



National Audit Office

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## **Report**

by the Comptroller  
and Auditor General

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**Department for International Development**

# Improving the lives of women and girls overseas

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National Audit Office

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Department for International Development

# Improving the lives of women and girls overseas

Report by the Comptroller and Auditor General

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National Audit Act 1983 for presentation to the House of  
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Gareth Davies  
Comptroller and Auditor General  
National Audit Office

21 April 2020

# This report assesses whether the Department for International Development is well placed to secure value for money from its 2018 Strategic Vision for Gender Equality

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## Key facts

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**2018**

year the Department for International Development (DFID) launched its Strategic Vision for Gender Equality

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**£4.2bn**

estimate of DFID's bilateral spending in 2018 (calendar year) on programmes with a gender equality focus

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**2030**

target date for delivery of the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals

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- 5** number of interlinked areas of gender equality on which DFID's 2018 Strategic Vision focuses: eliminating violence against women and girls, and supporting sexual and reproductive health and rights, girls' education, women's economic empowerment, and women's political empowerment
- 66%** percentage of DFID's total bilateral spending in 2018 on programmes with a gender equality focus (up 12 percentage points from 2014)
- 33%** National Audit Office assessment of the percentage of DFID's bilateral spending which was incorrectly classified against the Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development's Development Assistance Committee's gender equality policy marker in 2018
- 87%** percentage of programmes with a gender equality focus that met or exceeded DFID's performance expectations

## Key terms

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <b>Bilateral aid and multilateral aid</b> | <p>The former is earmarked spend, usually Official Development Assistance spending (see later definition) going to specific countries, regions or programmes.</p> <p>The latter is provided as core contributions to international multilateral organisations.</p>  |
| <b>Bilateral spending</b>                 | <p>Figures for bilateral spending are based on DFID's Statistics on International Development data – all figures are net of receipts and are presented on a calendar year basis.</p>  |
| <b>Gender equality</b>                    | <p>The state of being equal in status, rights and opportunities, and of being valued equally, regardless of sex or gender identity and/or expression. Working towards gender equality very often (but not always) means working to improve the situation of girls and women, because they are more often affected by discrimination or a lack of opportunities.</p> |
| <b>Gender equality policy marker</b>      | <p>Developed by the Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development, the application of this approach allows donors such as DFID to estimate spending in support of gender equality.</p>   |
| <b>Mainstreaming</b>                      | <p>Where gender equality is not the main objective, but gender considerations are fully integrated into all aspects of the programme/approach. In doing so, the different needs, priorities, opportunities and constraints faced by women, men, girls and boys are recognised.</p>  |
| <b>Official Development Assistance</b>    | <p>Official Development Assistance (ODA), often referred to as aid, is the internationally agreed criteria for funds provided to developing countries or multilateral institutions to fight poverty and promote development.</p>  |
| <b>Social norms</b>                       | <p>Informal, mostly unwritten, rules that define acceptable, appropriate, and obligatory actions in a particular group or society.</p>  |
| <b>Sustainable Development Goals</b>      | <p>In 2015, the United Nations agreed its 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The agenda has 17 Sustainable Development Goals, the aims of which are to eradicate extreme poverty, fight inequality and injustice, and leave no one behind.</p>  |
| <b>Theory of change</b>                   | <p>A methodology which maps the assumptions which inform planned interventions. It is regarded by DFID as an "essential tool in designing and appreciating the complex network of factors which influence project outcomes".</p>  |

# Summary

**1** Gender inequality is prevalent across all aspects of life – in the workplace, in civic engagement, in health and in education. Worldwide, 63 million girls are out of school; women make up just 24.3% of representatives in national parliaments; and one in three women will be beaten or sexually abused in their lifetime. In 2018, globally, around 48.5% of women participated in the labour force, 26.5% behind men's participation. And women spent three times longer on unpaid care work preventing them from engaging in paid work, facing lower wages where they do obtain paid work, and facing other social and legal barriers. In 2018 the Department for International Development (DFID) spent £4.2 billion of bilateral aid (66% of its total bilateral spend) on programmes that targeted gender equality as a policy objective.

**2** In March 2018, DFID launched its *2018–2030 Strategic Vision for Gender Equality* (2018 Strategic Vision). This set out what it describes as a 'call to action' asking more of itself and of the UK government, and its multilateral and civil society partners, to help empower women and girls, recognising that gender equality is fundamental to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030.

**3** DFID's commitment to gender equality is long-standing. Its 2018 Strategic Vision builds on DFID's *2011 Strategic Vision for Girls and Women* and its *2007 Gender Equality Action Plan*. The UK International Development (Gender Equality) Act 2014 made it a legal requirement to consider gender equality in all of the UK's Official Development Assistance expenditure. And the *2015 UK Aid Strategy* promised to prioritise the needs of girls and women throughout the government's development spending, stating "no country can successfully develop if half its population is left behind". Stakeholders told us that DFID can be considered a world leader with regard to its work to improve gender equality.



## Scope of this report

4 For DFID to assess whether it has secured value for money from its work in this area, it needs to identify its impact in improving gender equality while understanding the cost of its interventions. Having strong management arrangements will support both these elements. In this report, we examine:

- whether DFID took a robust approach to developing its 2018 Strategic Vision;
- how DFID has translated its 2018 Strategic Vision into practical action; and
- whether DFID knows what progress it is making against the aims of its 2018 Strategic Vision.

5 We set out our audit approach in Appendix One and our evidence base in Appendix Two. Appendix Three provides details of DFID's work on gender equality in Ethiopia and Nepal (see Figures 18 and 19), which we visited for fieldwork for this study.

6 As we were finalising the report, the UK government was responding to the COVID-19 pandemic. DFID was, alongside the international community, providing an immediate humanitarian response to the pandemic overseas. And it was reprioritising its work to mitigate the pandemic's health, social and economic impacts in the short and long term. Given its assessment that the impact of COVID-19 will amplify existing gender inequalities, DFID is looking to make sure gender equality is central to its response. With the pandemic still unfolding at the time of writing, this report does not consider DFID's actions.

## Key findings

### Developing DFID's 2018 Strategic Vision

7 **DFID's 2018 Strategic Vision is ambitious and wide ranging.** It builds on and extends the scope of its earlier work in this area. Specifically, it added women's political empowerment as a fifth area of focus (alongside, for example, girls' education and sexual and reproductive health and rights); included specific objectives to support the most marginalised groups and focus on interventions across women and girls' lifecycles; and promised action to improve evidence, data and progress measurement. It also, for the first time, invited the wider development community to help DFID achieve its ambitions for gender equality (paragraphs 1.3 to 1.7, and Figure 1).

**8 DFID drew on a wide range of evidence to develop its 2018 Strategic Vision.** For example, it consulted widely both internally and externally, inviting input from colleagues in the UK and overseas and from a range of external organisations involved in gender equality work. DFID commissioned and responded to findings from an external review of its implementation of its earlier strategic vision in this area. It reviewed research on what works for existing priority areas and commissioned reviews on areas for consideration in the new vision. UK-based stakeholders were generally positive about DFID's consultation process, but considered it could have done more to invite input from overseas implementing partners, civil society organisations and beneficiaries. From our discussions with implementing partners in Ethiopia and Nepal, we agree that their knowledge of the challenges faced locally could have provided a useful perspective (paragraphs 1.8 to 1.14 and Figures 3 and 4).

**9 DFID did not set up its 2018 Strategic Vision in a way which allowed it to assess overall progress and value for money.** DFID is clear that, against the backdrop of its decentralised approach to implementation through its network of country offices, its 2018 Strategic Vision aims to set a broad framework for work in this area, rather than a 'blueprint' for specific action. DFID did not intend to support its 2018 Strategic Vision with a costed plan for implementation and specific outcome measures. This was, in part, because it considered it needed more analysis to support an assessment of costs for some elements, such as its approach to 'mainstreaming'. This choice limits its ability to assess progress and consider value for money. While it completed an exercise to identify gaps in its capability, it did not assess the resources required to deliver each of its 2018 Strategic Vision's key components (paragraphs 2.9 to 2.11).

## Implementing the Strategic Vision

### **10 DFID aims to achieve the goals outlined in its 2018 Strategic Vision through a combination of programming and influencing activity.**

DFID's estimate of its bilateral spending on programmes with a gender equality focus was £4.2 billion in 2018 (an increase of 71% on 2011) across programmes that look to tackle a range of issues. Some programmes have a primary focus on gender equality, such as the Girls Education Challenge, which looks to enable 1.5 million marginalised and highly marginalised girls to access education and transition into further education, training or meaningful employment. Other programmes incorporate a focus on gender equality alongside broader goals in programmes where it is not the primary focus. For example, we saw a programme in Ethiopia which aims to increase productivity of agricultural land and therefore the incomes of 500,000 households; and secure land ownership for 6.1 million households, by certifying 14 million parcels of land, of which around 70% are jointly or individually owned by women. Alongside programming DFID has sought to lead on gender equality with other government departments in the UK (such as the Foreign & Commonwealth Office and the Department for International Trade). In the international arena, it has looked to lead on issues considered sensitive by other countries such as safe abortion and positioning itself against attempts to rollback the internationally agreed position on sexual and reproductive health and rights. DFID's success in delivering its 2018 Strategic Vision relies on it working well with other government departments and international partners without any mandate to direct their activities (paragraphs 2.2, 2.3, 2.7 and 2.8, and 3.22 to 3.25; and Figures 6 and 16).

### **11 DFID emphasises local context in programme design and implementation which limits its control over delivery of its 2018 Strategic Vision.**

DFID's decentralised approach allows a necessary focus on local challenges and consideration of its strengths relative to other donors when designing and implementing programmes. For example, we saw family planning projects in Ethiopia and Nepal which were tailored to respond to demand for different types of contraception. We have identified significant variation in spending on gender equality across the countries DFID works in, as well as within regions. Such variations might reflect varying levels of need in different populations, as well as differences in the opportunities and costs of programmes. It might also highlight a disparity in the willingness, capacity or capability of country offices to address gender inequality in their programming (paragraphs 2.4 to 2.6, and Figures 7 and 8).

**12 Successfully “mainstreaming” gender across all of DFID’s work is integral to achieving its 2018 Strategic Vision, but it has found this difficult.** DFID attempts to make sure gender equality is considered regardless of a programme’s primary objective – an approach known as mainstreaming. It has responded positively to critical findings from its internal auditors in 2016 regarding the extent of practical consideration in business cases of gender equality. Its progress has been hindered by a lack of buy-in from some staff, an absence of complete guidance and training before 2019, and some weaknesses in its quality assurance processes. Improvements to DFID’s assessment of a programme’s consideration of gender issues should mean it is better placed to identify those areas on which it needs to focus to improve mainstreaming (paragraphs 2.12 to 2.17).

**13 DFID has recognised that programmes which look to address social norms are underrepresented in its portfolio.** DFID considers tackling social norms, such as negative attitudes within communities to girls attending school, will have the most long-term impact on tackling gender equality. DFID’s decentralised operating model allows it to take a context-specific approach to tackling such issues. For example, DFID funds a project in Ethiopia to strengthen the Ministry of Women, Children and Youth so that it can better support and hold other government departments to account on gender improvement outcomes. It also complements its country-based programmes with centrally managed global programmes, such as the Gender and Adolescence: Global Evidence Programme, to assess the long-term impact of interventions. DFID has identified issues around the successful implementation of these programmes, including the assessment of their impact. DFID looks to take a case-by-case approach to each procurement to reflect the nature of the issue it is looking to tackle. Some stakeholders have highlighted how DFID’s approach might not help in addressing harmful social norms because, for example, activities in this area can be expensive, as they can be focused on long-term and harder to measure goals (paragraphs 2.18 to 2.21 and Figures 10 and 11).

#### Assessing progress with its 2018 Strategic Vision

**14 It has taken some time for DFID to begin setting up an approach to assessing the collective performance of its programmes.** DFID has an established approach to assessing the performance of its programmes. This shows that individual programmes with a gender equality focus, across areas such as education and economic empowerment, achieve similar levels of performance as those which do not have such a focus. It is also important DFID understands the contribution programmes make, when considered together as well as individually, to progress with its 2018 Strategic Vision. In 2019, DFID usefully started to draw together information on spending and on performance for each area of focus. It has yet to use this combined set of information to help it assess whether its priorities are being addressed and to identify where resources should be applied in the future (paragraphs 3.4, 3.15 to 3.21, and Figure 15).

**15 DFID is working to improve its oversight of the implementation of its 2018 Strategic Vision.** DFID has established a cross-department and cross-government board to oversee progress with its implementation of its 2018 Strategic Vision. Every six months it has assessed performance to date and prospects for the immediate future against objectives. But its approach lacks a long-term perspective on what constitutes progress at intervals between now and 2030 (paragraphs 2.9, 3.2 and 3.4).

**16 DFID's most recent assessment of progress and future prospects is mixed.** In September 2019, DFID identified what it described as a strong performance to date with regard to four of its seven calls to action. It assessed the other three calls to action as "at risk" (one of which included programmes focused on, for example, health issues and economic empowerment). It also assessed its work with international partners and with other government departments as performing well. However, its assessment of likely performance for the next six months against future priorities was less positive. DFID considered that five of its seven calls to action are not on track to meet its aims in that period, which it attributed to internal resource constraints and changes in the external environment. It is taking action to address the areas of concern it has identified, such as establishing priorities across government for economic empowerment work (paragraph 3.3 and Figure 12).

