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# **Submission to DFID Bilateral Aid Review**

## **October 2010**

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## 1. Introduction

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.

As DFID looks to redefine its priorities, we welcome the opportunity to contribute to this review. The change in Government presents a chance to look afresh at DFID's work and establish the most effective use of resources for the years to come. As DFID looks to review its country footprint, VSO would welcome more clarity regarding the criteria used to select countries and the emphasis being placed on different measures reported in the poverty results offers.

VSO believes that a robust framework that ensures the UK's aid efforts continue to be effective and targeted must underpin the UK Government's approach to international development. Therefore, VSO welcomes DFID's focus on establishing measurable results that can be monitored over time to ensure the effectiveness of the UK's work.

VSO continues to urge DFID to place the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) at the heart of its approach to tackling global poverty. In looking to achieve the MDGs, VSO believes that DFID should continue to invest in people centred and participatory approaches. As such, DFID should focus on strengthening government capacity to respond to its citizens and strengthen the capacity of civil society to hold their governments to account. We are mindful that the outcomes of such work are often intangible and less easily measured than others. We encourage DFID to ensure that work such as civil society capacity building is not lost and that these types of activity, which often contribute to tackling the underlying causes of poverty, are strengthened over the years to come.

## Summary of Key Recommendations

- DFID should provide clarity regarding the criteria it will use to select the countries it works with and how it will prioritise indicators from the poverty results offers.
- In seeking to measure effectiveness of aid interventions, DFID should ensure that less tangible outcomes (such as building capacity in civil society organisations) is considered.
- DFID should continue to ensure that its work fits with locally-designed country development plans and that it plans within the Paris and Accra aid effectiveness framework and the EU/EC Division of Labour.
- In seeking to determine its Country Portfolio DFID should focus on those least developed countries at most risk of failing to reach the MDGs.
- DFID should ensure a participatory approach to selecting programmes and priorities to ensure they are responsive to local needs. DFID should ensure that an exclusion analysis is conducted to ensure that the impact on marginalised groups is taken into account.
- VSO believes that DFID should continue to invest in strong public services in the countries in which they work. High levels of investment in recruitment, training and retention of health workers and teachers are essential to provide quality healthcare and education in developing countries.
- DFID will also need a clear approach on working with BRICs, and poor people within Middle Income Countries, but this may be best approached through regional or multi-lateral instruments.
- VSO welcomes the focus on wealth creation. We encourage DFID to consider the impact of wealth creation on societies *as a whole*. VSO believes that the proceeds of growth should be shared by all of society and that balanced growth should be an aim of DFID programmes.
- VSO welcomes DFID's focus on women, maternal health and child mortality. In working to address these issues, DFID should be mindful of the need to address the underlying causes of gender inequality which are the drivers of these gaps in outcomes.
- VSO is mindful of the focus on value for money. Value for money can be achieved by working closely within relevant donor frameworks, by supporting SWAPs and Basket Funding where institutions are strong enough, and by supporting civil society to monitor governments spending and hold institutions to account.

## 2. The DFID Country Footprint

VSO currently works in 44 countries in Africa, Asia, the Pacific and Latin America and the Caribbean. Over time, we have seen the effectiveness of the UK, and other donor's, development programmes. As a general principle, we believe that the practical application of a people centred approach means that DFID's programmes should be established in consultation with local populations, governments and NGOs. VSO believes that in establishing the new country footprint, DFID should consult extensively with DFID country offices and ensure that the views of governments and local partners and local people are taken into account.

Under the previous Government's Public Service Agreements (PSAs), DFID's focus on 26 countries provided a way to concentrate efforts on those countries in most need of investment. VSO believes that DFID should continue to identify priority countries. In doing so, co-ordination between donors will be essential and VSO encourages DFID to plan within the Paris and Accra aid effectiveness framework and the EU/EC Division of Labour. Such an approach ensures increased effectiveness of donor aid and works to ensure the best value for money for the UK Government.

