters' funding to CSOs, including funding levels and funding mechanisms. Funding to CSOs from DFID country offices was to be outside the scope of the Review.

Prior to the CSPR, DFID was providing so-called strategic/unrestricted funding (funding whose use is not tied to any particular project or programme) to large CSOs, under s-called Programme Partnership Arrangements (PPAs). DFID headquarters was also funding CSOs through a variety of other schemes, most notably UK Aid Direct, previously known as the Global Poverty Action Fund (GPAF). Under this scheme, small and medium CSOs were able to apply for funding for specific projects. Other schemes included UK Aid Match, under which CSOs conducting public appeals could ask the Government to match the donations they receive, and the International Citizen Service, under which DFID was covering the expenses of young adults who volunteered overseas.

The review was due for publication in November 2015 but was ultimately delayed by a year: it was finally published on 4 November 2016. The headline announcement was that PPAs would be replaced with a new scheme called UK Aid Connect, which would "support coalitions of CSOs, think tanks, public, private and third sector organisations to help find solutions to current complex situations whilst tackling tomorrow's challenges." It is not yet clear precisely how this scheme will work in practice, or how much funding will be available. DFID's other main mechanisms for funding CSOs have been retained, with funding for UK Aid Direct and UK Aid Match being doubled.

Reaction to the Review was mixed. There was some concern about the scrapping of PPAs, particularly since UK Aid Connect will not open for applications until March 2017, three months after the end of the last PPAs. The expansion of UK Aid Match was welcomed but there was some concern that it might encourage CSOs to focus on appeals which will capture the public imagination, rather than on those which are most needed. More broadly, the delay to the Review's publication had clearly caused some frustration, but many were broadly supportive of its content.

1. Launch of the Review

DFID has historically provided a significant level of funding to Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), both through its country officers (many of which outsource particular projects to CSOs) and through direct funding from DFID headquarters.¹ In 2014/15, contributions to CSOs from DFID's headquarters (£1.4bn) made up 25% of the Department's total bilateral aid spending.² In July 2015, DFID announced its intention to conduct a Civil Society Partnerships Review (CSPR). The review was to cover all aspects of DFID headquarters' funding to CSOs, including funding levels and funding mechanisms. Funding to CSOs from DFID country offices was to be outside the scope of the Review.³

1.1 DFID's work with Civil Society Organisations before the Review

Prior to the CSPR, DFID was providing so-called strategic/unrestricted funding (funding whose use is not tied to any particular project or programme) to large CSOs, under s-called Programme Partnership Arrangements (PPAs). Between 2011 and 2014, DFID provided £120m per year to 41 CSOs through PPAs, with CSOs receiving anything between £151,000 and £11 million.⁴ Earlier this year, some organisations saw their PPA funding extended until the end of 2016, including the Institute of Development Studies (IDS), the Overseas Development Institute (ODI), the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED), the Centre for Global Development, Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO), Bond (the umbrella organisation for England-based CSOs) and the Disability Rights Fund (DRF).⁵ The Independent Commission for Aid Impact (ICAI) evaluated DFID's use of PPAs in 2014: it concluded that PPAs were "helping to drive innovation in the recipient organisations" but that DFID "would achieve more with its PPAs if it were to refocus on the added value they can provide as a strategic instrument." ICAI's overall conclusion was "green-amber."⁶

DFID headquarters was also funding CSOs through a variety of other schemes, most notably UK Aid Direct, previously known as the Global Poverty Action Fund (GPAF). Under this scheme, small and medium CSOs were able to apply for funding for specific projects. Other schemes included UK Aid Match, under which CSOs conducting public appeals could ask the Government to match the donations they receive, and the International Citizen Service, under which DFID was covering the expenses of young adults who volunteered overseas.

¹ DFID uses this as an umbrella term for third sector organisations.