**17 DFID needs to make more progress in improving its estimate of spending on programmes with a gender equality focus.** DFID's 2018 Strategic Vision encourages improvements in the collection of data on gender issues, including that on spending. DFID uses an internationally recognised assessment of a programme's focus on gender issues (whether gender is the programme's principal objective, is a significant feature, or does not feature at all) to estimate spending. Our analysis shows that, for 2018, it classified 33% of its bilateral spending for that year incorrectly. As a consequence, it is likely that DFID is inaccurately assessing the degree to which its spending has a focus on gender equality. DFID has introduced arrangements to support a more accurate application of this approach (paragraphs 3.7 to 3.9 and 3.11 to 3.14, and Figure 13).

**18 While influencing is an important element in DFID's approach to implementing its Strategic Vision, its impact is hard to measure.** DFID aims to use its relationships with international organisations and other governments, individually and collectively (such as at the G7), to improve policies and programmes and to challenge the status quo around promoting gender equality. For example, using the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting to launch interventions to support girls' education; and working to make sure the replenishment of the World Bank's International Development Association strengthens commitments to gender. It has put in place an approach to support this work by establishing objectives for each of these activities against which it can assess its contribution. DFID has acknowledged that it faces challenges assessing and claiming impact from its influencing activity (paragraphs 3.22 to 3.25, and Figure 16).

### **19 DFID has made limited information about progress with its 2018**

**Strategic Vision publicly available.** DFID's annual report and accounts and its Single Departmental Plan include some coverage of progress with its 2018 Strategic Vision. But it has not published an assessment of its progress to date (as it did for each of the three years following the introduction of its 2011 Strategic Vision for Girls and Women). And while it has met with stakeholders, it has not convened an external panel of experts to challenge its performance – a process it said it would establish when it launched the 2018 Strategic Vision. DFID told us it intends to hold such a meeting in the future (paragraphs 3.5 and 3.6).

### **Conclusion on value for money**

**20** DFID's long-term commitment to improving gender equality in the face of long-standing and entrenched social norms is clear. Its current Strategic Vision for its work on gender equality, which was well researched, is ambitious – looking to achieve improvements across a broad range of issues and types of intervention over a 12-year period through its own and others' efforts.

**21** Individually, DFID's programme interventions to improve gender equality are performing well and it is widely respected internationally for its broad range of influencing activity in this area. Two years into the implementation of its 2018 Strategic Vision, DFID has in place some of the management arrangements we would expect for it to be confident about its delivery. But there are gaps. It does not have an overall long-term plan for implementation against which it can assess progress with its 2018 Strategic Vision at key points between now and 2030; it does not have a strong understanding of its spending in this area; and it has been slow to start bringing performance information together to provide an accurate picture of progress across the portfolio of its activities. DFID has recently taken positive steps to improve its oversight and understanding of performance but it needs to make significant further progress in getting better management arrangements in place before it will have a good understanding of whether it is on track to secure value for money in this area.

## Recommendations

**22** With 10 of 12 years remaining to implement its 2018 Strategic Vision, we make a number of recommendations for improvement, all of which are consistent with DFID's decentralised operating model.

DFID should:

- a** develop and publish a plan for implementing its 2018 Strategic Vision, setting out key milestones and planned achievements in the short, medium and long term through to 2030;
- b** put in place an action plan to tackle the barriers it has identified to the successful implementation of its interventions to tackle social norms;
- c** periodically review other government departments' and its international partners' contribution to the implementation of its 2018 Strategic Vision to identify opportunities for its own influencing work and for collaborative activity;
- d** put in place an action plan to tackle the barriers to mainstreaming gender issues it has identified;
- e** regularly review the accuracy of its application of the gender policy marker, to make sure its actions for improvement will lead to a better understanding of its spending on programmes with a gender equality focus; and
- f** (complementing material it publishes through the Single Departmental Plan and the Annual Report and Accounts) publish, every two years, a short report setting out its progress against its 2018 Strategic Vision and towards the Sustainable Development Goals relevant to gender equality.

# Part One

## Developing its 2018 Strategic Vision

**1.1** In this part of the report we examine how the Department for International Development (DFID) developed its *2018-2030 Strategic Vision for Gender Equality* (2018 Strategic Vision) including:

- setting its scope;
- its approach and response to consultation; and
- its use of evidence.

### **The scope of DFID's 2018 Strategic Vision**

**1.2** Improving the lives of women and girls has long been a key focus of DFID's work. In the past 15 years DFID has demonstrated this commitment in several forms:

- DFID's *2007 Gender Equality Action Plan* set out a programme of gender mainstreaming across its policies, programming, internal systems and resources for the period 2007–2009.
- DFID's *2011 Strategic Vision for Girls and Women* contained four pillars: delay first pregnancy and support safe childbirth; get economic assets directly to girls and women; get girls through secondary school; and prevent violence against girls and women. In November 2013, DFID updated the vision to 2020 and beyond; and expanded the pillar on economic assets to broader women's economic empowerment.
- The UK International Development (Gender Equality) Act 2014 made it a legal requirement to consider gender equality in all UK Official Development Assistance.
- The *2015 UK Aid Strategy* promised to prioritise the needs of girls and women throughout the government's development spending, stating "no country can successfully develop if half its population is left behind".



**1.3** DFID's 2018 Strategic Vision builds on and extends the scope of its *2011 Strategic Vision for Girls and Women*. The 2018 Strategic Vision launched a "call to action" asking more of DFID and of the UK government, and its multilateral and civil society partners, to meet the gender-related Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. It consists of seven objectives on gender equality (**Figure 1** overleaf). The second objective is supported by five interlinked areas (also known as pillars) which focus on activity which, together, are intended to have a transformational effect for girls and women. Four of the five pillars are carried forward from the 2011 Strategic Vision, with the addition of women's political empowerment which did feature in the previous vision but not as a dedicated pillar of activity.

**1.4** In response to stakeholder feedback on limitations of the 2011 Strategic Vision, the other six objectives focus attention on broader issues such as:

- stepping up in conflict, protracted and humanitarian crises (objective 3);
- supporting the most marginalised groups, in other words, leaving no one behind (objective 4);
- collecting reliable data, building evidence and tracking progress (objectives 5 and 7); and
- focusing on the needs of women and girls at key points in their lives, with particular attention to adolescence (objective 6).

**1.5** DFID's 2018 Strategic Vision is an overarching framework, underpinned with multiple DFID and cross-government policies and strategies as shown in **Figure 2** on page 17, which contains a range of gender-related commitments. For example, one of 11 priorities in DFID's *Economic Development Strategy* – focussing on the poorest and most marginalised people – looks to "place the economic empowerment of girls and women at the heart of our approach and help marginalised groups, including people with disabilities, to access productive employment".

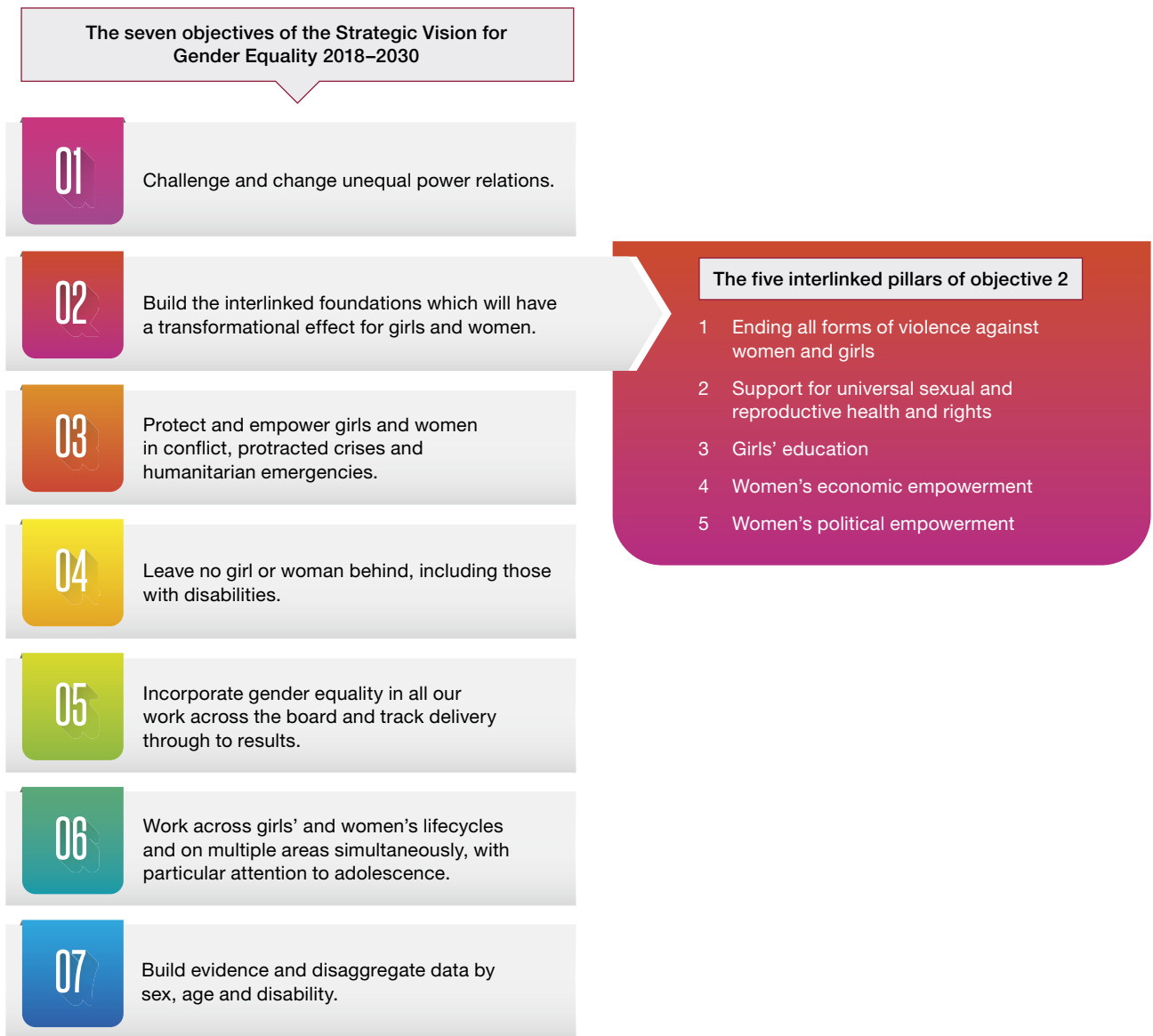
**1.6** DFID's 2018 Strategic Vision explicitly acknowledges it needs to work with other government departments and the international development community to realise its ambitions. For example, it emphasises "...the urgent need for a significant and coordinated shift in approach, for DFID and for all of our partners". However, while DFID can encourage others to respond to the calls to action through its influencing work, it cannot set specific targets for other organisations, which are not accountable to DFID for their actions.

**1.7** Its 2018 Strategic Vision sets out DFID's ambitions for global gender equality by 2030, the target date for meeting the Sustainable Development Goals. It identifies areas for focused attention but does not prescribe what its country offices should do or when they should do it, allowing them autonomy to make programming and spending decisions based on each country's specific context. DFID does not therefore have an overarching implementation plan, against which it can measure and report progress.

**Figure 1**

Department for International Development’s 2018–2030 Strategic Vision for Gender Equality

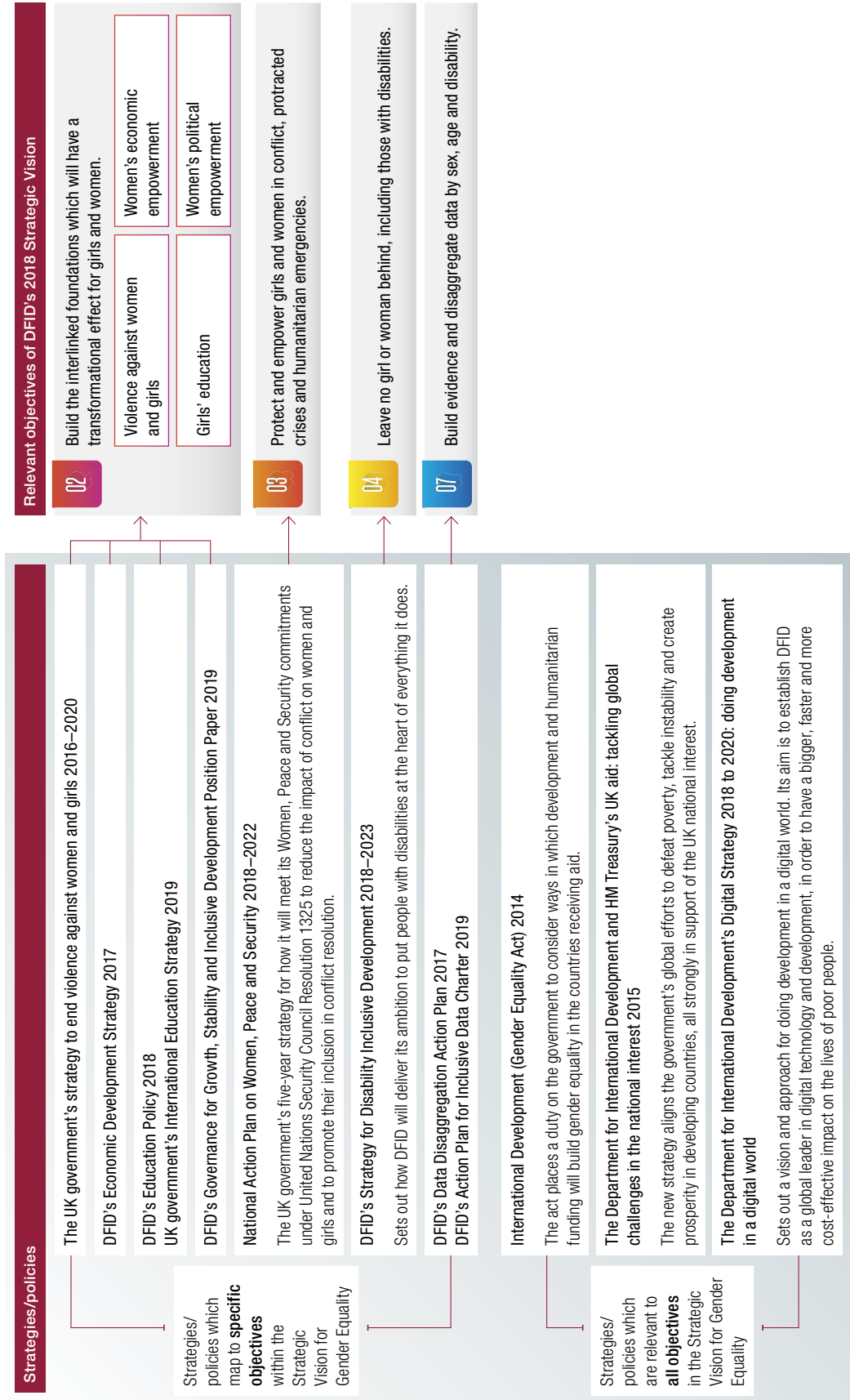
The bulk of the Department for International Development’s gender focused activity sits within objective 2 of its Strategic Vision for Gender Equality 2018–2030 – each of the five interlinked pillars of objective 2 has a suite of programmes