We believe that the MDGs should provide the framework for identifying priority countries and measuring the impact and results of DFID programmes. Progress towards the MDGs – particularly in the years leading up to the MDG deadline in 2015 – should be the key measurable for donors. We agree with the Government's approach – set out by the Secretary of State and others – to invest more resources in least developed countries (LDCs) and fragile states. In general, these countries require most effort to reach the MDGs. VSO has recognised this in our latest strategy and is working to increase our work in LDCs and fragile states.

DFID's approach of devoting 90% of expenditure to Least Developed Countries has been an important lever, but we believe it risks becoming too restrictive. VSO believes that DFID's approach has to be flexible enough to respond to areas where the need is greatest and where the MDGs are most at risk of not being achieved. Recent debates have focussed on the future of DFID's role in India and China. We believe DFID should continue programmes in India and China, but change the nature of these programmes. In India, we believe that DFID should continue to support development programmes while also working to build commitment and capacity within the Indian government in order to reach the poorest and focus on improving development outcomes.

In China, we believe that DFID should retain a presence in-country, albeit small, due to the key importance of China in the global development architecture over

the next decade. The main focus should shift to facilitating south-south education and policy engagement. VSO's programme in China has had significant influence on basic education programmes and HIV-AIDS outreach efforts for most-at-risk-populations. However we are particularly interested in working with China over the decade to come because of their role in south-south education, especially in Africa.

Our experience shows that, among Middle Income Countries, governments often lack the will to support the poorest. In these countries, where effective Government systems exist, DFID should support civil society to increase their capacity to hold their government to account.

### 3. Wealth Creation

DFID's structural reform plan (SRP) made a number of commitments regarding the UK's contribution to wealth creation in developing countries. VSO welcomes the attention given to wealth creation in the SRP and recognises that economic growth is a key driver in improving the lives and livelihoods of the poorest people. VSO's work in this area has increased significantly in recent years and our Secure Livelihoods goal area now accounts for 19% of our expenditure and our work with around 270 partner organisations.

VSO welcomes DFID's proposed focus on property rights, microfinance, SME finance and investment climate reform. Based on feedback from VSO partners in 25 countries, we recommend that DFID should ensure that such projects are inclusive of marginalised groups such as women, young people, those living with HIV & AIDS, people with disabilities, and ethnic minorities. It is crucial that marginalised groups are given access to the same benefits and opportunities in order to ensure that they too can take advantage of the proceeds of growth. For example, many countries where VSO works have benefited from the availability of microfinance, but it remains inaccessible to poorer people. This can be due to lack of transport to reach the urban centres where the finance providers operate, failure to meet literacy requirements, or prohibitively high interest rates that make the schemes unaffordable to small-scale entrepreneurs. DFID should recognise that full-cost recovery models of microfinance, although seen as more sustainable, are often unaffordable to poor people and DFID should address the need for alternatives for poorer individuals through research and piloting new initiatives that address this need.

In addressing property rights, DFID should use its influence to support pro-poor land reforms, but should also take into account the need for support to ensure implementation at community level. For example, in Zambia, VSO supports the Zambia Land Alliance, which campaigns for pro-poor land policy reform, to raise its profile through research, communications and campaigns work and so influence government as it reviews the current land policy. The key focus is women's right to land, since it is unequal access to land which is a key barrier to improving livelihoods. This work is complemented by work with traditional leaders, where VSO works with local NGOs, to support women who care for children orphaned by HIV&AIDS, to negotiate with village elders to gain access to land, so that they may be able to grow crops and earn money to feed children in their care.

In promoting investment climate reform, DFID should recognise that not all foreign investment is beneficial to the economies of developing countries and DFID should promote best practice standards for investing companies. This should include paying corporation taxes for investment in services for local populations, ensuring adequate environmental controls and building capacity of

host country nationals to lead the enterprise. DFID can also play an important role in building the capacity of national governments to increase the collection of national taxation income.

The promotion of economic empowerment of women and girls should be central to DFID's wealth creation programmes. It should not be seen as a separate strand of activities but as a key growth area that is promoted through all of DFID's work on wealth creation. A continued focus on agriculture should be central to the economic empowerment of women – as women make up the majority of smallholder farmers. VSO's work on food security in Sub-Saharan Africa shows the critical need for better access for women to agricultural advice, affordable inputs and support to form market linkages.

