The UK Department for International Development (DfID)

Accountability Assessment 2011/2012 Results

Summary briefing

Michael Hammer and Lauren Cumming

Introduction

This summary brief captures headline findings of the 2011/12 assessment of the UK Department for International Development's (DfID) accountability capability using the *Pathways to Accountability II* framework[1]. The assessment was carried out by the One World Trust as part of the One World Trust's and London School of Hygiene's joint ESRC funded project to research accountability of key global actors involved in global climate governance. Further detailed analysis will be released as part of the project's research publications. For more information about the project see the last page of this briefing.

The *Pathways to Accountability II* framework measures organisations' *capability to be accountable* to their stakeholders, including their ability to align their day to day practice with their commitments as expressed in organisational policy and strategy. It does so through assessing organisations' global policies and management systems (those that are valid and applied across the organisation) with respect to the four dimensions of accountability which formed the core of the 2005 framework – Transparency, Participation, Evaluation, and Complaints and Response – and also reviews a fifth dimension, Accountability Strategy. This dimension was added to give greater weight to the importance of a conscious overarching approach to accountability. Further, the revised version of the framework contains a number of indicators that focus on quality assurance, effectively testing whether an organisation has mechanisms in place that allow it to keep track of its own performance in practice, and translate these findings into an organisational learning and improvement process.

Figure 1: The key dimensions of the revised *Pathways to Accountability II* Framework
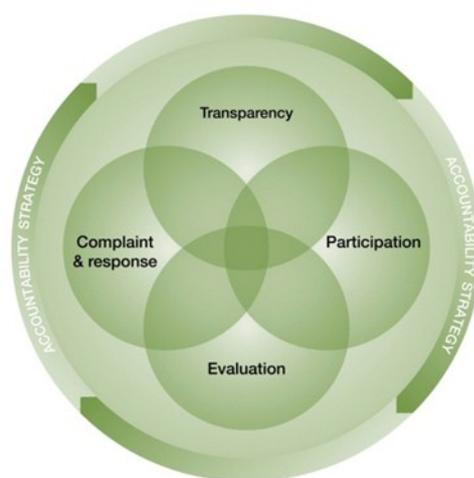
The UK Department for International Development (DfID)

Established in 1997, the UK government's Department for International Development's aim is to reduce world poverty. To this end, DfID provides development assistance which contributes to poverty reduction. DfID has three main functions: distributing UK aid, conducting development research, and providing technical assistance.

At the headquarters level, DfID is organised in various divisions, departments and units, several of which have responsibilities relevant to this assessment. In particular this includes the Openness Unit, the Aid Transparency Steering Group, the Private Sector Department (PSD), the Civil Society Department (CSD), the Evaluation Department, the Human Resources Division (HRD), the Internal Audit Department (IAD), and the Counter-Fraud Unit. In addition there are three other bodies which are not DfID divisions, which are important to DfID's accountability: the Independent Commission for Aid Impact (ICAI), the International Development Select Committee (IDC) of the UK Parliament, and the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman.

> **Box 1: Basic facts about the organisation**
>
> **Organisational structure:** Government department
> **Headquarters:** London and East Kilbride, UK
> **Countries of operation:** 78 received bilateral assistance and 36 received direct financial aid (FY2010/11)
> **Number of employees:** 2654 (1331 at HQ level)
> **DFID Aid Programme expenditure:** £7.689 billion (FY2010/11)
> **Net operating costs:** £7.104 billion (FY2010/11)
> **Website:** www.dfid.gov.uk

---

[1] Hammer, M.; Lloyd, R.; et al. (2011): *Pathways to Accountability II: The revised Global Accountability Framework,* London, One World Trust

Summary of findings

Overall, DfID meets many principles of good practice as set out in the framework in relation to the transparency, participation and evaluation dimensions, and performs more poorly in relation to the accountability strategy and complaints and response dimensions. In general, more of DfID's policies meet the standards of best practice than its management systems. DfID's quality management systems are generally poor, with exception of that for evaluation, which meets best practice. Table 1 shows the unweighted scores for DfID by individual dimension, and the total weighted score, which is calculated as the sum of the weighted individual indicator scores. The narrative findings are outlined below.

Table 1: DfID's aggregate scores in each dimension

Ref. No.	Dimension	2011/12 Score (%)
1	Accountability Strategy	22
2	Transparency	66.7
3	Participation	36.6
4a	Evaluation	86.6
5	Complaints and Response	29.4
Total	**Weighted Score**	**53.7**

Accountability Strategy

Accountability strategy is a new dimension in the revised framework. Accountability strategies demonstrate organisations' understanding of and commitment to their accountability relationships with their stakeholders and support their abilities to exercise leadership on accountability and related reforms.

In terms of accountability strategy, DfID does not meet many best practice principles. The Department identifies its stakeholders in its website and has signed up to two external accountability commitments. However, DfID has not provided evidence of a stakeholder mapping exercise, nor does the Department identify in a single source the mechanisms it has in place to deliver accountability to key stakeholder groups.

Transparency

Transparency is the provision of accessible and timely information to stakeholders and the opening up of organisational procedures, structures and processes to their assessment. An organisation that is transparent enables its stakeholders to monitor its activities and hold it to account for its commitments, decisions and actions. Being transparent helps organisations build trust among their stakeholders and avoid challenges of secrecy.

DfID meets most best practice standards in this area in terms of policy, although some of the management systems needed to support these policies are quite weak, with the notable exception of a system for building staff capacity in this area which meets best practice.

Participation

Participation is the active engagement by an organisation of both internal and external stakeholders in the decisions and activities that affect them. Best practice in this dimension means that stakeholders should have opportunities to influence decision making, and not just possibilities for approval or acceptance of a decision or activity. Participation strengthens ownership and buy-in for what organisations do by those they affect.