Source: National Audit Office summary of the Department for International Development’s 2018 Strategic Vision for Gender Equality

**Figure 2** Several strategies and policies feed into the Department for International Development's Strategic Vision for Gender Equality 2018

The strategies and policies underpinning the 2018 Strategic Vision come from both the Department for International Development (DFID) and wider government



Source: National Audit Office summary of the Department for International Development's and other strategies and policies relevant to its work on gender equality

### DFID’s consultation approach

**1.8** **Figure 3** summarises DFID’s nine-month-long consultation process, which began with an invitation to DFID staff to make suggestions for the new vision in March 2017, and ended with external roundtable events in November 2017. DFID’s Gender Equality Team led the development, delivery and launch of its new Strategic Vision with help from a strategic vision reference group which included staff from the most relevant areas across DFID.

#### Internal consultation

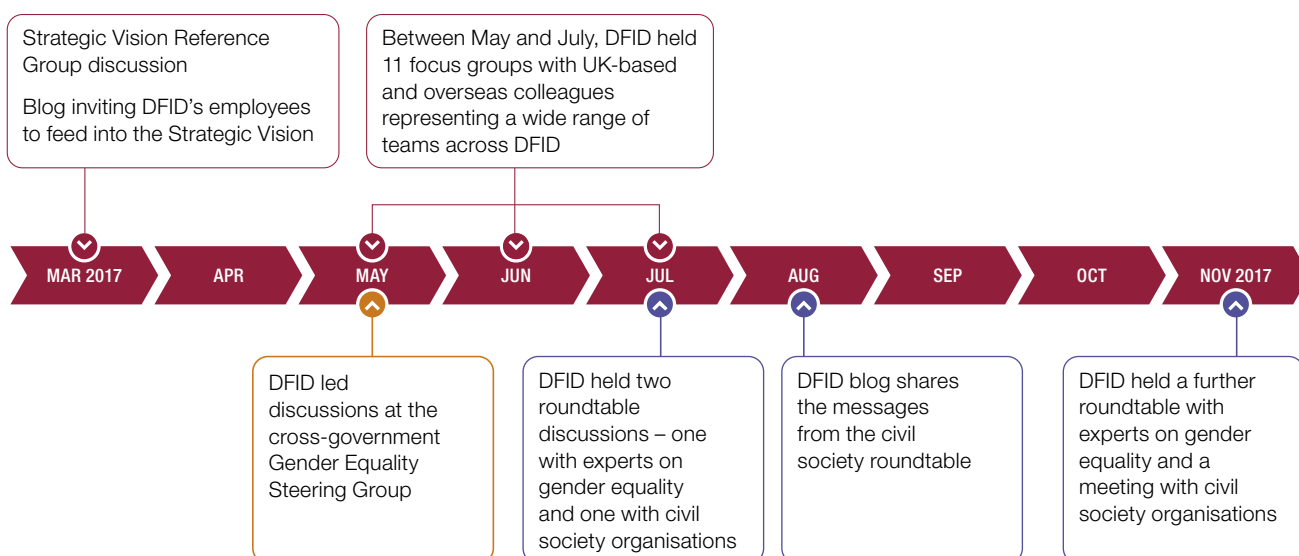
**1.9** Staff across DFID were given the opportunity, between March 2017 and November 2017, to contribute to the development of the Strategic Vision (Figure 3).

- DFID invited colleagues to submit their views on what the new vision should include.
- Between May and July, DFID held 11 focus groups with UK-based and overseas colleagues representing a wide range of DFID teams.
- DFID consulted and updated a cross-departmental grouping of staff working on, or interested in, gender equality.

### Figure 3

The Department for International Development’s consultation process for its 2018 Strategic Vision for Gender Equality

The Department for International Development (DFID) consulted widely, both internally and externally, between March 2017 and November 2017



- Internal consultation
- Consultation across the UK government
- Consultation with organisations outside the UK government

## External consultation

**1.10** DFID invited input from a range of external organisations involved in gender equality work (Figure 3). It held a discussion with other government departments at the Cross-government Gender Equality Steering Group in May 2017 attended by representatives from eight departments. DFID also invited input from selected non-government stakeholders through two external expert roundtables in July 2017 and November 2017, a civil society roundtable in July 2017 and a follow-up civil society meeting in November 2017. However, DFID did not run a wider consultation exercise to get input from implementing partners or beneficiaries, either in the UK or overseas, so losing an opportunity to test how realistic its ambitions were when considering local country contexts.

**1.11** We asked stakeholders involved in DFID's consultation process for their views on DFID's approach and received a largely positive response, with a few suggestions for improvement:

- On the composition of DFID's stakeholder consultation, they commended DFID's willingness to consult with civil society organisations and to invite input from a range of role-holders rather than only inviting heads of relevant organisations. However, they felt DFID should have included civil society organisations overseas and women's rights organisations both in the UK and overseas in its consultation process.
- Comparing DFID's consultation process for its 2018 Strategic Vision with that for the 2011 Strategic Vision, they described the former as more inclusive, more meaningful and more responsive to feedback but thought that DFID should speed up its engagement with international non-government organisations overseas.
- On logistics, they criticised DFID for giving short notice for consultation events, which made it difficult for senior staff with full diaries to attend.

## **DFID's use of evidence to develop its 2018 Strategic Vision**

**1.12** A primary source of evidence for DFID's development of its 2018 Strategic Vision was an external review of the implementation of its 2011 Strategic Vision for Girls and Women, which reported in July 2015. Commissioned by DFID, this concluded that the vision had achieved "tangible organisational change in raising the profile and legitimacy of the girls and women agenda in DFID" but that "challenges remain to embedding this agenda securely in all areas of DFID's operation". **Figure 4** on pages 20 and 21 summarises the challenges the review identified and DFID's response.

**1.13** DFID has acted to address many of the challenges identified in its 2015 review of its 2011 vision but needs to do more around conflicting priorities for staff and measuring the impact of non-programme-specific work. For example, in September 2019, it warned that, to maintain progress on gender equality and other inclusion issues in a climate of constrained resources and unclear priorities, teams (in country offices and centrally) needed a strong lead from ministers and board members on its importance.

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**Figure 4**

How the Department for International Development has responded to the external review of its implementation of its 2011 Strategic Vision for Girls and Women

**The Department for International Development (DFID) has made changes in response to most of the challenges identified in an external review,<sup>1</sup> published in 2015, of its 2011 Strategic Vision for Girls and Women**

**Challenge****DFID's response****Lack of integration**

The Strategic Vision focus on four pillars has meant that some issues have not received consistent attention because they are not clearly integrated in the Strategic Vision. These include climate change; women, peace and security; and some dimensions of economic development.

Some of these issues are covered in the third objective of its 2018 Strategic Vision: protect and empower girls and women in conflict, protracted crises and humanitarian emergencies.

The sixth objective acknowledges the importance of working across all areas simultaneously: work across girls' and women's lifecycles and on multiple areas simultaneously, with particular attention to adolescence.

**Conflicting priorities**

DFID's organisational culture and political drivers sometimes inhibit Strategic Vision implementation: the Strategic Vision is one of several priorities, which staff often experience as conflicting.

This challenge is on-going. DFID intends to identify common areas on different inclusion agendas such as gender and disability to provide a more coherent set of tools and guidance for staff to identify ways to join up across the agendas.

**Implementation and measurement difficulties**

The Strategic Vision is more challenging to implement where issues do not offer obvious entry points or results are difficult to measure, for example, in global influencing work or work with multilaterals.

DFID's 2018 Strategic Vision includes a call to action which demands more of DFID's international partners and national governments to tackle the barriers and deliver on opportunities for women and girls. However, there are no specific indicators or measures attached to this work.

**Leadership**

Commitment from political leadership and senior managers is a key driver of success. While leadership is strong in some parts, it is inconsistent in some locations and levels.

DFID's new Gender Equality Delivery Board members are senior managers from across DFID business units with responsibility for deliverables within the delivery plan.

In its 2018 Strategic Vision, DFID undertook to "continue to equip our staff and delivery partners with the skills, tools and knowledge to better integrate gender equality into policies and programmes, and to join up across sectors to take a gender equality portfolio approach. This will include embedding gender equality more fully into our business systems, to ensure more effective delivery, tracking of spend and results, and greater accountability".

---

**Figure 4** *continued*

How the Department for International Development has responded to the external review of its implementation of its 2011 Strategic Vision for Girls and Women

| <b>Challenge</b>   | <b>DFID's response</b>   |
|--|--|
| <p><b>Accountability</b></p> <p>There has been excellent progress in strengthening accountability mechanisms, but this needs to be deepened further.</p> | <p>DFID set up a Gender Equality Delivery Board in February 2019 to track progress against the Strategic Vision.</p>   |
| <p><b>Capacity</b></p> <p>Staff skills and understanding to address the interests of girls and women are improving but significant gaps remain.</p>      | <p>DFID has taken a number of actions to boost capacity including new guidance on gender equality (issued in October 2019); it delivered two training sessions in January 2020 on the International Development (Gender Equality) Act 2014 and the application of the gender equality policy marker; and it has developed and piloted a 2-day <i>Introduction to Gender</i> training course.</p> |
| <p><b>Resources</b></p> <p>Spend on girls and women is not well captured; increased attention has not always been matched by sufficient resources.</p>   | <p>DFID is developing a dashboard to track spend on gender equality which will be presented to the Gender Equality Delivery Board every six months.</p>  |

**Note**

1 DFID's Strategic Vision for Girls and Women Policy Implementation Review: Final Report – Macro Evaluations of DFID's Strategic Vision for Girls and Women and Policy Frame for Empowerment and Accountability (June 2015).

Source: National Audit Office summary of the Department for International Development's policy implementation review of its 2011 Strategic Vision for Girls and Women

**1.14** DFID also drew on research evidence on what works to drive change for girls and women such as DFID's What Works to Prevent Violence programme (2013-20), and on specially commissioned reviews and other sources:

- a review of the evidence and gaps on women and girls in conflict, which outlined the implications for future strategic visions;
- a paper on the global context for gender equality which made recommendations to DFID on the enabling environment (such as tackling structural barriers to gender equality and addressing harmful social norms), and the four priority areas from the 2011 Strategic Vision;
- a paper providing recommendations to DFID on how to advance women's political empowerment through its new Strategic Vision; and
- the recommendations of the United Nations' Secretary General's High Level Panel on Women's Economic Empowerment, which followed consultations held around the world with private sector, civil society, national governments, business and networks in panel members' countries.

## Part Two

### Implementing the Strategic Vision

**2.1** In this part of the report we examine the Department for International Development's (DFID's) approach to implementing its *2018 Strategic Vision for Gender Equality* (2018 Strategic Vision). Specifically, we consider:

- the impact of how DFID is organised on the implementation of its 2018 Strategic Vision;
- the steps DFID took to support the implementation of its 2018 Strategic Vision;
- DFID's approach to integrating its work to improve gender equality across all its activities; and
- DFID's approach to tackling harmful social norms.

#### **DFID's organisational structure**

**2.2** DFID's approach to implementing its Strategic Vision has two main elements: programming, which represents most of DFID's spending on gender equality, and work with global partnerships and international influencing activity.<sup>1</sup> **Figure 5** outlines DFID's approach to achieving the objectives outlined in its 2018 Strategic Vision.

**2.3** DFID implements two types of programme to address gender equality – standalone and mainstreamed programmes, which are explained in **Figure 6** on page 24.

**2.4** DFID implements its programmes through a decentralised model (**Figure 7** on page 25). For example, its 32 country offices design and implement programmes and undertake influencing work among local stakeholders (subject to oversight and support from the centre). Country office interventions are complemented by centrally managed programmes and influencing activity among global stakeholders undertaken by DFID UK-based staff. This approach is intended to make sure local needs are identifiable and addressed by staff with an understanding of the local context while ensuring they receive appropriate technical and programmatic support from the UK.