VSO recognises that unemployment – particularly among young people – is a key driver of poverty. Most developing countries have young populations, with up to 50% of people under the age of 30. DFID should acknowledge the imperative to support young people to gain access to employment or to manage their own enterprise to guard against future poverty. For example, in Kenya, VSO works with youth polytechnics, building management capacity and helping to develop demand-driven short courses. This has increased the quality of training provided to young people, enabling them to find employment.

While the effect of wealth creation programmes in developing countries is overwhelmingly positive, VSO encourages DFID to consider the impact of wealth creation on societies as a whole and work to alleviate negative effects. 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. Balanced growth, as demonstrated in recent research, leads to improved societal outcomes including greater social cohesion, improved educational outcomes and increased life expectancy<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> 'The Spirit Level' – Wilkinson and Pickett, 2009

## 4. Climate Change

As part of our recent strategic review, VSO has decided to place increased emphasis on climate change over the coming years. Currently, twelve VSO programmes are undertaking work on climate change or planning to start work in the next year. VSO is mindful that the prominence of climate change will only increase over the coming years. In this light, we believe that DFID should ensure that climate change financing should be additional to ODA and channelled through the UK Framework Convention on Climate Change.

As the Bilateral Aid Review moves forward, VSO believes that DFID should assess carefully its climate change priorities for each country. A comprehensive review of DFID's work in this area will be crucial in establishing priorities for the coming period. As such, VSO welcomes DFID's plan to carry out pilot Strategic Climate Programme Review in six countries. DFID should ensure that these reviews support the ability of local people to participate in decision-making about climate change-related initiatives. This should include investment in training, empowerment and access to these discussions by representatives of affected people. These reviews should also consider the regional impact of climate change across geographical eco-systems and the potential to address the impact of climate change in more than one country to achieve a holistic response – for example, the Mekong Delta, Coral Triangle or the Himalayas. Finally, DFID should ensure that the reviews take into account gender dimensions of climate change, and how these can be related.

VSO welcomes DFID's commitment to renewable energy programmes and also to develop new programmes to improve forest management and tackle illegal logging. VSO would like DFID to invest more in research and development of renewable energy technologies that are accessible and affordable for poor people. VSO has successfully promoted the use of lower carbon technology, such as improved wood stoves, in several countries, but there is still a need for wider access to such technology. With regards to forest management, these initiatives should actively involve communities in the decision-making process. Such initiatives should engage forest communities in sustainable economic development effort that work towards both wealth creation and conservation.

VSO is very supportive of the establishment of an Advocacy Fund to help poorest countries to participate in international negotiations. VSO has many years of experience of building capacity of local partners to participate in such events in our Education and HIV & AIDS work and we believe this to be an effective strategy. One successful example of this approach in education is the Fast Track Initiative (IMF/WB/major donors) which has a \$17m two year fund to develop civil society which enables poor countries to participate in education lobbying.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.educationfasttrack.org/financing/epdf/csef/>

Currently national education coalitions in 40 countries receive grants, administered by Global Campaign for Education (GCE), from the FTI fund. The fund provides a capacity support program which builds the ability of national education coalitions to perform as effective partners at the national level. Through the fund, grassroots teachers and education officials have been able to attend key discussions, which has influenced the thinking of UNESCO and ILO on the issue of contract teachers (para-teachers).

## 5. Governance and Security

VSO currently works on governance issues in Africa, Asia, the Pacific, Latin America and the Caribbean. In these programmes, we aim to support the development of governance systems, structures, policies and practice that empower disadvantaged people to participate in the decisions that affect their lives. Therefore, our contribution in this area of work will focus on governance and the participation of poor people.

VSO believes that DFID should continue to support democratic governance reforms that enhance voice and accountability. DFID should support matters of equity and equality in political processes by investing in programmes that build capacity of civil society organisations that represent the interests of poor people. VSO's programmes have demonstrated the benefits of working with local governments to support greater transparency, accountability and engagement with a view to greater responsiveness to the voice of local people.