² DFID, [Annual Report and Accounts 2015-16](#), p38

³ DFID, [Civil Society Partnership Review - FAQs](#) [accessed 11 October 2016]

⁴ ICAI, [DFID's Support for Civil Society Organisations through Programme Partnership Arrangements](#), p1

⁵ DFID, [Civil Society Partnership Review - FAQs](#) [accessed 11 October 2016]

⁶ ICAI, [DFID's Support for Civil Society Organisations through Programme Partnership Arrangements](#), p1

2. Methodology

DFID's methodology for the review included online engagement with CSOs (through Twitter, surveys, and blogs to which CSOs were invited to respond); and group meetings with CSO representatives. DFID hosted one such meeting in mid-October 2015 (though capacity was expected to be insufficient for all interested CSOs to attend); DFID also co-hosted meetings with Bond, NIDOS and the Cymru Africa Hub (umbrella organisations for CSOs based in England, Scotland and Wales respectively).⁷

In addition, some organisations made written submissions to DFID. Bond's [submission](#) included the following ten recommendations:

- Diversify funding mechanisms
- Strengthen policy dialogue and development
- Support the strengthening of civil society capabilities
- Foster innovation
- Adopt a broader "Results Agenda 2.0" (focusing on longer-term results)
- Facilitate partnerships and collaboration
- Promote improved learning and shared expertise
- Invest in sustainable development solutions, beyond projects (strategic funding)
- Engage the public with development issues
- Develop the capacity of southern CSOs

⁷ DFID, [Civil Society Partnership Review guidance](#) [accessed 11 October 2016]

3. Results and reaction

The review was due for publication in November 2015 but was ultimately delayed by a year: it was finally published on 4 November 2016. The report, when it finally emerged, set out four main mechanisms by which DFID headquarters would fund CSOs in the future.⁸ This chapter looks at each of these mechanisms in turn, and examines reaction from the international development community.

UK Aid Match

This scheme re-opened for applications on the day the CSPR was launched (applications had been closed temporarily). Under this new application window, up to £30m will be available – double the amount which was available under the previous window. The window will be open until 31 January 2017. DFID is inviting applications addressing any of the Global Goals, but expects that “some successful proposals will focus on the following areas”:

- Addressing the immediate and underlying causes of malnutrition among children under 5 years and adolescent girls and women of reproductive age (including those who are pregnant or breastfeeding).
- Supporting DFID’s commitment to enable 24 million additional women and girls to gain access to family planning between 2012 and 2020, using rights-based, voluntary approaches.
- Supporting the UK’s commitment to work together to stamp out modern slavery worldwide.⁹

Commenting on the expansion of UK Aid Match, Toby Porter argues:

U.K. Aid Match, through which the government commits to meeting donations made by members of the public, has been an attractive and successful scheme, but there are risks in resourcing it further with money saved by DfID’s ending strategic support to charities. By its nature, U.K. Aid Match favors larger and financially stronger organizations that are best placed to mount large appeals and raise large sums from the public.

Agencies proposing ideas to DfID will also inevitably need to focus as much on what will capture the U.K. public’s imagination as to what they hope to achieve and how. Appeals and issues that do best with the U.K. public are often but certainly not always the appeals for which funds are most needed. It is worth remembering that U.K. Aid Match developed and was managed out of DfID’s communication department, not out of the civil society department or any other program team.

DfID will have to work hard to ensure that their announcement of a turbocharged U.K. Aid Match does not structurally favor the largest charities at the expense of smaller ones and that funds are not drawn away from forgotten emergencies, issues, and indeed organizations, where previous strategic support allowed charities

⁸ DFID, [Civil Society Partnership Review](#), 4 November 2016

⁹ Gov.uk, [UK Aid Match](#) [accessed 11 November 2016]

to focus and allocate resources without having captured the imagination of people in the U.K.¹⁰

UK Aid Direct

DFID announced in the CSPR that this scheme would re-open for applications (applications had been closed temporarily). Under this new application window, up to £40m will be available – double the amount which was available under the previous window. The window will be open from 14 November 2016 to 31 January 2017, for projects beginning in late 2017. As with UK Aid Match, DFID is inviting applications addressing any of the Global Goals, but expects that some successful proposals will focus on nutrition, family planning or modern slavery.

UK Aid Connect

This is a new scheme whose launch was announced as part of the CSPR. Applications will open in March 2017, for projects beginning later that year. According to the CSPR, UK Aid Connect will “support coalitions of CSOs, think tanks, public, private and third sector organisations to help find solutions to current complex situations whilst tackling tomorrow’s challenges.” It is not yet clear precisely how this scheme will work in practice, or how much funding will be available.