External stakeholder participation

Overall, DfID struggles to meet many best practice principles in relation to external stakeholder engagement. Strategies for engaging with some specific external stakeholder groups exist, but DfID fails to make the necessary clear commitments in relation to consultations and stakeholder involvement in policy development that would bring the department in line with best practice. In addition, evidence provided reflects a lack of sufficient management systems in place to support staff to engage with external stakeholders.

Good Governance standards

As a government department with no identifiable 'members' as such and its leadership and accountability being tied into a wider process of democratic legitimisation, the DfID's internal policies and management systems is assessed in line with the framework against good governance as opposed to 'member control' principles.

Here, DfID fulfils best practice in terms of its governance.

Evaluation

Evaluation is the process through which an organisation monitors and reviews its progress against goals and objectives, reports on results, and feeds learning from this into future planning and practice. Evaluation ensures that an organisation learns from and is accountable for its performance.

DfID's evaluation policies are very strong, fulfilling all best practice criteria. Some of DfID's management systems in this area fulfil best practice criteria; in other cases, DfID performs well but could strengthen the systems it has in place.

Complaints and Response

Complaint and response mechanisms are channels developed by an organisation that enable internal and external stakeholders to file complaints on issues of non-compliance with the organisation's own policy frameworks or against its substantive decisions and actions, and which ensure that such complaints are properly reviewed and acted upon. Complaint and response mechanisms are accountability processes of last resort, but are an important way for organisations to demonstrate that they are serious about being accountable and interested in learning from their mistakes.

External complaints handling

The Department's external complaints policy meets several best practice criteria, although no protections are offered to external complainants. However, the management systems in place to support this policy are very weak.

Internal complaints handling

DfID's whistle-blower policy has some key weaknesses, including the lack of protections afforded to internal complainants. Management systems meet few best practice principles.

Current reform processes underway in the organisation

Not yet integrated in the assessment are a number of processes which, according to DfID, are currently underway within the Department, and which may shape its accountability capability once concluded and put into practice. They include:

- A 'refresh' review of DfID's (2009) evaluation policy
- A handbook development by the Evaluation Department to provide guidance on standards and procedures
- A Steering Group on Embedding Evaluation which has been tasked to assess DfID's existing evaluation systems and develop proposals for embedding a culture of evaluation in DfID.

Key policies and external standards the organisation commits to

The following table lists the key policies that reflect the Department's main commitments to accountability towards its stakeholders, as well as the external standards/codes of conduct to which the Department has committed itself. It is not exclusive.

Table 2: Key policies and external standards DFID commits to

Dimension	Policies
Accountability strategy	N/A
Transparency	Freedom of Information Act 2000 International Development (Reporting and Transparency) Act 2006 UK Aid Transparency Guarantee
Participation	Operational Plan 2011-2015 DFID Private Sector Department The Engine of Development: The private sector and prosperity for poor people Taking Forward the Findings of the UK Multilateral Aid Review
Evaluation	Building the evidence to reduce poverty: The UK's policy on evaluation for international development Framework Agreement between the Department for International Development (DFID) and the Independent Commission for Aid Impact (ICAI)
Complaints and response	Complaints Procedures How to blow the whistle
External standards/codes	International Aid Transparency Initiative

Power, Equity & Accountability in Global Climate Change Governance

About the project

On a planet in which all countries and sectors are increasingly interconnected, climate change affects people and societies around the world and at all levels. Responding to the long term and complex impacts of climate change has emerged not only as an economic and technical problem, but also as a governance challenge at global level. Without equitable and accountable structures and processes of policy and decision making it will neither be possible to shape the consensus around key principles required for a joint global response to climate change, but the world will also fail in developing a long term vision for ensuring the sustainability of development.

For the years 2010 to 2012 a research team from the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine and the One World Trust have come together for an ESRC-DFiD funded project: "*Challenging the Development Paradigm: assessing accountability and equity of global institutions in climate-change governance responses to the poor*".

In this three year research programme the team explores how global and national organisations who play an important role in responding to climate change-induced threats to poverty-alleviation and public health, are preparing themselves institutionally to meet these challenges. Specifically, it asks how these actors remain responsive and accountable to their key stakeholders, especially those poorest and most vulnerable to the impact of climate change, and seek to develop a conceptual framework in which the role and dimensions of accountability can be understood in the context of the governance and provision of global public goods and sustainable development.

The programme studies and engages with several of the key institutions that shape global policy and influence national response to climate change-induced threats to poverty-alleviation and public health, and connects these findings with national level realities through a country reference study. The specific organisations the research focuses on include the World Bank (IBRD), the World Health Organisation (WHO), the World Trade Organisation (WTO), and the UK's Department for International Development (DfID) as a bilateral development agency with considerable global funding and policy reach. The project works in Ghana as the country case study.

Objectives

In broad terms the project works to the following objectives and phases:

1. Assessing accountability of global organisations
2. Exploring institutional preparedness and responsiveness
3. National responsiveness reference-study
4. Building concepts and theory for future research and policy

The partnership

This research brings together two specialist institutions: The **London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine**, with Dr Susannah Mayhew leading as Principal Investigator, contributes its expertise on policy analysis; poverty, vulnerability and climate change assessments; and methodological developments. The LSHTM has conducted climate change research for many years, and staff members sit on the IPCC. The **One World Trust**, led by its Executive Director Michael Hammer as chief collaborating partner, is one of the leading non-academic institutions working on accountability of global, state and non-state institutions, and accountability in policy oriented research and advocacy. Its work on measuring accountability provides the conceptual lynchpin for this research.