Responding to the views of local people should also be central to DFID's approach in aid spending. VSO welcomes DFID's commitment to give poor people more power and control over how aid is spent. DFID should continue to support budget monitoring and accountability projects and promote mutual accountability of aid. It will be important to support this not only at the national level but also supporting people to hold their elected representatives and council managers to account. In Kenya NGO partners are working to give poor people more power and control over how aid is spent, pressing for more transparency in aid.

DFID should support greater citizen participation in planning and budgeting to support specific reform programmes run by governments. This builds accountability and also rewards success and incentivises successful councils through further allocation of funds. Promotion of efficient decentralised services increases efficiency and equity in service delivery.

DFID can make a strong contribution in conflict-affected states by supporting community peace-building initiatives which build social cohesion. Basic services cannot be delivered successfully where people are in fear of violence. VSO works on these approaches through programmes of mobilisation of national volunteers and other partnerships in Pakistan, Northern Uganda, Mindanao, the Burmese border, as well as in post-conflict fragile states such as Sierra Leone. From these experiences we believe DFID should support holistic peace-building and post-conflict recovery programmes. There is a need for a commitment to invest in conflict transformation in conflict-affected countries and regions. Programmes should encourage the engagement of women in peace-building processes since this has been proven to give improved possibilities of success. Institutional strengthening for local government, which enables the delivery of

essential services is crucial. These programmes need to be complimented by rapid recovery of social services such as education and primary health care.

## 6. Direct Delivery of the MDGs

VSO believes that placing the Millennium Development Goals at the heart of the UK's approach to development is central to ensuring that the fight against global poverty is most effective. As such, VSO welcomes the recognition by DFID that the MDGs should provide the key results by which progress and impact will be measured following the Bilateral Aid Review. VSO's experience – particularly in Health and Education – provides us with a unique perspective to comment on how DFID can best utilise its resources in the countries it chooses to work in.

### 6.1 Education

The global numbers of out-of-school children are dropping too slowly: 69 million children are currently denied a primary education, and UNESCO predicts that as many as 56 million children could remain out of school in 2015. VSO was very happy to see the Secretary of State making a commitment to these children at President Zuma's education summit in South Africa in July. A majority of the 69 million children are girls, - yet to deliver education for these girls would be a major way to address inequality between women and men.

VSO has consistently argued that for MDG2 to be achieved governments need to increase investment in education to enable them to train and retain sufficient numbers of professional trained teachers. This view was recently endorsed by the National Audit Office's report on DFID's support to primary education, which noted that:

'Teachers are the costliest input to primary education, but DFID has not had a close enough focus on their recruitment, pay, behaviour or performance'

It went on to argue that:

'DFID country operations should: ensure that its programmes evaluate levels of teacher pay against average wages for educated people, assessing whether budgets can afford sufficient teachers; influence government pay policies where analysis indicates un-affordability; and work with Education Ministries to ensure that incentives and sanctions on school and teacher performance are adequate to motivate improvement'.

These recommendations are consistent with VSO research<sup>3</sup> over the last ten years which calls for increased investment and technical support to:

- Improve teacher incentives and support;

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<sup>3</sup> As detailed in our 2008 report 'Managing Teachers' - which synthesises our research into teacher motivation in 14 countries. See [www.vsointernational.org/what-we-do/advocacy/campaigns/valuing-teachers.asp](http://www.vsointernational.org/what-we-do/advocacy/campaigns/valuing-teachers.asp).

- Strengthen education management systems and
- Ensure parents and civil society are able to hold their governments to account

VSO believes that education in the majority of situations in developing countries is best delivered by public sector education systems. These systems are best placed to provide education on the scale required. However, in order to manage public education governments in developing countries need long-term predictable financing. This can usually be best delivered through sector-wide approaches. Governments need both finances and technical support to design and improve systems to scale up the recruitment and retention of the public sector workforce. VSO is wary of the trend in some countries in the South to recruit under-skilled contract or para-teachers, and institutions such as ILO and UNESCO also share these concerns. We would urge DFID to be very cautious about supporting any teacher-schemes that weaken the technical skills and terms and conditions of the teaching workforce.