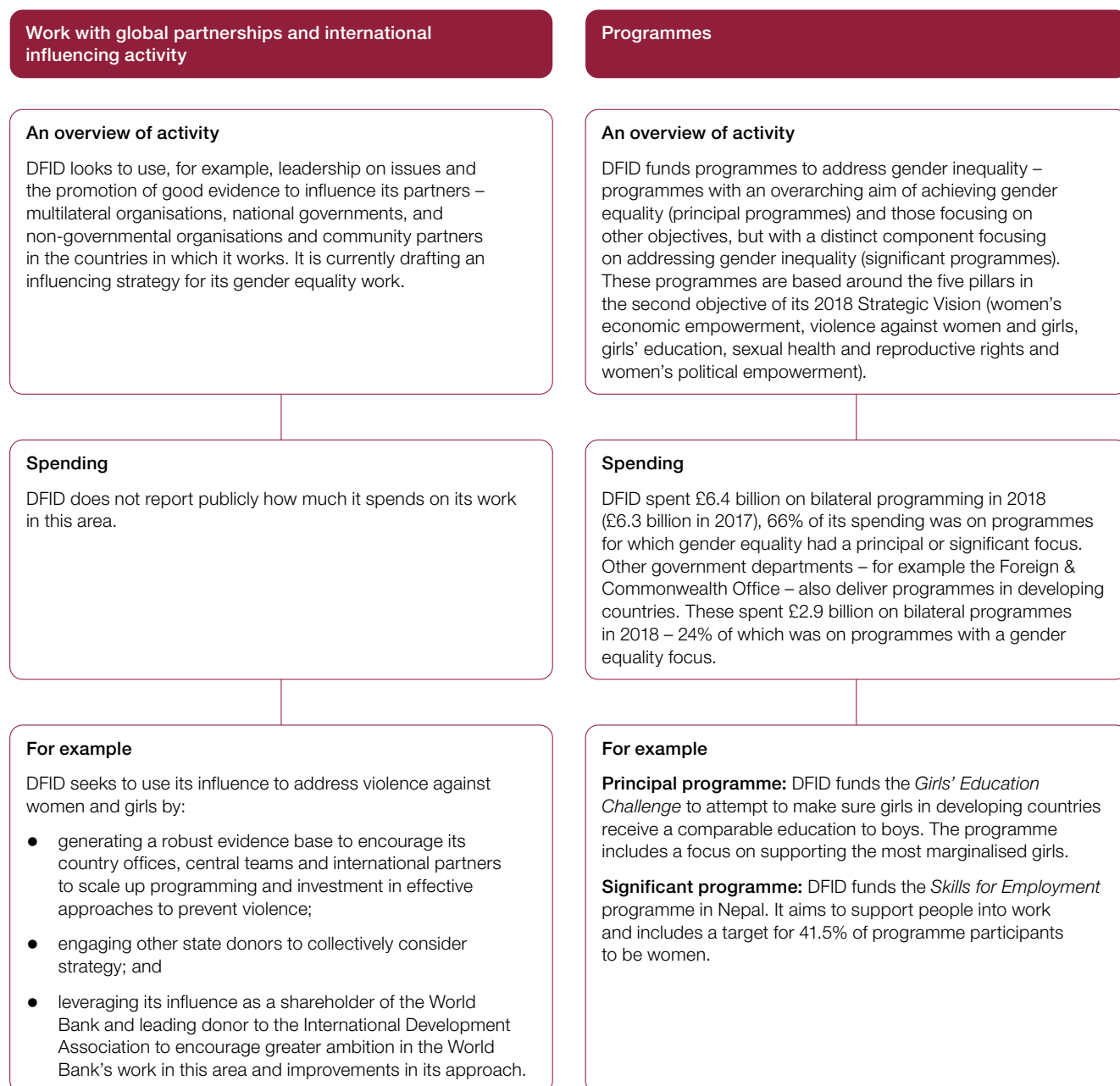
<sup>1</sup> The Department for International Development's approach to work with global partnerships and international influencing activity is set out in more detail in Part Three (paragraphs 3.22 to 3.25).



**Figure 5**

## The Department for International Development's approach to the implementation of its 2018 Strategic Vision for Gender Equality

The Department for International Development (DFID) aims to achieve the objectives outlined in its 2018 Strategic Vision for Gender Equality through a combination of influencing and diplomacy, and programming

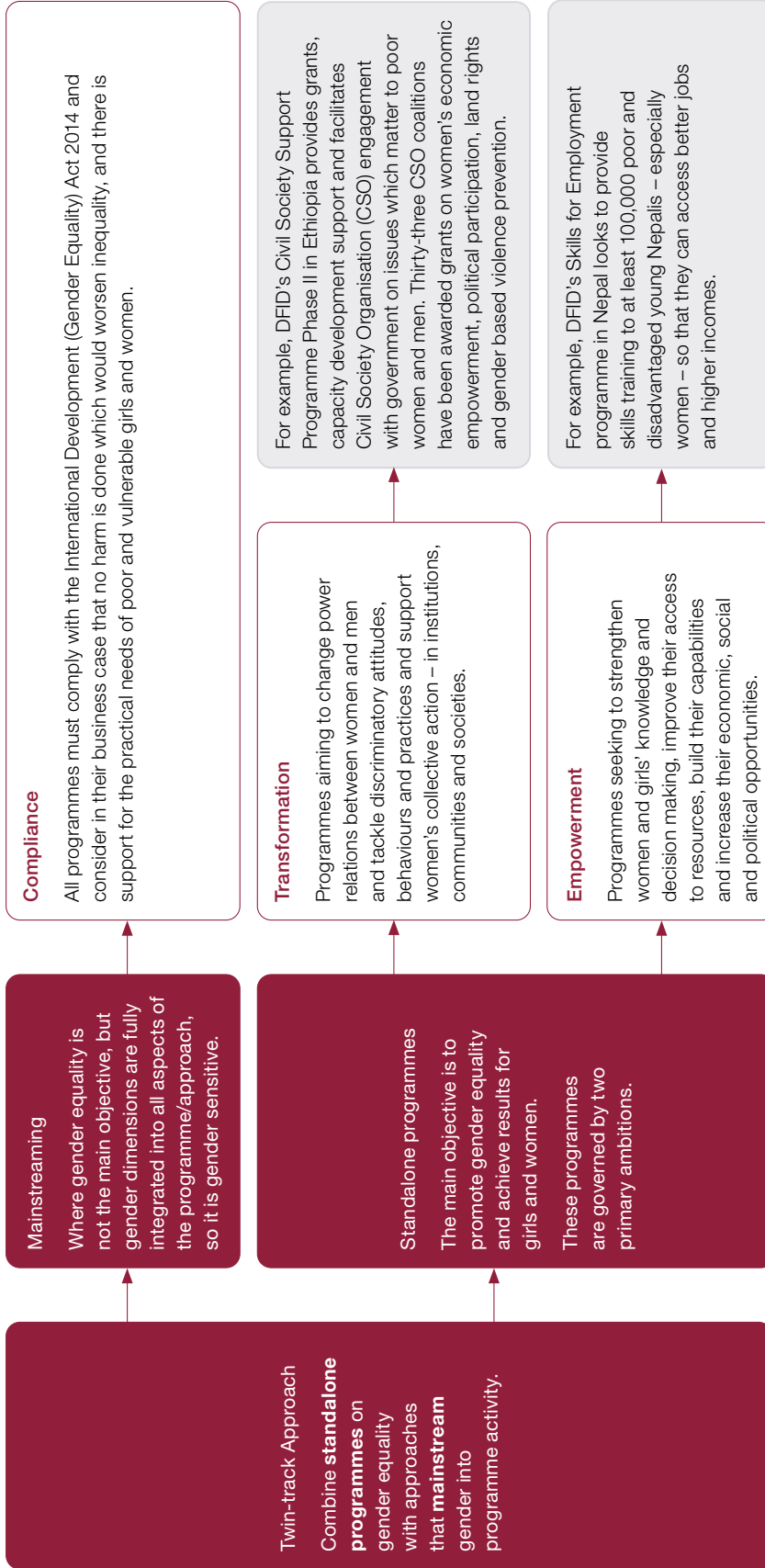


Source: National Audit Office summary of the Department for International Development's Statistics for International Development, programme documentation and its guidance on implementing gender equality programmes

## Figure 6 The Department for International Development’s approach to programming to address gender inequality

The Department for International Development (DFID) manages two types of programmes – standalone and mainstreamed – to support the implementation of its 2018 Strategic Vision for Gender Equality

All government projects which involve Official Development Assistance expenditure or humanitarian expenditure must consider their impact on gender equality. This is what is referred to as the mainstreaming of gender into government programmes. In addition, standalone projects have a sole focus on gender and are driven by two primary ambitions.



### Note

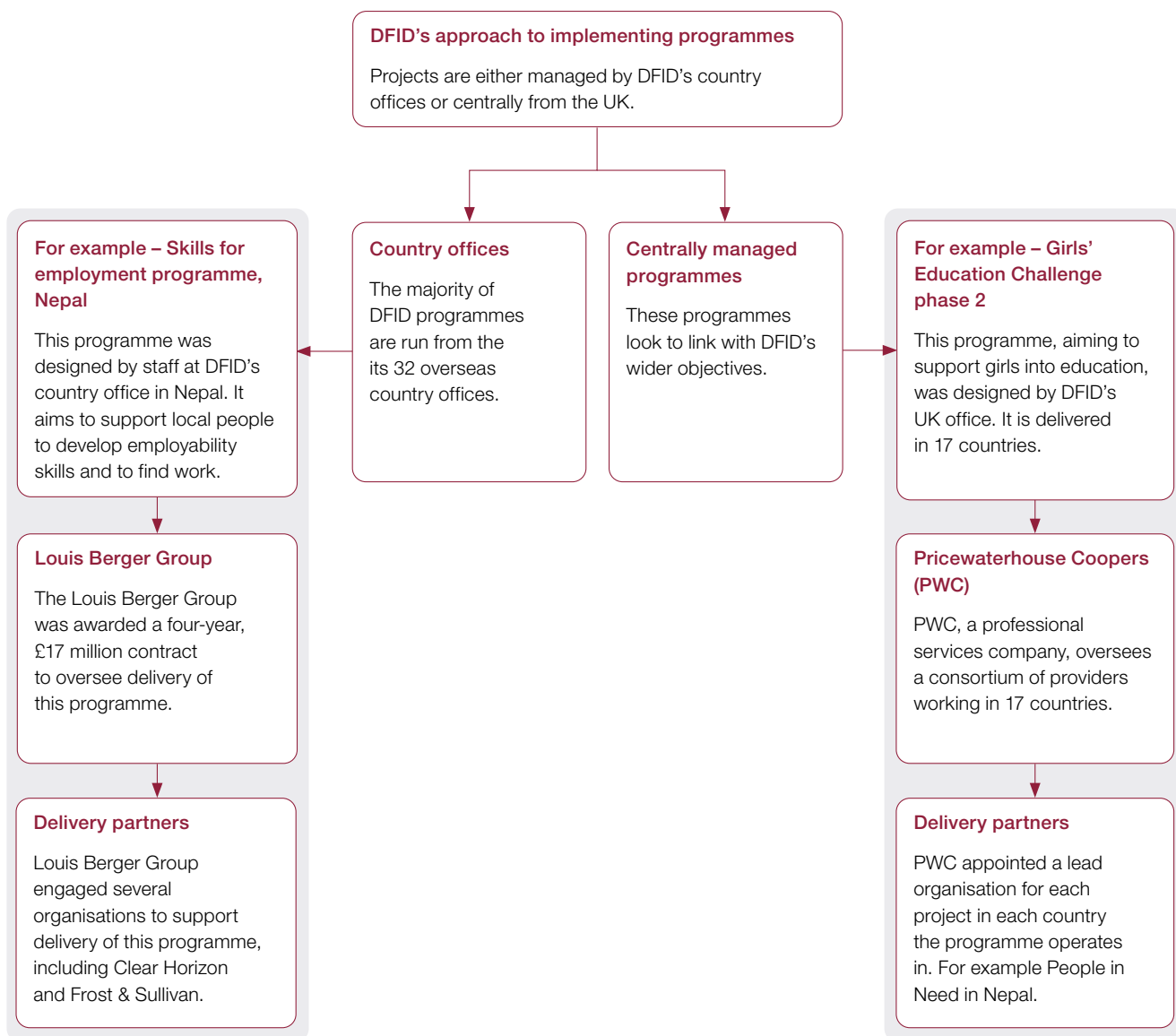
- 1 The Department for International Development reports its spending on gender equality using the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's Development Assistance Committee's reporting guidelines for its gender marker (see paragraph 3.9). This has three classifications which broadly equate to DFID's programme types: i) standalone programmes are usually considered as having a 'principal' focus on gender equality, ii) mainstreamed programmes have a 'significant' focus, and iii) programmes that have not mainstreamed gender are classed as 'not targeted'.

Source: National Audit Office summary of the Department for International Development's guidance on implementing gender equality programmes and programme documentation

**Figure 7**

The Department for International Development’s programme delivery model

The Department for International Development (DFID) uses locally and centrally managed programmes



Source: National Audit Office summary of information included in the Department for International Development’s programming documentation

**2.5** While recognising the strengths of DFID's decentralised model, we identified some challenges.

- DFID does not have complete control over the implementation of policy initiatives, such as its 2018 Strategic Vision, in terms of the range and types of interventions implemented by country offices and centrally. This presents a risk that programmes and activity at country level, while locally relevant, may not be making an optimal contribution to progress with its 2018 Strategic Vision.
- A 2018 report from the Independent Commission for Aid Impact (ICAI) identified how DFID's centrally managed programmes are often poorly coordinated with in-country programmes and that this presented a potential value for money risk. However, it did note improvements in some more recent programmes.<sup>2,3</sup>
- There is a risk that a country office's approach to gender equality is not aligned with DFID's central priorities. For example, in Ethiopia, DFID's country office's gender strategy runs in line with its business plan from 2016-17 to 2019-20. It had not updated its gender equality strategy to align with DFID's centrally developed 2018 Strategic Vision and as a result, only sets out DFID Ethiopia's programme for four of the five foundation pillars in its 2018 Strategic Vision. And DFID's Nepal country office collaborated with other donors working in Nepal on a strategy for gender equality.

