

## **Draft VSO response to IDC submission on the SDGs, August 2015**

### **Introduction**

VSO is an international development agency with 55 years' experience of addressing poverty and disadvantage through our unique approach of working through volunteers. By working closely over time with carefully selected partners – from grassroots organisations to government ministries – volunteers provide the right support to help ensure that local development efforts deliver greatest impact and lasting change.

VSO's vision for the post-2015 framework is one which:

- Treats people as active partners in development rather than passive beneficiaries of aid;
- Tackles power imbalances that lie at the heart of poverty, inequality and marginalisation
- Supports the democratic ownership of development agendas

VSO actively engaged throughout the Post 2015 negotiations, focussing on the importance of women's participation and influence in decision making as a driver for greater gender equality in all areas, highlighting the critical role that volunteers will play in implementing and localising the SDG agenda, supporting a qualified and inclusive teaching workforce to enable quality education for all and highlighting the need for the new agenda to invest in primary health care and strengthen capacity in all countries.

We welcome the opportunity to contribute to this inquiry on the SDGs. VSO is also on the steering committee of the Beyond 2015 UK coalition and an active member of the Gender and Development Network, and supports their submissions to this inquiry.

***Which SDGs should DFID prioritise and how? Should the priorities be country specific or an overarching strategy of SDG priorities applied to all partner countries?***

### **Prioritisation of SDGs**

1. We should build upon the lessons learnt from the MDGs are that people living in poverty experience a multiple and complex challenges. It is not, therefore individual goals that will result in poverty reduction and sustainable development, but the interplay of goals. DFID should therefore look at the SDGs in their entirety, leaving room for country offices to work with governments and local partners and communities to prioritise goals based upon the specific needs and plans of countries.
2. We recommend that DFID should focus on "leave no-one behind" as a key principle, and a cross-cutting theme to all its work. In applying this principle DFID country programmes

should start from the basis of helping to identify the most marginalised groups and excluded people within the different country and thematic contexts it works in. Note the UK Government as a whole must also do this exercise nationally to determine the focus of its SDG work..

- In prioritising its agenda around the leave no-one behind principle, DFID should look to partner with and support groups that represent the needs of the excluded and marginalised populations so that its works, and the work of DFIDs wider development partners, is driven by the needs and priorities of these communities.
3. Integral to this is support for data collection, disaggregation and analysis. This requires investment from donors like DFID in capacity building within national statistical offices of developing countries as well as supporting the creation of new data sources including citizen generated data and recognising civil society data which will often provide a more realistic and up to date picture of poverty and inequality. (see below for further expansion of these points)
  3. DFID should be congratulated for championing the inclusion of a standalone SDG goal on gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls as well as the need to mainstream gender equality throughout the framework. However they must now continue to champion gender equality globally to ensure that implementation and action matches the ambition that has been agreed. Learning from successive frameworks has showed that implementation is slow and uneven and is where the ambition falls down. Gender inequality persists despite previous international agreements such as CEDAW, the Beijing Platform for Action, the International Conference on Population and Development Programme of Action (ICPD PoA) etc, and many of the most progressive aspects have yet to be fulfilled.

In investigating priorities for implementation and action, DFID must map out what aspects of the framework risk not being priorities by other governments or donors. Often the work needed to tackle the deep rooted discriminatory attitudes and social norms that perpetuate gender equality are unlikely to receive sufficient donor attention as it is not a 'quick win'. Therefore we suggest that this could continue to be key focus for DFID where it builds on the work it has already done to tackle the social norms that perpetuate FGM but seek to take a holistic approach the issue to tackle social norms and patriarchal attitudes as a whole which would help tackle a fundamental structural cause of gender inequality. this is not about prioritising one target but rather a whole goal and recognising that until men and women, boys and girls have equality, women and girls will continue to suffer disproportionately from poverty and climate change. Much political will is needed to address these issues and the UK Government and DFID, working in partnership with its grassroots partners and peers can help to foster the required political will. The UK has a high reputation as a donor that has focused on gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls in various aspects, DFID can also within its implementation plan

support the work of more women's rights organisations to ensure that gender equality is being achieved in a way that is guided by the interest of women and girls themselves.  
(Maria/Priya)

### **Follow up and review**

4. The follow up and review section of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development outlines a list of principles that should be applied to follow up and review at all levels but lacks firm commitments to how this will happen. Therefore much work, and political will, is still needed to ensure the process of follow up and review for the SDGs is **participatory**, transparent, people-centred and regular so that it is meaningful. DFID can work with civil society, donors, international institutions, private sector and others to influence national and regional governments to put in place relevant structures and investment to make this happen. Citizen led monitoring of the SDGs is one way that DFID could help to ensure this agenda is relevant and responsive to the needs of people and not simply a nice looking bit of international development text. (see below section on monitoring and indicators for more explanation) Broadly all monitoring at all levels must be transparent, regular - we recommend not less than once every 3-4 years at the national level, involve citizens and civil society and allow time and space for their meaningful involvement and use of their data and reflections.
  
