



Response to the International Development Select Committee Inquiry on the 2010 Millennium Development Goals Review Summit

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INTRODUCTION

About VSO

1. VSO is an international development agency with over 50 years of experience working in a variety of settings worldwide. We take a unique approach to tackling global poverty, by placing committed volunteers with carefully selected partners - from grassroots groups to government ministries. Our 1600 volunteers use their skills to improve the impact of aid efforts for poor and marginalised people. By working closely over time with partner organisations, they provide the right support to help ensure that local development efforts deliver greatest impact and value for money.
2. The content of our submission to this enquiry will focus on question one: the role of DFID in delivering agreed strategies. The submission will look at those areas where VSO has a particular focus: namely, in education (MDG2), health (MDG4-6), HIV and AIDS (MDG6), wealth creation (MDG1) and gender equality.

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Key Recommendations

- VSO commends the UK Government for the international leadership shown during the Summit. We urge DFID to continue to press other states to meet their commitments in order to ensure the MDGs are met by 2015.
- *Learning for All*, DFID’s education strategy for 2010 – 2015, provides a clear direction of travel for the UK’s contribution to MDG2. DFID should continue to pursue this strategy.
- The chronic shortage of health workers is the greatest crisis facing developing health systems. DFID should look at domestic and international solutions to stem the ‘brain drain’ of health workers, including looking at possible changes to the UK’s immigration and citizenship framework.
- DFID should continue to drive progress on universal access to prevention, treatment, care and support for those living with HIV and AIDS.
- VSO welcomes DFID’s focus on wealth creation as a means to alleviating poverty. DFID should work to ensure that the proceeds of growth are shared by all of society and that the means to accessing markets – such as microfinance – are made available to all, including marginalised groups.
- The UK Government should continue to support the newly established UN Women’s agency through strong political leadership and ambitious financial commitments.

SUMMIT OUTCOMES

3. VSO welcomes the continued commitment of the UK Government to reaching the target of spending 0.7% of GNI on aid by 2013. We commend the Government, and DFID in particular, for demonstrating global leadership at this critical time.
4. Progress towards reaching the MDGs by 2015 remains perilously off track. We are concerned that other nations are not set to reach the 0.7% target and that global leaders look set to fail to meet the commitments on aid set at Gleneagles in 2005. The UK Government must continue to press other governments to meet their commitments in order to ensure that the MDGs are met by the 2015 deadline.

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THE ROLE OF DFID

Education

5. VSO welcomes the continued commitment shown in the Summit Outcomes Document to MDG2. We particularly welcome the recognition of the use of targeted, evidence-based measures to ensure that more children are given access to primary education. This includes abolishing school fees and providing school meals. We also note the recognition that increasing the quality and quantity of teachers is key to ensuring that quality education is provided and also that increasing the capacity of national governments is central.
6. DFID has a key role to play in the delivery of these pieces of work. VSO believes that DFID's recently published education strategy – *Learning for All* – presents a clear programme for action across a number of these areas. VSO believes that DFID should continue the delivery of its strategy in *Learning for All*.
7. DFID should continue to work with partners to manage the abolition of school fees. As DFID has recognised in the past¹, the removal of fees has resulted in increases of 12% in primary school enrolment in Mozambique, 18% in Kenya and 23% in Tanzania. We hope that DFID also continues to recognise the need to reduce the cost of schooling in areas where fees have already been abolished. This includes providing support for uniforms and other costs.
8. Increasing the quality of teachers is key to improving the quality of education. VSO believes that pre and in-service training should be prioritised along with ongoing professional development. Our volunteers in programmes around the world have also recognised the consequences of low-salaries, which directly affect the effectiveness of teachers. DFID's commitment in *Learning for All* to train 130,000 teachers each year in DFID programmes was particularly welcome and we hope that the new Government continues to meet this commitment in order to close the gap in the global shortfall of teachers.
9. VSO believes that DFID can continue to contribute to the progress towards MDG2 by improving the management of teachers. Recent

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¹ 'Learning for All, DFID's Education Strategy 2010 – 2015', DFID, 2010

research by VSO² highlighted the importance of teacher management in improving the quality of teaching available to students. This includes:

- Improving education management information systems to inform systems for the training, recruitment, deployment and continuing professional development for teachers.
- Capacity building for teachers and head teacher training through continuing professional development opportunities.
- Capacity development of education managers in schools, and at district, provincial and national levels; and effective appraisal systems for teacher and head teachers.

“The greatest challenge facing health systems in developing countries is a chronic lack of health workers.”

10. VSO’s research also highlighted the importance of supporting education systems to increase participation of key stakeholders in planning, implementation and monitoring of education programmes. We were pleased that *Learning for All* reflected a number of these recommendations, which are key to driving progress on MDG2, and hope that DFID will maintain its commitment to these programmes of work ahead of the 2015 deadline for the MDGs.

Health

11. We welcome the commitments made across the health MDGs. VSO currently has 10 dedicated health programmes in addition to 18 HIV and AIDS programmes and 13 disability programmes, which make contributions towards our health goal. In Malawi – VSO’s largest dedicated health programme – we work closely with DFID through a Sector Wide Approach (SWAP) to provide support for health systems strengthening at all levels of the health system.