**2.6** We used DFID's data on gender related expenditure to calculate the proportion of expenditure focusing on gender equality by country. In those countries where DFID has a country office, an average of 69% of DFID's bilateral spending was on programmes with a gender equality focus. We found that the proportion of DFID's bilateral spending focusing on gender equality in countries where it has an office ranged from 0% to 100% (**Figure 8**). Such variation was also present between countries in specific regions. For example, in sub-Saharan Africa, spending ranged from 100% in Zimbabwe and 94% in Mozambique to 39% in Uganda and 11% in Liberia. Variation in spending could be a consequence of DFID's decentralised operating model. It might also indicate differences in the needs of the population. Or in the willingness, capacity or capability of country offices to address gender inequality in their programming. DFID has not completed any analysis to consider why variations exist.

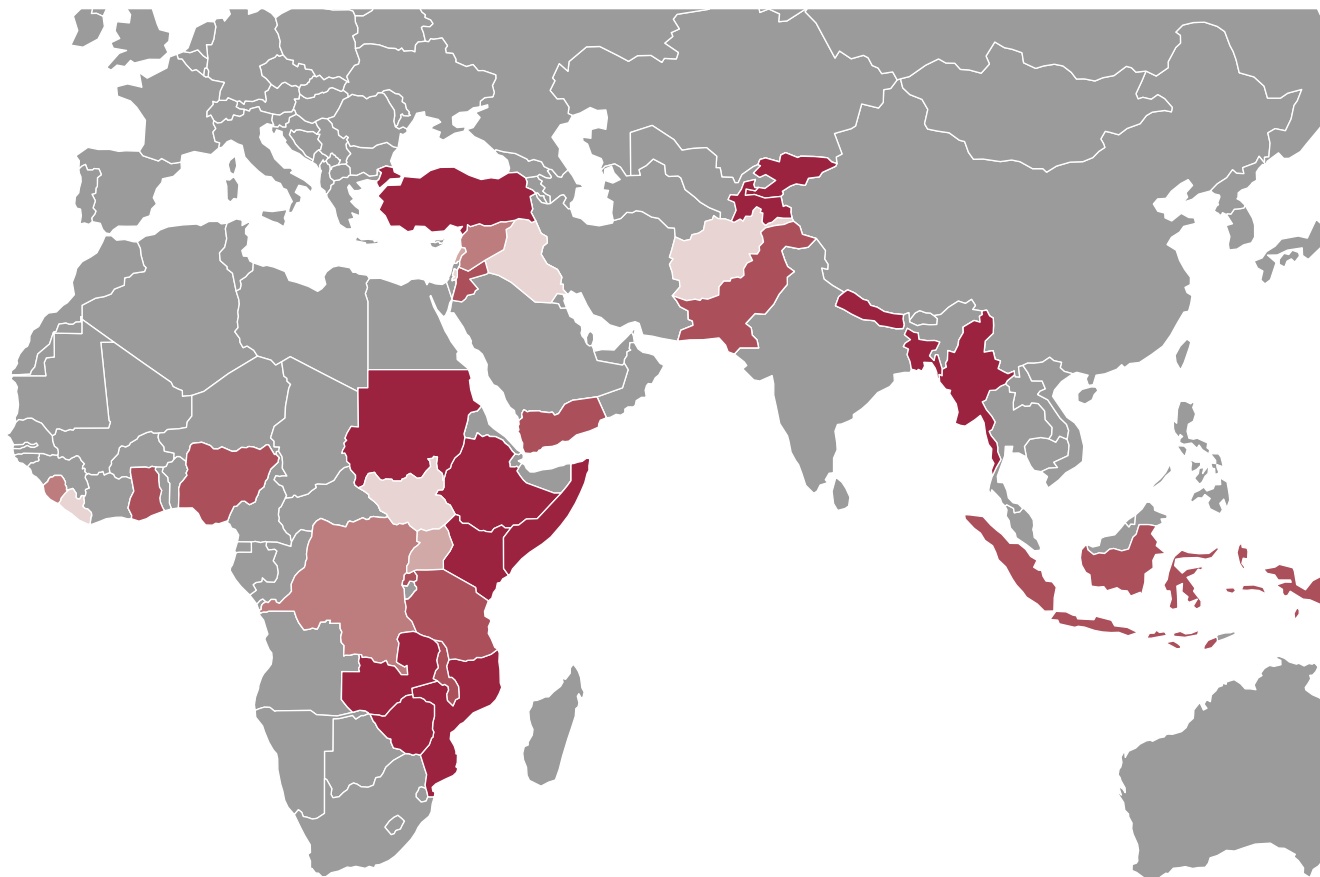
<sup>2</sup> Independent Commission for Aid Impact, *DFID's approach to value for money in programme and portfolio management*, February 2018.

<sup>3</sup> Appendix Two to this report lists the reports from the Independent Commission for Aid Impact relevant to this work.

**Figure 8**

The proportion of the Department for International Development’s 2018 bilateral spending on programmes with a gender equality focus by country office

The Department for International Development’s country offices applied between 0% and 100% of their bilateral spending on programmes with a gender equality focus



Percentage of bilateral spending on programmes with a gender equality focus by country office

- 80–100
- 60–80
- 40–60
- 20–40
- 0–20
- Countries where the Department for International Development does not have a country office

**Note**

1 Country borders do not necessarily reflect the UK government’s official position.

Source: National Audit Office analysis of the Department for International Development’s Statistics on International Development

## Other government departments

**2.7** Its 2018 Strategic Vision commits DFID to work increasingly closely with other UK government departments to deliver against targets for women and girls in developing countries (paragraph 1.6). DFID does not have direct influence over the nature and implementation of other government departments' initiatives which have a gender equality focus. We have seen evidence of commitments to do this across several country offices and embassies. For example, we saw a strong approach to joined-up working during our visit to the DFID Nepal country office. A cross-government strategy was developed between DFID, the Foreign & Commonwealth Office (FCO) and the Department for International Trade, combining departmental priorities to take a shared approach to work, including on gender equality priorities. But DFID has not completed an exercise to assess whether, at department or country level, strategies are aligned with its 2018 Strategic Vision (paragraph 3.3 and Figure 12 summarise DFID's consideration of other government departments' work).

**2.8** In 2018, DFID reported a far greater proportion of its Official Development Assistance (ODA) bilateral spending was on programmes with a gender equality focus than other government departments and agencies – it spent two-thirds, compared with just less than one-quarter by other government departments (**Figure 9**). The proportion of spending towards this objective varies significantly across government – from 0% to 100%. This may reflect varying levels of gender mainstreaming (see paragraphs 2.11 to 2.16) across government or may indicate a lack of awareness or commitment in some government departments to accurately report expenditure on gender equality.

## Supporting implementation

**2.9** In Part One of our report we set out the steps DFID took to develop its 2018 Strategic Vision. Here we consider how it supported its implementation. We found that DFID:

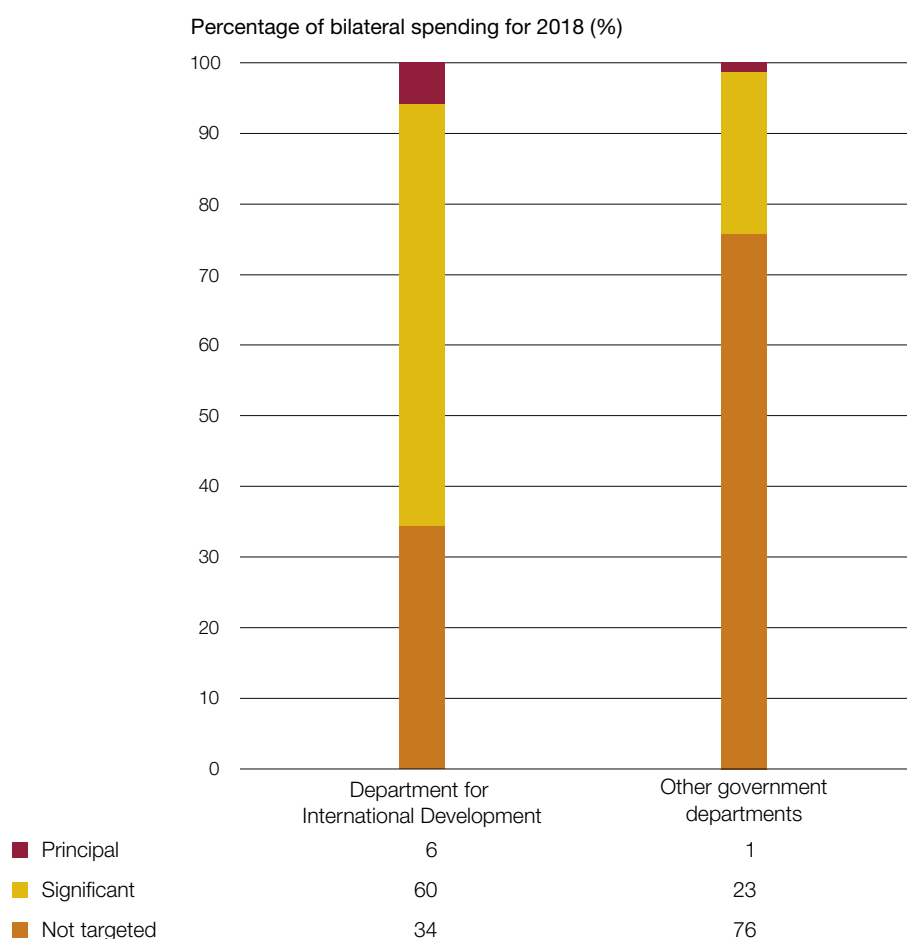
- has a high-level road map containing actions around influencing, capability, accountability and reporting; but does not have a detailed plan, setting out for example, milestones against which progress with its 2018 Strategic Vision can be assessed between now and 2030;
- has six-monthly rolling objectives against the seven calls to action as well as for its work on this issue with other government departments and with its international partners (Part Three of this report sets out DFID's approach to the oversight of progress against these objectives);
- draws on existing implementation plans – such as for women's economic empowerment and for women, peace and security (Figure 2);
- looked to use its approach to business planning to translate the ambitions in its 2018 Strategic Vision into programming and influencing activity;

- has recently issued guidance to help address weaknesses in its internal capability and capacity which had been identified as requiring attention following a review of the implementation of an earlier strategic vision (Figure 5); and
- has not considered the cost of implementing its 2018 Strategic Vision, undermining its ability to establish a benchmark for value for money at the start of the initiative.

### Figure 9

Proportion of 2018 bilateral Official Development Assistance spending focusing on gender equality by government departments and organisations

In 2018, the Department for International Development spent two-thirds of its bilateral spending on programmes which had at least some aspect which addressed gender equality issues; for the rest of government this figure was just less than one-quarter



#### Notes

- 1 Principal: Gender equality is the main objective of the programme and is fundamental to its design and expected results. The programme would not have been undertaken without this objective.
- 2 Significant: Gender equality is an important and deliberate objective, but not the principal reason for undertaking the programme, often explained as gender equality being mainstreamed in programmes.
- 3 Not targeted: The programme has been assessed against the gender marker but has not been found to target gender equality.

Source: National Audit Office analysis of the Department for International Development's Statistics on International Development

**2.10** DFID did not estimate the costs of implementing its 2018 Strategic Vision because:

- it judged doing so would have limited the scope of the vision to activities which could be costed rather than the full range of activities some of which it considered were difficult to cost;
- it needed more context-specific analysis of, for example, activity to address social norms and mainstreaming approaches; and
- budgeting is done at a local level – by country offices – with DFID centrally providing support when requested.

**2.11** Stakeholders told us they were largely impressed with the content and message of DFID's 2018 Strategic Vision. For example, they liked that it was clear on the need for cross-government working and that DFID engaged with them again early on in its implementation. However, they were concerned about the lack of clarity around the practicalities of implementation and the absence of milestones which made following progress difficult.

## **Mainstreaming gender equality**

**2.12** Mainstreaming is an approach which looks to integrate gender considerations into all aspects of a programme or approach when gender equality is not the main objective. In doing so, the different needs, priorities, opportunities and constraints faced by women, men, girls and boys are recognised. It is central to DFID's implementation of its 2018 Strategic Vision for two reasons.

- DFID must comply with the requirements of the International Development (Gender Equality) Act 2014. Specifically, DFID is required to consider, before providing assistance, whether the expenditure is “likely to contribute to reducing poverty in a way which is likely to contribute to reducing inequality between persons of different gender”.
- DFID encourages its programme managers to consider gender equality at each key stage of a programme's life — from design through to implementation and analysis. Full understanding of how an intervention may affect girls, women, boys and men differently means that the risks and opportunities of an intervention for each group can be identified. Programming can be adapted to make sure that no party is negatively impacted, and programmes are able to adopt targets for women and girls or gender equality where relevant.