The need to recruit and train over 10 million new teachers<sup>4</sup> for primary education alone also presents an unprecedented opportunity to redress long-standing imbalances in numbers of male and female teachers in both primary and secondary schools. DFID should use this opportunity to pursue its commitment to gender equality. Women teachers and other education workers act as powerful role models for girls, and education for girls about reproductive health plays a powerful role in reducing maternal and infant mortality rates. To achieve this, DFID should support governments to:

- Improve incentives, living and working conditions for female teachers, including making adequate arrangements for maternity and paternity leave;
- Prohibit discrimination against women, people with disabilities and teachers from excluded minorities in teacher recruitment, posting and promotion systems;
- Set and monitor national goals or quotas for hiring women and be flexible with age and education requirements for women (while providing compensatory in-service training);
- Invest in recruitment campaigns that encourage women to break with powerful social norms and adopt a teaching career;
- Allow head teachers to control teacher recruitment for their schools, to enable them to balance the number of male and female teachers;
- Implement measures such as ensuring accommodation for female teachers is safe – particularly in rural areas where active recruitment and training of women from the local area may be necessary;
- Improve the quality of Education management information systems (EMIS) that encourage the active participation of teachers, head teachers, parents and civil society organizations in decision making.

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<sup>4</sup> UNESCO Institute for Statistics, *Global Education Digest 2010*, p57

VSO believes that DFID's current education strategy – *Learning for All* – is still fit for purpose. Having been involved in the consultation and development of the strategy, along with other partners, VSO believes the conclusions reached provide a clear direction for future action. VSO would welcome a commitment from the Government to continue with the strategy outlined in *Learning for All*.

## **6.2 Health, including HIV and AIDS**

VSO welcomes DFID's commitment to make significant improvements in maternal mortality figures, and improve access to reproductive and sexual health services. These are both essential to the quality of life for women and for addressing the inequality between women and men that is a driver of poverty in developing countries. DFID should support less developed countries to increase the number and quality of trained health workers, without which it will be impossible to meet the ambitions laid out. And DFID should continue to support a strong focus on the role of communities in health care - especially on aspects such as HIV and AIDS and malaria.

The three Millennium Development Goals concerning health outcomes are closely related and require a joint and comprehensive approach. A fundamental constraint that affects all the MDGs is weak health systems and specifically the shortage of trained health workers (including nurses, midwives, doctors and other health workers such as community health workers and home-based caregivers). There is a strong correlation between those countries with a low ratio of health workers to population and those countries that are struggling to meet the MDGs. Without a strong and effective health system in place, development challenges cannot be overcome.

The health MDGs can only be achieved if health system strengthening and disease-specific responses are addressed equally. DFID should adopt and implement a strong approach to support countries that achieve universal access to a basic health care package.

VSO believes that DFID should use its influence to ensure that the donor community provides the necessary support to allow the abolition of user fees so that services are provided free at the point of use. Where this happens countries must also be supported to simultaneously increase health worker numbers to meet the demand stimulated by the abolishment of user fees. The recent health worker strike in Sierra Leone following user fee abolishment should be noted in this context.

### **i. Human resources for Health**

A key indicator of an effective health system is a sufficient number of well skilled, supported and motivated health workers to meet the needs of the population. However, WHO statistics report that in at least 57 countries there are chronic

shortages of health workers with the necessary skills. Every VSO health programme includes in-service and pre-service training of health professionals in order to improve standards of health care delivery.

Discussions about health workers also seldom take into account the critical role of community and family home based caregivers in providing or facilitating access to healthcare for many of the most poor and marginalised. They help bridge the geographical or psychological gaps that often separate poor people in their communities from more formal health and social services. The innovative frontline contributions of community and home-based caregivers and community –based organisations providing health services need to be recognized, strengthened and fully integrated into broader health systems. Over 80% of community caregivers are poor women, and many are living with HIV themselves, yet most receive little or no training, equipment or compensation for their work. Strengthening and properly supporting caregivers contributes to poor women’s increased voice in decision-making and economic empowerment while also improving the quality of the healthcare services they provide for their clients. VSO recommends that DFID should continue to support government and INGO’s efforts to scale-up health worker recruitment and training and also to recognise the role of community caregivers within formal health systems.