Commenting on the new scheme’s launch, Molly Anders argues:

As a forum for cross-sector collaboration and funding, U.K. Aid Connect could prove an innovative way to draw partners together. Such funding streams are relatively novel for bilateral donors and could facilitate the U.K.’s new commitment to deliver 30 percent of its official development assistance through government departments other than DfID.

For example, the fund could help players across sectors learn how to partner for international development. Some U.K. government departments such as the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and Ministry of Defence have [a poor track record in aid delivery](#). Likewise, many corporations and diaspora groups have little to no experience working in international development.

“Given that other department beside DfID are spending aid money, it wouldn’t be surprising to try and get some cross-government benefits,” said Sarah Mistry, director of effectiveness and learning at NGO network [Bond](#).

One individual working for a domestic anti-slavery advocacy organization said that in advance of U.K. Aid Connect’s launch, DfID is working to build ties among institutions and create more incentives for collaboration.

“We were told we could access DfID funding if we could partner with an international [development] organization working on the same issue,” said the source, who spoke to Devex on condition of anonymity to preserve business ties. “It’s very new, but we are trying to figure out how that would work,” the person said.¹¹

¹⁰ T Porter, ["Opinion: Taking back control? UK reviews support to CSOs"](#), *Devex*, 9 November 2016

¹¹ M Anders, [DFID explains future of NGO funding](#), *Devex*, 8 November 2016

UK Aid Volunteers

This will include an expanded International Citizen Service with triple the number of volunteers, plus “any future DFID relationship with volunteering agencies.” As with UK Aid Connect, details are scarce at this stage.

Broader reaction

Implicit in the CSPR is the fact that PPAs, under which DFID provided strategic/unrestricted funding of CSOs, have been scrapped. In her foreword to the CSPR Rt Hon Priti Patel, Secretary of State for International Development, discussed “moving away from the previous system of upfront, unrestricted core funding [...] to the largest CSOs, and towards a more open, competitive and outcome-focussed model of funding.” DFID’s other main mechanisms for funding CSOs have been retained, with ICS being included under the UK Aid Volunteers umbrella.

Commenting on the scrapping of PPAs, Molly Anders says:

One particular concern for many larger PPA recipients is timing. Flexible funding will run dry in December, three months before U.K. Aid Connect opens for bids. Other funding streams aren’t an option for larger organizations including [Oxfam](#), [Save the Children](#), [Islamic Relief](#), [ActionAid](#) and others with annual income over 10 million pounds per year and don’t qualify to apply for U.K. Aid Direct.

“If you’re a large organization there’s nothing for you in here. OK, U.K. Aid Match, potentially yes, but U.K. Aid Direct is not for you, and U.K. Aid Connect has a big gap before the first money’s available,” [Sarah] Mistry {Bond’s director of effectiveness and learning} said.¹²

More broadly, reaction to the CSPR was mixed. Toby Porter highlights the extent to which its publication was delayed:

The review itself, almost 18 months in the making, reads as a bit of a disappointment, a “damp squib” in fact. The conclusions and proposals are clear enough and had been widely anticipated. Collectively, however, they read like the sort of output that DfID’s able and experienced civil society team could have readily produced at the end of two day away-day, a week or two after Justine Greening’s formal announcement of the review in July 2015. Inevitably, expectations had been raised higher by the 18 month length of the process, and I am not sure from that perspective whether they have been met.¹³

Notwithstanding the delays Graham Mackay, chief operating officer at Bond, welcomed the review’s publication:

Bond welcomes the publication of this important review. We look forward to building on the existing collaboration to further strengthen the partnership between DFID and civil society in

¹² M Anders, [DFID explains future of NGO funding](#), *Devex*, 8 November 2016

¹³ T Porter, [“Opinion: Taking back control? UK reviews support to CSOs”](#), *Devex*, 9 November 2016

delivering outcomes for people experiencing poverty and suffering around the world.¹⁴

¹⁴ ["CSPR emphasis importance of civil society in UK's role in the world", Bond, 4 November 2016](#)

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