**2.13** Stakeholders welcomed DFID's focus on mainstreaming as a way of making sure all its work has a positive, or at least does not have a negative, impact on gender equality. In its report on DFID's efforts to eliminate violence against women and girls, the Independent Commission for Aid Impact (ICAI) found that while gender equality had been mainstreamed fairly effectively across DFID where gender equality was not the primary focus of a programme, the quality of its interventions focusing on this was lower.<sup>4</sup> For example, its review of interventions where addressing violence against women and girls is a secondary priority, found that 40% did not include adequate indicators for this, and 30% did not include it in the programme's theory of change.<sup>5</sup> This undermined the quality of their delivery and DFID's ability to assess its impact.

**2.14** A failure to understand how men and women might access and use particular services can reinforce inequalities and stereotypes and might have a negative impact on women and girls. We identified a number of issues that might compromise DFID's efforts at mainstreaming.

- Gender is one of several issues programming staff are required to mainstream; as their enthusiasm and capacity for mainstreaming gender varies, some programmes are not adequately considering risks and opportunities relating to gender equality.
- DFID does not regularly make central assessments of programme compliance with its own mainstreaming guidance.
- DFID did not update its 2008 guidance on gender mainstreaming until October 2019.

**2.15** In June 2017, ICAI identified that DFID had not properly mainstreamed gender into its economic development programmes in Africa.<sup>6</sup> Some stakeholders considered that DFID's economic development strategy was not aligned with its wider gender priorities, indicating that gender was not properly mainstreamed in one of its flagship policy areas. For example, the economic development strategy prioritised helping women into work without proper consideration to whether the jobs were safe and sustainable. It also failed to recognise the contribution of women's unpaid domestic care work, as well as the barriers to other employment that involvement in this type of work presents. DFID responded to ICAI's recommendations on this issue and a recent ICAI follow-up review confirmed that DFID had improved its approach.<sup>7,8</sup>

4 Independent Commission for Aid Impact, *DFID's efforts to eliminate violence against women and girls*, May 2016.

5 Theory of Change – a methodology which maps the assumptions which inform planned interventions. It is regarded by DFID as an “essential tool in designing and appreciating the complex network of factors which influence project outcomes”.

6 Independent Commission for Aid Impact, *DFID's approach to supporting inclusive growth in Africa*, June 2017.

7 Independent Commission for Aid Impact, *The current state of UK aid: A synthesis of ICAI findings from 2015 to 2019*, June 2019.

8 Independent Commission for Aid Impact, *ICAI follow-up review of 2017-18 reports*, July 2019.

**2.16** A 2016 internal audit report considered DFID's compliance with the International Development (Gender Equality) Act 2014 as a major risk. The report found that for 13% of the 104 business cases examined no reference to gender or to this legislation was made. In a further 35% of cases examined, internal audit judged that insufficient information was included to demonstrate that the legislation had been considered. It also found that more could be done to embed gender within the supply chain.

**2.17** DFID has taken steps to reduce risk in this area, which will be completed in spring 2020. A 2019 follow-up of the internal audit report found that DFID had work in progress to help staff comply with efforts to mainstream but, three years after the original report, training courses and guidance to help staff comply with the act had not been finalised; and teams were still working on measures to improve the application of an internationally recognised assessment of the extent to which programmes consider gender issues. While DFID has since published its *'How To' Guidance Note on Gender*, issues around its application of the gender equality policy marker remain.

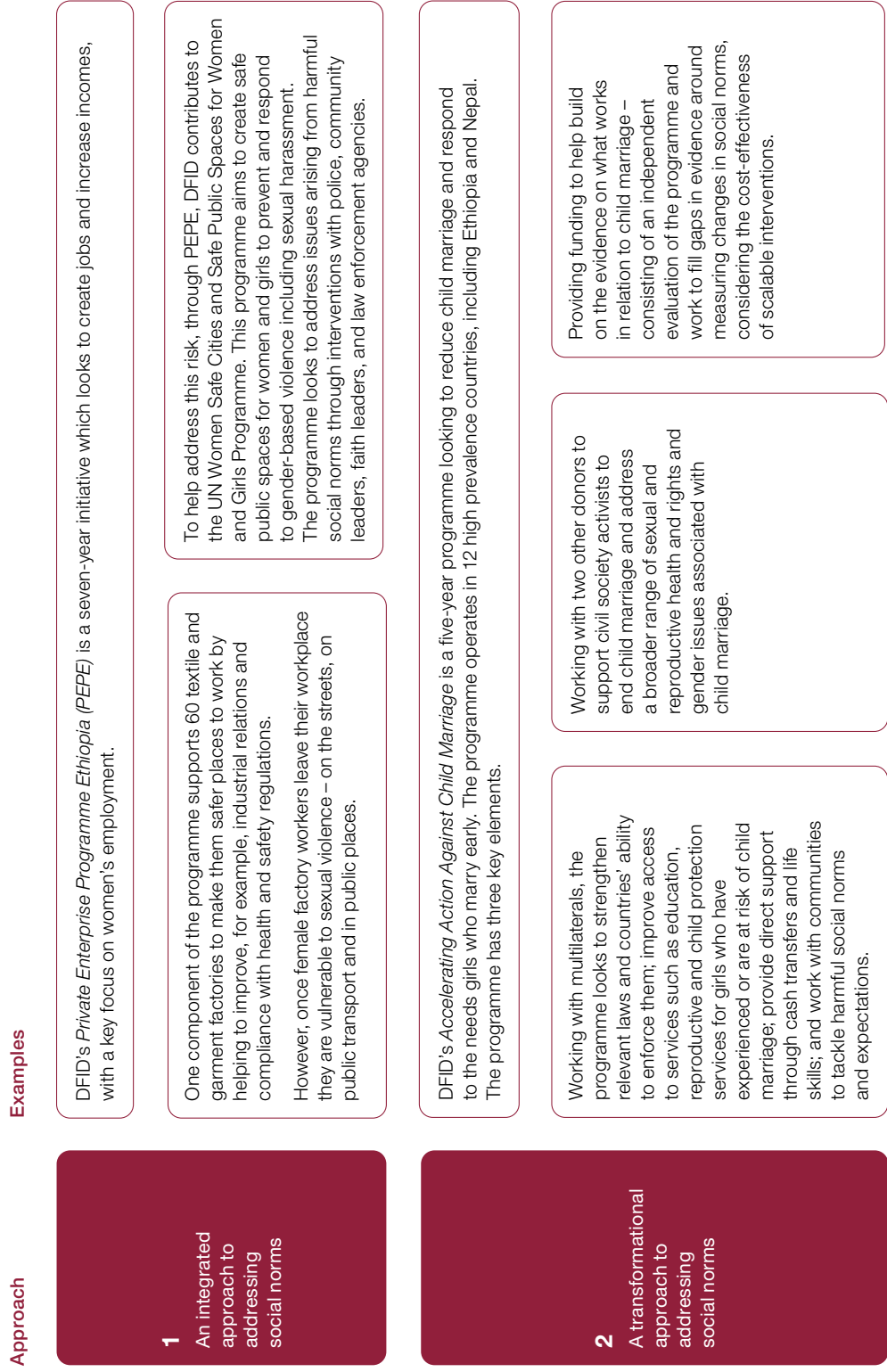
### **DFID's approach to tackling social norms**

**2.18** DFID's 2018 Strategic Vision recognises the need to address harmful social norms – informal, mostly unwritten, rules that define acceptable, appropriate and obligatory actions in a particular group or society – if it is going to improve gender equality. Such norms are wide-ranging (across issues such as violence against women and girls, early marriage, limitations in women's access to property rights and to certain types of employment and entitlement to equal pay), context-specific and complex. And interventions to shift social norms can be unconventional and progress hard to assess as they are focused on addressing behaviours, attitudes and beliefs (**Figure 10**). Country offices have identified a number of barriers to stepping up work on social norms including a lack of technical capacity on the ground to understand and carry out the necessary analysis, a lack of evidence about what works, and the challenge of demonstrating clear results. Taken together, these features present DFID with multiple challenges during the design, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation phases of its work in this area.

**2.19** DFID's centralised operating model (paragraph 2.4) provides a strong base from which to address harmful social norms. It can design and deliver context-specific approaches through its country office network, while implementing global programmes to build the evidence base of what interventions are effective in addressing social norms, such as the Gender and Adolescence: Global Evidence programme (**Figure 11** on page 34). DFID and FCO's in-country presence can build local relationships with local stakeholders to help influence them to address structural barriers, such as discriminatory laws which are not in line with international commitments.

**Figure 10**  
The Department for International Development's approach to addressing harmful social norms

The Department for International Development's (DFID's) programmes can take two different approaches to tackling harmful social norms



Source: National Audit Office summary of the Department for International Development's programme documentation

### Figure 11

## An overview of the Department for International Development’s programme Gender and Adolescence: Global Evidence (GAGE)<sup>1</sup>

The Department for International Development (DFID) is looking to track the progress of adolescent girls over almost a decade in a number of different areas to identify interventions most likely to have a positive impact on, for example, health outcomes

#### Overview

The Gender and Adolescence: Global Evidence (GAGE) programme is a nine-year mixed methods longitudinal research and evaluation programme following the lives of 18,000 adolescents in diverse and developing country contexts. It aims to generate new evidence on what works to enable poor adolescent girls to emerge from poverty and fast-track social change for themselves, their families and communities and their countries.

The research includes adolescents who are involved in adolescent-focused programme interventions as well as non-programme participants so as to better understand the relative contribution of programmes in shaping their wellbeing and empowerment in the short and longer terms.

The GAGE consortium, managed by the Overseas Development Institute (ODI), includes 35 partner organisations from around the world known for their expertise in research, policy and programming in the fields of adolescence, gender and social inclusion.

#### Six outcomes



#### Six countries



#### GAGE in the countries visited by the National Audit Office

**Ethiopia**

**Research population:** GAGE is following more than 6,800 adolescent boys and girls from rural, urban and pastoralist communities in three regions.

**Intervention:** GAGE is examining *Act with Her* – which aims to increase girls’ capabilities of well-being and facilitate healthy transitions to adulthood.

**National Research Partners:**

Quantitative: Laterite Ethiopia

Qualitative: Quest and a collective of independent researchers.

**Nepal**

**Research population:** In Nepal, GAGE is following around 1,700 adolescent girls in three districts.

**Intervention:** GAGE is examining *Room to Read’s Girls Education Programme* which aims to help adolescent girls realise their own potential and take purposeful action towards personal and community goals and child protection programming implemented by World Vision.

**National Research Partners:**

Quantitative: Centre for Research on Environment, Health and Population Activities.

Qualitative: the Nepal Institute for Social and Environmental Research.

#### Notes

- 1 More detail about the Department for International Development’s Gender and Adolescence: Global Evidence programme can be found at: <https://devtracker.dfid.gov.uk/projects/GB-CHC-228248-GAGE>.
- 2 SRHR: Sexual and reproductive health and rights.

Source: National Audit Office summary of Department for International Development programme documents

**2.20** However, DFID's operating model may impair its ability to achieve its long-term goals around addressing social norms. Programmes can have a relatively short-term lifecycle, and there is often little scope for evaluating the impact of the programme in the years following completion. Also, impact may materialise after a programme has finished. These issues can affect DFID's ability to address complex issues which need to be tackled over a longer period, and its ability to assess the longer-term impact of its work or whether attitudes and behaviours have regressed in the years following programme completion. DFID has some evidence that it can achieve progress in addressing some social norms in shorter timeframes in some areas.

**2.21** DFID's programmes include elements for which it contracts with external organisations. DFID looks to take a case by case approach to each procurement to reflect the nature of the issue it is looking to tackle, including social norms. And it provides funding to a range of organisations of different sizes. But its approach to procurement risks prioritising low costs and easier to measure outputs and outcomes over addressing more complex, longer-term goals, such as many relating to changing social norms.

- Some stakeholders have told us that DFID's approach could limit the involvement of smaller organisations which focus on addressing long-term social norms. They also told us its approach could mean that women's rights organisations and smaller non-governmental organisations, some of which DFID supports financially, are unable to receive DFID funding. In their opinion, they are often best-placed to address successfully harmful social norms in the community.
- A 2016 ICAI report into marginalised girls' education recommended that DFID should specify how to approach value for money analysis when targeting marginalised groups and harder to reach groups, emphasising equity as well as cost effectiveness.<sup>9</sup> Partially accepting the recommendation, DFID stated that its approach to value for money did not mean it should ignore programmes which focus on difficult to reach populations or problems which are difficult to tackle and that it was taking steps to make this commitment more explicit in its internal and external guidance. In July 2017, DFID issued guidance outlining how to make sure equity is addressed during its value for money assessments, as well as refining its approach to procurement.

<sup>9</sup> Independent Commission for Aid Impact, *Accessing, staying and succeeding in basic education – UK aid's support to marginalised girls*, December 2016.

## Part Three

### Assessing progress with the Strategic Vision

**3.1** In this part of our report we examine how the Department for International Development (DFID) assesses progress with its 2018–2030 Strategic Vision for Gender Equality (2018 Strategic Vision). Specifically, this part covers:

- the introduction and application of arrangements to support the assessment of progress;
- the identification of its expenditure on gender related interventions;
- the assessment of performance and progress at a programme and portfolio level; and
- assessing the impact of its influencing activity.

#### Oversight of progress

**3.2** DFID has put in place mechanisms to help it to assess progress with its 2018 Strategic Vision. In February 2019, it established the Gender Equality Delivery Board. The Board is DFID-wide and aims “to hold responsibility and accountability for the implementation of the Strategic Vision [...]”. Its terms of reference cover, among other things, responsibility for reporting progress with the calls to action (see Figure 1); identifying areas of concern with regard to implementation; and sharing lessons learnt within DFID and across government. In line with its terms of reference the Board has met four times to date.