6. Link to youth participation and accountability- Phil/Geors

***How there could be a more coherent approach with other donors towards the SDGs with donors specialising on specific areas for example Education or WASH to reduce duplication etc.***

***How DFID could have a more strategic approach on how it uses contractors, multilaterals, NGOs and its own bilateral country offices to deliver on the SDGs.***

**Donor coordination** *(Tanya would be great to get your input here)*

7. Donor coordination will be fundamental to the success of the implementation of the SDGs.
  
8. Donors need to align behind sector plans of countries rather than imposing their own agendas

8. DFID is a respected leader in the international donor community, and it could play a key facilitative role in bringing together donors- including multilateral, bilateral and private donors to ensure a strategic approach to implementing the SDGs.
9. Basket funding mechanisms (*Purna -you mentioned this, could you expand?*)

***Which SDGs should other UK Government departments focus on?***

10. The Sustainable Development framework is a universal framework, which has applicability in the UK as well as in developing countries. In addition, there needs to be a strong and consistent approach to policy coherence across the UK government- for example across issues of trade, health care and migration (*Clive is there anything more we can get from AFGH on this?*)
11. Interdependencies and relationships with other key departments- e.g the department of health, for link to health recruitment and health worker migration, DCMS for government equalities, FCO for human rights and democracy- we recommend strong Cross-Whitehall mechanisms for monitoring and implementing the new framework, such as a Cross-Whitehall cabinet level committee on international development.
12. Around 10-13% of ODA is spent by Government Departments other than DFID, reaching £1.4 billion in 2013. It is reassuring that the Independent Commission for Aid Impact (ICAI) has recently found that the scaling up of UK aid to meet the 0.7% target 'has not led to a loss of pro-poor orientation'.<sup>[1]</sup> This had been a concern of many stakeholders including the Select Committee itself. As non-DFID ODA spend continues not to be subject to the 2002 International Development Act, we would welcome greater measures to increase the transparency of this spend, for example by implementing ICAI's recommendation that DFID includes more comprehensive information on this spend in its

annual international development statistics report. This will help to maintain the UK's reputation as an influential donor focused on poverty reduction.

---

[1] *A Preliminary Investigation of Official Development Assistance*, ICAI, February 2015  
<http://icai.independent.gov.uk/reports/a-preliminary-investigation-of-official-development-assistance-spent-by-departments-other-than-dfid/>

(*Maria* did you want to add a point about this here-I think the point was about transparency of ODA amongst non DFID departments?)

14. Connection to other youth agendas in the UK and link between ICS and NCS- *Phil* are you able to expand here?

15. Awareness raising and building of public support for aid and development- links to ICS, and public attitudes work (*Heather/Naveed/Emma*)

### ***How will progress be measured? What should be the indicators?***

(*Maria/Priya*)

15. The choice of indicators for the SDGs will have a major impact on the focus of the SDG efforts and therefore the outcomes that are achieved/ prioritised. Therefore indicator selection should not only be a job for statisticians. The indicators picked will need to measure the full ambition of each target, not only part of it as is the case with many of the current indicator suggestions. In this regard VSO has a few principles that we believe need to apply to overall selection of indicators:
- indicators must not be regressive in respect to the agreed target or existing agreements
  - the selection process must recognise the expertise and voice of civil society and those people working day to day on poverty eradication and environmental sustainability
  - they must measure what we need to know, not what we can easily measure (see example below). Where new measurements or methodology is needed, this must be invested in and prioritised.
  - they must not only measure outcomes but also perceptions and qualitative evidence of change. Acknowledging that while quantitative data is excellent for telling us what is happening, qualitative research is vital for telling us how and why it happens.
  - they must be disaggregated by gender, race, class, disability, age, ethnicity, and geography but also allow for further national disaggregation for key groups according to the ambition of the target - ie prisoners in the case of the indicator for target 3.3.

In the most recent list of proposed global indicators produced by the UN, some targets have been reduced to those which are “easy to measure” – for example, proposed indicators under the target on women’s leadership (5.5) are actually a continuation of the MDG focus on the numerical representation of women– a measure of numbers of women in national parliaments. **and local government.** It provides no means to analyse women’s ability to genuinely influence decision making or the level of power entrusted to women in these positions.

16. The UK Government should use its influence as a member of the Inter-Agency Expert Group on SDG indicators to ensure these above principles are adhered to. Further more, the UK Government and DFID should prioritise support for the **Data Revolution** which broadens the provision of data available and enhances capacity to use that data to assess progress on tackling poverty, inequality and environmental degradation for all people. VSO volunteers often report that the basic skills to collect, analyse and use data is patchy and non transparent. In the long term this must be addressed through more statistics included in school curricula and improvements in training of statistical analysis at tertiary level and workforce level to support robust use of statistics. However alongside this in the short term the data revolution can ensure that reporting and data generation is not just the remit of National Statistical Offices but it also fosters broad, multi-stakeholder participation in national reporting. As mentioned above, it is important to recognise that who and how data is collected is just as important as what is collected.

As we look towards creating a more people centred framework, there is an opportunity to promote the role that citizens can play in collecting and validating data. An example of this is the [www.ureport.ug](http://www.ureport.ug) where 287,730 volunteers respond to weekly surveys. Such citizen led data collection could be used to increase accountability and improve service delivery/ responsiveness. VSO has been involved in one such joint Initiative with Collectorate Koraput, UN Millennium Campaign and SOVA called Samadhan. Information available here <http://koraput.samadhan.org.in/>

Data collection and accountability should be a participatory process in order for it to better reflect changes to [deeply ingrained social norms and attitudes that are often key obstacle towards poverty reduction and tackling inequalities.](#)