VSO has long recognised the impact that the migration of health workers from Sub-Saharan Africa to the UK and other OECD countries has had on African health care systems<sup>5</sup>. As the Government embarks on a renewed debate on the UK’s immigration and citizenship framework, VSO believes that the effects of the design of that system on development outcomes should be fully taken into account.

## **ii. Strengthening of health management systems**

Strengthening health management is essential for any health system to be able to operate effectively. Weak health service management and the absence of robust management information systems contributes to poor health service delivery, increases the incidence of corruption and explains why health systems in many developing countries are in crisis or facing near collapse.

For example, in Cambodia, quality improvement assessments conducted by the Ministry of Health, have shown that 3 hospitals supported by VSO health management advisers have improved significantly in terms of their overall management and service delivery

At the grassroots level, many women are anchoring a community-based response to wider health issues such as HIV and AIDS. It is often home-based caregivers who link women to sexual and reproductive health services, ensure access to testing, treatment, counseling, and directly provide care and support

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<sup>5</sup> Brain Gain, October 2010

(e.g. improving treatment adherence, and creating support systems in response to issues such as domestic violence and land grabbing). It is essential that formal health management systems are linked to informal community initiatives to ensure strong referral systems and increased access to health services for vulnerable groups.

In Zambia for example, 40% of ART patients are being referred through Thandizani's, a home-based care provider. Focus group discussions with beneficiaries led to improved integration of services in relation to ART, HBC and nutritional support leading to increased accessibility of services.

VSO recommends that DFID should continue to support all stakeholders' contributions towards the strengthening of health management at all levels of the formal and informal health system.

### **iii. Communities are part of every health system**

A strong and effective health system is one that is truly responsive to the needs of the communities it serves. Ensuring that the voice of communities is properly represented within the health system at local, district and national level is one way of increasing trust between health providers and the recipients of health services. In order to ensure services are responsive, relevant and accountable people should be given opportunities to participate in health and community systems strengthening initiative. This should include in the design, implementation, monitoring and decision making of health programmes and services. This will ensure systems build on what is already in place and are responsive to household and community needs and priorities as well as increasing access by facilitating the identification of barriers that prevent people from accessing health services.

For example, in Uganda, VSO volunteers working in Miriyya sub-district have helped to build the capacity of village health volunteer teams. There is evidence of a reduction in malaria rates as a result of health education work that increased the distribution and use of bed-nets. Village volunteers are now focusing their efforts on promoting the importance of childhood immunisation, clean drinking water and improved hygiene and sanitation.

A VSO volunteer in Malawi has facilitated the formation of consultative committees both at district and community level where the needs of specific groups are discussed. This has led to the development of a disability-friendly programme whereby hospitals in the district have introduced specific times to meet people with disabilities and have also employed people with disabilities as village health workers to mobilise fellow disabled people to use the health facilities.

VSO recommends that DFID should continue to support community engagement when planning health services. Community health services need to be included in health budgets, and countries should have a clear policy on the 'voluntary' provision of labour (e.g. in Home based care efforts). DFID should provide technical support to assist countries to reduce their dependence on women's unpaid labour. It is not sustainable and prevents women from playing their due role in the economy.

### **6.3 Poverty, Hunger and Vulnerability**

DFID should ensure that it balances its support between macro level interventions such as investment in climate reform with support at grass roots level – for example, support to social protection initiatives – to ensure that poor people are not left vulnerable whilst macro level processes take effect.

DFID must take into account that the most vulnerable – such as the elderly, orphans and other vulnerable children and people with disabilities – are in need of social protection support and should increase the priority given to supporting governments of developing countries to develop appropriate predictable support.