**3.3** DFID has assessed its performance and progress with regard to its objectives for each of its seven calls to action as well as its work with international partners and with other government departments. **Figure 12** on page 38 summarises DFID’s September 2019 assessment of its performance against two criteria – performance to date since it launched its 2018 Strategic Vision in March 2018 and likely performance against future actions over the next six months. DFID’s assessment shows that it:

- had a positive view of performance to date – for example, it highlighted that good evidence of effective interventions to tackle violence against women and girls had been identified and disseminated; established a cross-government approach to address the potential rollback of women’s rights globally; and improved coordination across government departments with regard to gender equality overseas; and

- is less optimistic about its performance against future priorities over the next six months – for example, DFID stopped for the moment its work to integrate gender equality into the United Nations (UN) reform process, has scaled back its work on capacity-building across the department, and identified concerns about the extent to which its country offices are focusing sufficiently on addressing social norms as a barrier to improved gender equality. DFID identified internal resource constraints and, externally, the impact of the attempted rollback of women's rights as contributing to its view of performance.

**3.4** Recognising the narrative dashboard is in an early stage of development, and given the qualitative nature of many aspects of its 2018 Strategic Vision, DFID has made some effort to capture progress from a qualitative perspective within its own organisation and more widely across government and its influencing network. Drawing together existing data, it is also developing a complementary dashboard which captures quantitative measures of performance at three levels – development outcomes DFID is contributing to alongside others; DFID results relevant to each of the pillars; and spending data. It has a number of issues around the quality of spending data that it needs to address.

**3.5** DFID's transparency of its performance in relation to its 2018 Strategic Vision is limited. Its work on gender equality features in two important publicly available accountability documents.

- **Annual report and accounts.**<sup>10</sup> For example, in its 2018-19 annual report and accounts it set out details of some of the influencing work it had completed at the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting in April 2018 and at the Canadian G7 in June 2018. It also highlighted the steps it has taken to improve the evidence base for programmes which address, for example, violence against women and girls in humanitarian settings.
- **Single Departmental Plan.**<sup>11</sup> For example, DFID reports its performance with regard to the number of children under the age of five, women (of childbearing age) and adolescent girls reached by DFID through nutrition-related interventions and on the total number of women and girls, supported by DFID, using modern contraception.

10 The Department for International Development's Annual Report and Accounts for 2018-19 can be found here – [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/815787/ARA-2019.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/815787/ARA-2019.pdf)

11 The Department for International Development's current Single Departmental Plan can be found here – [www.gov.uk/government/publications/department-for-international-development-single-departmental-plan/department-for-international-development-single-departmental-plan--2](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/department-for-international-development-single-departmental-plan/department-for-international-development-single-departmental-plan--2)

**Figure 12**

The Department for International Development's assessment of its performance with regard to its 2018 Strategic Vision for Gender Equality, September 2019

The Department for International Development's most recent assessment of performance shows it is generally positive about its performance between March 2018 (when it launched its 2018 Strategic Vision) and September 2019 but it was less positive about likely performance against future priorities for the next six months to March 2020

| Area of work   | Assessment of performance to date (March 2018 to September 2019) | Assessment of likely performance against future priorities (October 2019 to March 2020) |
|--|--|---|
| Call to Action 1<br>(challenge unequal power relations)  | ●  | ↓   |
| Call to Action 2<br>(build inter-linked foundations to have a transformational impact for women and girls) | ●  | ↓   |
| Call to Action 3<br>(step up in conflict and crises)   | ●  | ↔   |
| Call to Action 4<br>(step up to leave no girl or woman behind)   | ●  | ↓   |
| Call to Action 5<br>(integrating gender equality in all we do)   | ●  | ↓   |
| Call to Action 6<br>(working across lifecycles)  | ●  | ↔   |
| Call to Action 7<br>(data and evidence)  | ●  | ↓   |
| Working with international partners  | ●  | ↓   |
| Working across UK government   | ●  | ↔   |

**Notes**

- 1 Performance to date – Green: On track; Amber: At risk; Red: Off track.
- 2 Likely performance against future priorities in the next six months: Side arrow – On track to meet aims; Down arrow – Not on track to meet aims.

Source: National Audit Office summary of the Department for International Development's assessment of progress, September 2019



**3.6** But there are weaknesses in its approach. DFID has met with its stakeholders to discuss, for example, priorities for its work and areas for collaboration. But its intention, at the time it launched its 2018 Strategic Vision, was to convene an external panel of academic, civil society and private sector representatives every six months to challenge its performance. The panel would be chaired by DFID's permanent secretary or its director-general responsible for, amongst other things, policy and research. To date, terms of reference for these meetings have not been established and no such meetings have taken place. DFID told us it intends to hold such a meeting in the future. Neither has DFID published an assessment of its progress with its 2018 Strategic Vision, nor has it any plans to do so (while it did publish annual reports showing its progress with previous strategies directed at improving the lives of women and girls, it told us there had been a reduction in the 'appetite' within DFID as it judged the costs of doing so outweighed the benefit).

### **Improving data quality**

**3.7** DFID has championed good practice in data collection, including gender data, in its 2018 Strategic Vision and wider work including in two of the seven calls to action (**Figure 13** overleaf). Collecting disaggregated data, which is split by characteristics such as gender, age, geography and disability, is important in enabling organisations to track whether the impact of their work is reaching everyone in society, including those who are most at risk of being 'left behind'. Collecting data in an international development context is challenging due to a lack of data availability (often due to fragile or conflict-affected working environments or poor governance), reliance on third-party data collection and difficulty in attributing the impact of an activity.

**3.8** DFID has made good progress with its work to improve data quality. It has supported commitments to improve data collection and disaggregation at a global level. It has also supported initiatives to mainstream gender equality into more of its programmes, and contributed to the global evidence base on violence against women and girls (Figure 13). It has also started to use data on programmes with a gender focus in the material considered by the Gender Equality Delivery Board which tracks progress against its 2018 Strategic Vision (also see paragraphs 3.2 and 3.3).

**Figure 13**

The Department for International Development's two calls to action on gender equality data

The Department for International Development (DFID) has taken steps to improve the quality of data on gender equality

| Call to action   | Examples of DFID's actions  | Examples of DFID's actions to influence others   |
|--|---|--|
| <p><b>Integrate gender equality in all our work across the board and track delivery through to results</b></p> | <p>All of DFID's aid activities reported to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) are screened against the gender policy marker and the proportion of projects which mainstream gender (assessed as 'significant') has risen from 36% in 2009 to 60% in 2018.</p> <p>DFID has started to use data on gender specific projects in the material considered by the Gender Equality Delivery Board which tracks progress against the 2018 Strategic Vision for Gender Equality.</p> <p>DFID has taken steps to build the knowledge and capacity of its staff to improve consideration of gender equality when designing programmes.</p> | <p>DFID has supported the work of Gendernet, the sub-group of gender equality experts at OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC), and are members of the management group which sets DAC's agenda on gender equality.</p> <p>DFID raised the difficulties it experienced in applying the gender policy marker with the Gendernet sub-group who then led a training workshop on the issue in July 2019, as many donors were facing similar issues.</p>  |
| <p><b>Build evidence and disaggregate data</b></p>   | <p>DFID has produced two plans to encourage the collection and use of disaggregated data on gender.</p> <p>DFID's ambition is to report key headline results disaggregated by at least sex, age, disability status and geography where relevant/appropriate under its Single Departmental Plan by 2022.</p>   | <p>DFID hosted a conference with UN and civil society in 2016 which led to the development of its 2017 Data Disaggregation Action Plan and its Inclusive Data Charter Action Plan. Taken together these set out goals to increase the level of disaggregated performance data on, for example, gender that DFID collects, reports and uses, and an ambition to improve data collection and disaggregation at a global level. DFID's aim is to use this data to improve its decision making.</p> <p>DFID's 'What works to prevent violence against women and girls' research initiative provides open source evidence-based research, accessible to all to expand the global evidence base on prevention of violence.</p> |

Source: National Audit Office summary of the Department for International Development's documentation

**3.9** DFID must report annually on the UK's aid activities to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD's) Development Assistance Committee (DAC). As part of this, it must indicate for each programme whether it targets gender equality as a policy objective using the 'gender equality policy marker' which signifies the degree to which a programme has a gender equality focus. The marker is 'to ensure at minimum that the project/programme does not perpetuate or exacerbate gender inequalities'. It provides an approximation of the volume of aid which targets gender equality using three classifications:

- **Principal:** Gender equality is the main objective of the programme and is fundamental in its design and expected results. The programme would not have been undertaken without this objective.
- **Significant:** Gender equality is an important and deliberate objective, but not the principal reason for undertaking the project/programme, often explained as gender equality being mainstreamed in the programme.
- **Not targeted:** The programme has been assessed against the gender equality policy marker but has not been found to target gender equality.

**3.10** DFID is spending a larger proportion of its bilateral aid on interventions which look to address, to varying degrees, gender equality issues than similar organisations in other countries. In 2018, DFID spent 6% of its bilateral spending on 'principal' and 60% on 'significant' programmes (**Figure 14** overleaf), compared to an average of 4% and 38% respectively across similar organisations in other OECD DAC countries for the period 2016-17.<sup>12</sup> DFID's total gender-related expenditure has increased by 29% since 2014 when the Gender Equality Act was introduced. The percentage of DFID's expenditure on programmes which have a 'significant' focus on gender equality has increased by 12 percentage points in the same period. However, the percentage that focuses 'principally' on gender equality has plateaued at 6% for the past three years, down from 7% in 2014.

**3.11** Inaccuracy in DFID's gender-marked data means that DFID does not have an accurate grasp of which of its programmes have a gender equality focus and how much it spends on them, limiting its ability to monitor progress against its 2018 Strategic Vision. DFID's own 2017 review of the accuracy with which the marker had been applied found that 35% of programmes were classified incorrectly. In our own review of DFID's gender-marked programmes for 2018, we found that 44% of programmes we looked at had been classified incorrectly. Based on our approach to sampling for this exercise, (which differed to DFID's and which we set out in detail in Appendix Two), this means at least 33% of DFID's bilateral spending was incorrectly classified.<sup>13</sup>

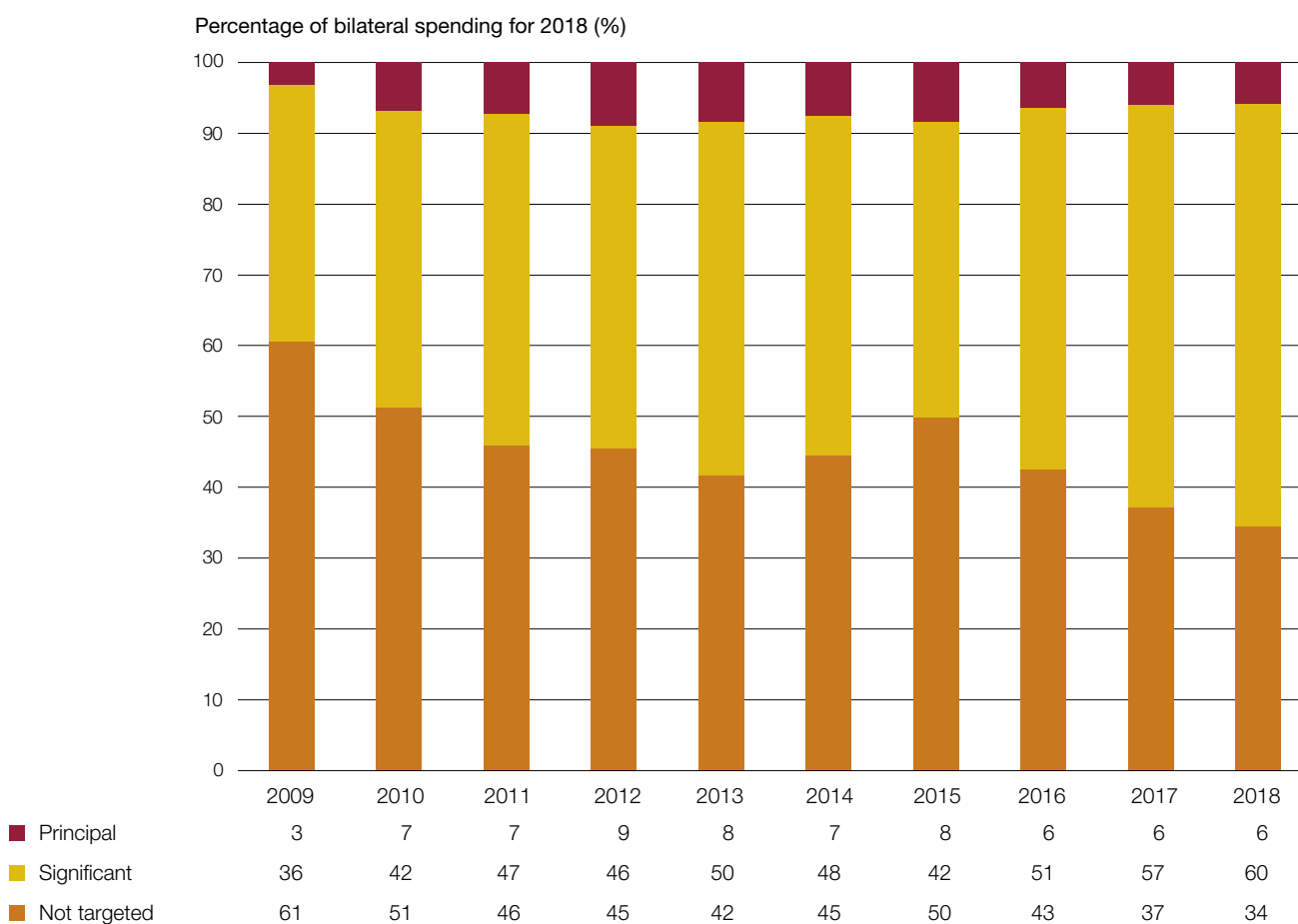
<sup>12</sup> Data for 2016-17 was the most up-to-date available when OECD completed its analysis.

