

Aid to Malawi

Methodology

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This is the first National Audit Office Value for Money study to evaluate a DFID country assistance programme “in the round” and so we paid particular attention to country selection, study design and scoping. We selected Malawi for evaluation after analysis of DFID’s overall portfolio of bilateral aid, taking into account various criteria, including:

- The scale of DFID aid - DFID has spent some £312 million through its country programme in Malawi between 2003-04 and 2007-08, rising from £54 million in 2003-4 to a planned £80 million by 2010-11.
- The importance of DFID as a donor - Malawi remains very aid dependent, and DFID is the biggest bilateral donor, giving more scope for association of outcomes and outputs with DFID’s particular contribution.
- The nature of the programme - DFID’s programme in Malawi is representative of its overall programme in size and diverse in nature, but exhibits a number of innovative features such as the Emergency Human Resource Programme in health and support to the subsidy programme for agricultural inputs.
- Progress towards development goals - Malawi has made mixed progress towards the Millennium Development Goals.
- Performance against objectives - DFID’s own appraisal of its Malawi project portfolio indicated mixed performance against objectives.

Our evaluative approach was designed to answer the main question, “Is DFID achieving what it set out to in Malawi”, over the period since 2003 when the Department set out its aims and objectives through a Malawi Country Assistance Plan 2003/04 – 2005/06, which was followed by another Country Assistance Plan for 2007 – 2011. In deciding our methodology we took into account:

- DFID’s own standard approach to evaluation of its country assistance programmes, including a report on the Malawi programme by external consultants in 2006. The DFID approach emphasises documentary review and interviews with development partners. We designed our own study to complement and supplement this approach rather than duplicate it, with a greater emphasis on primary research outside the donor and government community.
- Our findings from a short inception visit we conducted in Malawi in October 2008 confirmed the selection of Malawi and the feasibility of the main evaluative techniques.

A key design decision was to focus on the areas of health and food security, where DFID Malawi has been particularly active. We did not evaluate in depth its support of primary education because this was in transition to a new programme, and because we plan to examine education in the near future on a DFID-wide basis.

2 Methodology Aid to Malawi

We used the following methods

Selected method

Purpose

1 Evaluation of statistical, financial and economic data

We analysed data produced by the Government of Malawi, donors and NGOs. This included examination and validation of the Department's project assessment and scoring, in terms of how far the scores were justified, and how accurately they had been aggregated to provide overall management data, including trends. At the time of our audit DFID Malawi was migrating to a new resource management system, which affected the accuracy of aggregate data; difficulties we were able to resolve in co-operation with DFID staff.

To determine the level of progress in response to investment.

2 Documentary review

Strategy documents: We examined key documents in the development strategies of DFID and the Government of Malawi, including the DFID Country Assistance Plan, the Government's Poverty Reduction Strategy, other sector specific plans, and DFID's Country Programme Evaluation of Malawi.

To evaluate progress against plans, and identify constraints to progress.

Project documents: We examined project documentation relating to some 30 DFID projects initiated since 2003. Together these represented some 75 per cent of the value of budgeted DFID project spend in Malawi for projects initiated since 2003.

3 Semi-structured interviews

To gather views of development progress and DFID's performance.

We interviewed senior officials of the Ministries of Finance, Economic Planning, Health, Agriculture, Justice, and of key agencies such as the National Audit Office, Anti-Corruption Bureau, National Aids Commission.

We interviewed and held a focus group discussion with local representatives of NGOs active in Malawi, and with Malawian Civil Society Organisations active in the areas of justice, agriculture, health and economic management.

We interviewed representatives of the other donors active in Malawi, including the European Commission, World Bank, Norway, UNICEF and the African Development Bank.

4 Qualitative research with beneficiaries, district officials and local service providers

We commissioned research by specialist development consultants ITAD, who worked in partnership with a Malawi-based firm Kadale. This research employed qualitative techniques (semi-structured interviews with officials and service providers, and focus group discussions with ordinary Malawians), in three locations in each of the three selected districts, one district in each of Malawi's regions. The districts were agreed with DFID Malawi to be representative of the country, and the locations within districts were selected to include remote and less remote communities. Overall, 36 focus group discussions were conducted, as well as 18 semi-structured interviews with senior district officials and a further 54 semi-structured interviews with local service providers. The work yielded some 770 pages of transcripts. NAO staff observed some of this research being conducted.

To capture the views of beneficiaries, district officials and local service providers on progress in the areas of health, agriculture and social protection over the past five years, including the challenges and constraints to service provision. The study also provided insights into the lives of ordinary people and officials, and in doing so, highlighted some of the reality faced on the ground.

The consultants' report is reproduced in full on our website at www.nao.org.uk

Selected method	Purpose
5 Online survey of current and former DFID Malawi staff	To gather views of operations and performance of DFID Malawi.
The survey included current DFID Malawi staff, and other DFID staff who had worked for DFID Malawi at any point since 2003, enabling us to gauge trends. The response rate was 100 per cent for the 2009 current staff and 77 per cent for the former staff who worked for DFID Malawi between 2003 and 2008.	
6 A survey of volunteers working in Malawi through Voluntary Service Oversees (VSO)	To gather views of development progress and issues observed at the point of delivery by service providers or trainers.
A survey of some 100 volunteers working in Malawi under the auspices of Voluntary Service Oversees (VSO), in the health, education and agricultural sectors. Three separate questionnaires were produced, reflecting the differing context of each sector. The overall response rate was 61 per cent, achieved through a combination of hard copy and online responses and facilitation by VSO Malawi.	
7 Meeting DFID Malawi staff	To follow up issues raised by our other work, particularly our review of projects.
We held discussions with DFID Malawi staff whilst in Malawi and by telephone from the UK.	