For example, in Tanzania, VSO works with local partners providing small cash transfers to grandparents caring for children orphaned by AIDS. Evidence from these initiatives shows that these small amounts can generate other income-earning opportunities; it is therefore an investment that gives good value for money and enables grandparents to feed, clothe and protect their grand children.

DFID should work with governments and civil society organizations to support successful social protection mechanisms and income generating activities to promote the economic empowerment of marginalized groups and ensure access for the poorest and most marginalized.

Vulnerability is increased in societies where there is no access to healthcare that is free at the point of demand. Low income families can be thrown into poverty by relatively small 'shocks' such as illness in the family or even pregnancy. Our research programme – Valuing Health Workers – in 4 countries in Africa and Asia, has shown us that where rural families have to pay for basic health services or medicines they will usually sell agricultural assets such as seeds or livestock in a family emergency. Therefore we believe that the introduction of free health care, such as recently in Liberia and Sierra Leone supported by DFID, is a valuable component of reducing vulnerability and hunger.

We believe that poverty and vulnerability are very often a result of unequal power structures in society. In VSO we refer to exclusion, as the way that elites control access to power and social mores condemn some groups in society to poverty (HIV positive people; ethnic minorities; the disabled; gay men and others). Therefore DFID should continue to find ways to support civil society and people's

groups who can struggle to achieve greater voice and participation in society. VSO supports many examples of this sort of work, for example legal aid and advocacy for women's inheritance, and rights to land in Zambia.

Lastly, poverty and vulnerability are exacerbated by lack of access to education. VSO emphasises education as a major part of our programming, especially for girls. Because when you educate a girl she will on average earn 25% more, be less likely to contract HIV, and more likely to have a smaller and healthier family. For every year a girl spends in school her family's income will increase by 20% - but there are still 41m girls around the world who do not even have the chance to start primary education. Investment in increased teacher training for improved girls' education is therefore a cost-effective way of achieving impact on a national scale.

## 7. Women

VSO welcomes DFID's whole-hearted commitment to gender and the role of women in development. We particularly commend the prioritisation of maternal health and family planning, and improvements in women's and men's roles in the management and use of natural resources. VSO would recommend the following interventions:

- DFID should build on gender work of last twenty years and make gender a priority for its bilateral aid. Internally this could include prioritisation in management objective setting, and resource allocation, and externally could include monitoring and evaluation of its bilateral funding from gender equality perspective, and exerting its influence with national governments to adhere to their international agreements. Internally, DFID could benefit from increasing expertise both in London and in the field to ensure that gender issues have a strong voice in the department.
- DFID should take a gender equality approach to alleviating the poverty suffered by women, men and vulnerable groups such as sexual minorities. This means working with women but not in isolation. It means investing in interventions that address power relationships between women and men, looking for constructive roles that men can play (e.g. as HIV carers, nurses, fathers) in development, and tackling the poverty caused by gender norms and stereotypes for sexual minorities (e.g. loss of livelihood, lack of HIV information).
- DFID should prioritise *within* the gender agenda, thus making best use of resources. VSO would recommend the two areas enumerated below. These largely reflect its most effective gender equality interventions and are based on consultation with partner organisations (private sector, government, non government) and with men and women in groups excluded by caste, ethnicity, disability, rural location, HIV status and age. They represent value for money in development.

Firstly, promote **Gender disaggregated monitoring and evaluation**. This can generate evidence about results based on fact. Data collection over a number of years that records the results of development interventions for men and women would be the single most effective factor in making DFID's bilateral aid more effective. As stated above women, and organisations that represent them, should have a voice in grass roots monitoring processes as a practical way to increase impact.

Secondly, **Gender advocacy at all levels**. The voice of women as well as men in programme level monitoring makes all the difference between an effective intervention with clear results for its intended beneficiaries, and wasted aid.

DFID's influence at national and international levels can make gender inequality a primary consideration in key national poverty policy e.g. public sector workers, social protection, access of girls to school, and investment in maternal health.