12. The greatest challenge facing health systems in developing countries is a chronic lack of health workers. We are pleased that this has been recognised once again in the Outcome Document. However, significant steps have to be taken if the health MDGs are to be reached by 2015. VSO was disappointed that the Summit Outcomes Document did not provide a commitment for the

² ‘Managing Teachers’, VSO and CFBT, 2008

international community to reach the global target of at least 3.5 million new health workers by 2015 in countries with an acute shortage. We urge DFID to provide leadership internationally on this target and also to ensure that at least 25% of all new UK Government funding to health is directed at human resources for health systems, in line with the WHO's 50:50 principle³.

13. We also urge DFID to provide clear leadership to find solutions to combat the 'brain drain' of health workers, particularly from those countries with the most acute needs. While the UK's support for the Code of Practice on the international recruitment of health personnel is welcome, we believe that the UK Government and DFID have a role to play in working to combat brain drain through policy solutions that look both domestically and internationally. While we recognise that the movement of health workers is a global problem, requiring joint international action, we also recognise that the actions of the UK may contribute towards the hollowing out of African health care systems. *Brain Gain*⁴, a recent report by VSO, recommended that the UK Government look to realign its immigration and citizenship regulations to take account of this problem by increasing flexibility for those on the path to citizenship. VSO believes that increased flexibility would encourage health workers to return to their countries of origin temporarily or permanently. We urge DFID to show leadership on this issue within government, particularly in light of the upcoming discussion on the UK's approach to immigration and citizenship. VSO also believes that formal temporary training schemes, such as the Medical Training Initiative, should be expanded to allow health workers to come to the UK to train with a defined route of return to their home health system.

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HIV and AIDS

14. DFID has shown strong global leadership over recent years and has demonstrated a progressive vision for HIV and AIDS. For example, DFID's commitment to investing in R&D in vaccines and microbicides sets a gold standard for donors. However, we

³ 'World Health Report 2006', World Health Organisation

⁴ 'Brain Gain', VSO, 2010

believe that there are areas that have to be improved if we are to reach MDG6.

15. In particular, we would welcome a renewed focus on the disproportionate effect of HIV and AIDS on women and girls. VSO has highlighted before the importance of looking carefully at the barriers women and girls face at every aspect of prevention, treatment and care and support⁵. In 2008, DFID committed to ensuring that gender analysis is integrated into national AIDS programmes and that targets and indicators are developed to measure the impact of AIDS programmes on women and girls. We hope that this commitment will continue and DFID will continue to set a gold standard for international donors.
16. We would urge DFID to ensure that care and support are maintained as key components in the universal access agenda. A report in 2004 showed that 90% of care for people living with AIDS takes place in the home. As the home carers are disproportionately women, universal care is important to alleviate the burden on women and girls.

Eradicating Poverty through Wealth Creation

17. VSO welcomes the emphasis placed on wealth creation in DFID's recent Structural Reform Plan. This recognises the important part that economic growth can play in improving the lives and livelihoods of the poorest people. DFID's focus in this area will contribute to the success of the UK's contribution towards reaching MDG1.
18. We welcome the recognition in the Outcomes Document that economic growth has to be both inclusive and equitable. VSO believes that the proceeds of growth should be shared by all of society and that balanced growth - between geographical areas, by gender and by sector - should be the aim of DFID programmes. DFID has a role to play in ensuring that balanced growth becomes a reality in order to ensure that the effects of increased economic inequality - such as reduced social capital and declining educational outcomes - are not felt by developing countries.

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⁵ 'Walking the Talk', VSO and ActionAid, 2007

19. In making progress towards achieving MDG1 through wealth creation programmes, DFID should play a leadership role in ensuring that marginalised groups are given equal access to opportunities. VSO welcomes the recognition in the outcomes document that agriculture plays an important part in the economic empowerment of women. We are pleased that DFID has made the promotion of the economic empowerment of women and girls a central theme of its work on wealth creation and we hope that DFID can provide leadership internationally in this area. Similarly, DFID should work to ensure that opportunities such as microfinance are opened up to marginalised groups. This includes those who are marginalised due to discrimination and also those who face barriers to participation due to lack of transport or language.

20. VSO would like to see an increased emphasis on micro-enterprise development as DFID develops its role in wealth creation programmes. Through our Secure Livelihoods work, VSO has been engaged in a number of enterprise development projects which aim to expand the capacity and access to markets of fledgling businesses run by poor and disadvantaged groups. Through a strategic partnership with a leading management consultancy, VSO has pioneered the use of market assessments for micro-enterprises, which, has directly resulted in increased incomes for communities who previously missed out from the benefits of growth.

Gender Equality

21. VSO commends DFID for the role it has played in the establishment of UN Women – the UN’s consolidated agency for gender equality and women’s empowerment. UN Women is a significant step forward in reforming the UN’s architecture to better deliver for women and girls.

22. Many of the barriers that face women and the subsequent poor outcomes in health and education have at their roots the persistent inequality between men and women. This inequality continues to blight the lives of women and slows progress in the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. It is our belief that the establishment of UN Women, and the increase in

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resources it brings to tackling inequality, will drive progress towards the MDGs.

23. VSO believes that gender mainstreaming in the UN has failed and that UN Women will have a role in improving the work of all UN agencies to ensure that they are all focused on delivering results for women and girls.
24. The strong leadership that DFID showed during the discussions to establish UN Women must now be matched by a strong commitment of political will and financial resources if it is to achieve its potential. DFID has a key role to play in making this happen. We urge DFID to provide ambitious funding to UN Women and become a major donor to the new agency.