Within the MDG commitments, DFID should prioritise support for

- Health: maternal health, family planning, support countries to recruit more health workers but with improved gender balance within cadres, training of health staff so that women, men and sexual minorities have access to services (including health prevention within families e.g. malaria, HIV prevention e.g. Men who have Sex with Men). This means including community health as part of the whole health service and its budget
- HIV and AIDS: support for unpaid female carers (the vast majority of community carers being female), and for the involvement of men in home based AIDS care, mainstreaming men into national and international prevention guidelines, action against gender based violence
- Education: support for the recruitment of more female teachers including at senior levels, support for inclusive education through training of teachers in girl-friendly methods, support for parent associations that will enable girls as well as boys to access school, stronger education management that considers gender inequality in its systems and resource allocation, and generation of unbiased teaching- learning materials
- Governance: support for women's voice to heard on an equal basis with men in local government planning processes, support for women to involved in leading roles in community governance - especially after conflict or in the least developed and fragile states
- Wealth Creation: increased access to market chains and interventions the increase the value of their participation in markets, women's property rights
- Climate Change – support for women farmers in adapting to climate change, especially around food production, support for female natural resource users as well as male users e.g. water, fuel, fish, common grazing
- Participation: Recognition of women's contributions at different levels through promotion of National Volunteering - in own community or elsewhere in own country

## 8. Value for Money

VSO's unique approach is to increase the capacity of partner organisations, which, in turn, creates organisations that are more effective and able to make aid more effective. VSO works by providing people, not funds, and these volunteers enable organisations to be more effective and achieve more impact. By placing highly skilled volunteers with partner organisations, we increase the ability of those organisations to make the best use of aid. Similarly, by developing robust systems for those organisations and passing skills to local people we ensure that our development solutions are sustainable and act in the interests of local populations. We welcome DFID's focus on value for money and on ensuring a results oriented approach that ensures the effectiveness of the UK's aid spend.

We believe that supporting advocacy initiatives in-country is a cost-effective investment that brings important benefits that continue to produce benefit over time. Supporting Health Ombudsman organisations, or education coalitions for example is relatively low cost, but these groups can hold government to account and demand improvements in services. For example African governments have signed the Abuja Commitment to dedicate 15% of their budget to health – but very few countries actually comply with this. Therefore if advocacy can pressurise their governments to meeting their commitments this will make the whole development effort more equal and effective, releasing donor funds for other needs.

VSO commends the emphasis on providing value for money, but also cautions against a simple numerical cost-benefit analysis. All development agencies know that it is cheaper to reach the urban poor than the rural poor, or it is cheaper to reach large numbers of the general population with health messages rather than disabled people. DFID should not be driven by cost-benefit analysis to target only the 'low-hanging fruit'. VSO works through an exclusion analysis that assesses which sectors of society are marginalised from development initiatives. The results are very often indigenous people, people living with HIV, the disabled, rural women and so on. DFID needs to ensure that programmes continue to reach the marginalised, because it is these groups who are still being left behind by development efforts. This approach also leads to better services. VSO has seen that more inclusive services are better quality services, and thus will attract and can serve larger numbers of clients.

DFID should support NGO accountability initiatives and support for civil society efforts to hold governments to account e.g. with regard to UNCAC country reviews. Anti-corruption efforts should be supported as these build trust and accountability at local level especially. VSO has supported local anti-corruption NGOs in their local fights against bribery and impunity but these groups are vulnerable to local pressures or violence. *Visible* support from DFID (even if small scale) can make a significant difference. DFID should also support budget monitoring and accountability projects to promote mutual accountability of aid.

Where well-designed, Sector Wide Approaches (SWAPs) and basket funding are the most cost-efficient ways to support southern governments, through their line ministries. This is highly beneficial to support countries to make the essential long-term investments in their public sector workforce, which is of fundamental importance in improving public services such as schools and health services. DFID in Malawi has seen successful results from investment in donor basket funding.

Lastly, as in the previous point, working with others is the easiest way to ensure value-for-money and efficiency. Therefore VSO believes that DFID should support aid effectiveness and more efficient spending through engagement with other donors on specific areas of expertise, in line with the Paris and Accra agreements.