<sup>13</sup> We sampled the top 100 programmes by spending – this represented 10% of the total number of programmes and 62% of DFID's bilateral spending in 2018.

**Figure 14**

## Department for International Development's bilateral Official Development Assistance spending split by gender equality policy marker, 2009 to 2018

The percentage of the Department for International Development's expenditure on programmes which have a significant<sup>5</sup> focus on gender equality has increased by 12 percentage points since 2014, when the International Development (Gender Equality) Act 2014 was introduced. However, the percentage that focuses principally<sup>4</sup> on gender equality has plateaued

**Notes**

- Under the International Development (Gender Equality) Act 2014 programmes must have meaningful yet proportionate regard to the contribution its assistance is likely to make to reducing gender inequality (development) or to gender-related differences in needs (humanitarian) before assistance is provided.
- The Department for International Development (DFID) must report annually on the UK's aid activities to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD's) Development Assistance Committee. As part of this, it must indicate for each activity whether it targets gender equality as a policy objective using the 'gender equality policy marker' which signifies the degree to which a programme has a gender equality focus. The marker provides an approximation of the volume of aid which targets gender equality using three classifications: principal, significant and not targeted.
- The 2018 calendar year was the most recent year for which data are available. DFID and the OECD publish the data annually in autumn/winter for the previous calendar year.
- Principal: Gender equality is the main objective of the programme and is fundamental to its design and expected results. The programme would not have been undertaken without this objective.
- Significant: Gender equality is an important and deliberate objective, but not the principal reason for undertaking the programme, often explained as gender equality being mainstreamed in programmes.
- Not targeted: The programme has been assessed against the gender marker but has not been found to target gender equality.

Source: National Audit Office analysis of the Department for International Development's Statistics on International Development

**3.12** Following the 2017 review, DFID identified that many staff were confused about the application of the marker. For instance, there was confusion over the difference between principal and significant, and over how to categorise complex programmes (for example, where there were multiple objectives). It made six recommendations to address how projects could be better classified, including: a change in the language used to refer to projects (that is to say, using ‘targeted’ and ‘mainstreamed’); correcting the miscoded projects already identified; improving the training offer to programme managers and project inputters; and building in project data to the business case and quality assurance processes.

**3.13** DFID has targeted building the capacity and knowledge of its staff in a number of ways.

- General capacity-building to improve staff understanding of gender equality including the development of a ‘Gender Equality Resource Hub’ on the intranet, and a toolkit for in-country social development advisers to use to train overseas staff.
- *‘How To’ Guidance Note on Gender Equality* co-written by DFID and the Foreign & Commonwealth Office (FCO) was published in autumn 2019 and has a dedicated section on applying the gender equality policy marker.
- Changes to the management information system to insert prompts for considering gender in project design, and to record the gender equality policy marker classification upon entry to the system.

**3.14** In July 2019, DFID proposed a revised quality assurance process to address two of the recommendations made following its 2017 review. The revised quality assurance approach has not yet been fully implemented. While DFID is taking positive steps to improve the use of the gender equality policy marker, it has not tested whether use of the gender equality policy marker has improved since 2017 (our analysis for 2018 shows that this remains an issue).

## **Assessing programme and portfolio performance**

**3.15** DFID takes a systematic approach to considering the performance of each of its programmes, reviewing performance annually.<sup>14</sup> DFID considers the programme’s progress against milestones and outputs established when the programme was approved. Each programme is given one of five ratings – from ‘outputs failed to meet expectations’ (‘C’) to ‘outputs substantially meet expectations’ (‘A++’).<sup>15</sup>

**3.16** Our analysis of annual review scores for programmes which target gender equality shows they have a similar profile to that of programmes which did not have a gender focus. **Figure 15** overleaf shows that, in 2018-19, 87% of programmes achieved a score of A, A+ or A++: the programmes as a minimum met the expectations set for them. By comparison 84% of programmes with no gender focus achieved the same profile of results.

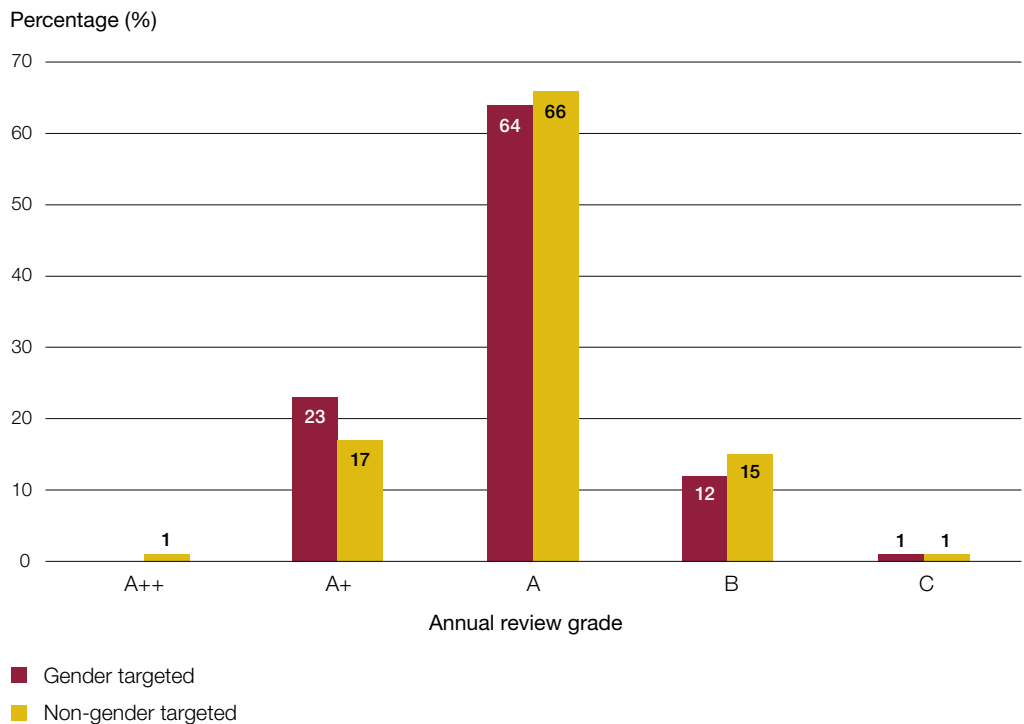
<sup>14</sup> An annual review is completed by the team responsible for and colleagues independent of the programme.

<sup>15</sup> The five ratings are C, B, A, A+, and A++.

**Figure 15**

The Department for International Development’s assessment of programme performance in 2018-19 for gender equality and non-gender equality specific programmes

**Similar proportions of gender equality and non-gender equality specific programmes were assessed as meeting expectations**



**Note**

1 Each programme is given one of five ratings – from ‘outputs failed to meet expectations’ (C) to ‘outputs substantially meet expectations’ (A++). The five ratings are C, B, A, A+, and A++.

Source: National Audit Office summary of the Department for International Development’s review scores for 2018-19

**3.17** As well as assessing performance at a programme level, DFID needs to understand how well its portfolio of work on gender equality is performing. For DFID this view is important because of the broad nature of its 2018 Strategic Vision and the decentralised nature of its delivery model (see paragraphs 2.4 and 2.5). A portfolio perspective would help DFID consider whether it has the right mix of programme interventions to achieve its objectives, and if it has the right balance of work (within and across programmes) between short-term activity and a focus on tackling social norms.

**3.18** Our guidance *Framework to review programmes* identified a number of benefits to taking a portfolio-based approach to considering performance.<sup>16</sup>

- Understanding the interdependencies between different strategies.
- Prioritising projects and programmes across the landscape of its work.
- Assessing performance across multiple objectives or across a range of locations.
- Assessing whether programmes are addressing the most important strategic priorities.
- Understanding how other organisations' programmes might impact on the operating environment.
- Understanding whether programmes make sense given the resources available.

**3.19** In February 2018, the Independent Commission for Aid Impact (ICAI) published its report *DFID's approach to value for money in programme and portfolio management*. ICAI concluded that DFID's management of its country portfolios highlighted the most significant gaps in DFID's approach to value for money. In particular, ICAI concluded that DFID did not have an approach for capturing and then reporting results at a country level. It also concluded that cross-cutting objectives are important to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, but do not feature in DFID's consideration of value for money.

**3.20** Earlier in this report we set out the steps DFID is taking to assess performance against the objectives it established, for example, each of the seven calls to action in its 2018 Strategic Vision; and we highlighted how DFID has started to draw together financial and performance information for each of the five pillars and for humanitarian assistance.

<sup>16</sup> National Audit Office, *Framework to review programmes*, April 2019. Available at: [www.nao.org.uk/report/framework-to-review-programmes](http://www.nao.org.uk/report/framework-to-review-programmes)

**3.21** DFID should also have a view on the performance of its portfolio at a country level. As part of our visits to DFID’s country offices in Ethiopia and Nepal, we considered the approach taken by each office to the consideration of portfolio performance to complement its programme level assessment of performance.

- While DFID’s Ethiopia country office tracks the impact of its individual programmes on gender equality and women’s empowerment, it does not currently have an approach which considers value for money across all of its programmes in this area.
- DFID’s Nepal country office has taken steps to get a more portfolio wide perspective on its performance, including that which relates to its gender equality interventions. It is looking to consider its performance against the three key issues it has identified in Nepal.<sup>17</sup> For example, it has in place an approach to assess coherence across its programmes and is introducing an approach to monitor and evaluate the performance of its portfolio. The Nepal country office told us its initiative was intended to help it prioritise its spending and to reduce complexity (by, for example, reducing the number of funding agreements it had in place).

In its February 2020 report on UK aid to Ghana, ICAI recommended that DFID should require portfolio level development outcome objectives and results frameworks for its country programmes. DFID responded positively to this recommendation setting out for example that country offices plan to develop portfolio level results frameworks during 2020.<sup>18</sup>

### **Impact from influencing work**

**3.22** DFID is clear in its 2018 Strategic Vision that it needs to strengthen existing and develop new partnerships with overseas governments, businesses, multilaterals and humanitarian agencies. It called on its partners to consider their performance against the seven parts of its call to action (see Figure 1). DFID recognises that this is a challenge as it does not have the power to compel these bodies to make such an assessment (or to take action more generally in response to DFID’s 2018 Strategic Vision). DFID has not assessed whether organisations have made this assessment.

**3.23** DFID has a four-part approach to influencing its partners, explained in **Figure 16**.

**3.24** As part of its implementation review of its previous Strategic Vision for Women and Girls, DFID found two challenges relevant to its influencing work. First, identifying what it described as “obvious entry points” – determining how best to secure influence with a particular organisation. Second, assessing the impact of this type of work.

**3.25** For each activity, DFID looks to establish objectives for what it wants to achieve, which can be used to consider the success of its involvement. Such activities tend to have less specific objectives than programme interventions and involve many organisations. Attributing impact specifically to DFID is difficult and could have a detrimental impact on DFID’s future efforts to bring about change if it attempts to do so.

<sup>17</sup> Inclusive growth, Leave No-one Behind, and the transition to federalism.

<sup>18</sup> Independent Commission for Aid Impact, *The changing nature of UK aid in Ghana – Country portfolio review*, February 2020.



**Figure 16**

The Department for International Development's approach to influencing other organisations

The Department for International Development (DFID) looks to influence a range of different organisations through, for example, attendance at events and summits and by using its position as a donor to multilaterals

| Area of focus   | Examples of activity  |
|---|---|
| <p>Influencing through attendance at events and summits, and involvement in considering intergovernmental processes</p> <p>Shaping development policy and practice through the use of evidence on the types of interventions which are successful.</p> <p>Establishing global partnerships to focus on the implementation of gender equality commitments.</p> <p>Protecting and enhancing, for example, worldwide legal frameworks for gender equality.</p> | <p><b>Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting (April 2018)</b></p> <p>The UK government launched the Platform for Girls' Education to support progress with, for example, the commitments in the Leave No Girl Behind campaign. The UK government also made its financial commitments to the Girls Education Challenge and announced its commitment to what it described as a gender responsive trade policy.</p> <p><b>Women MPs conference (November 2018)</b></p> <p>DFID attended this conference which aimed to highlight the importance of women's political empowerment. DFID aimed, among other things, to support evidence based discussions among delegates and raise DFID's profile.</p> <p><b>63rd Commission on the Status of Women (March 2019)</b></p> <p>DFID was part of the Commission focused on, for example, social protection systems and access to public services. DFID's aims were to, among other things, prevent rollback of the international framework to promote gender equality.</p> <p><b>Ending Sexual and Gender Based Violence in Humanitarian Crises conference (May 2019)</b></p> <p>DFID attended this conference – the first conference to focus on political and financial support for ending gender based violence in humanitarian crises.</p> <p><b>Women Deliver (June 2019)</b></p> <p>DFID looked to, among other things, identify key areas for collaboration with other donors.</p> |
| <p><b>Influencing through position as a donor to multilaterals</b></p> <p>DFID looks to use its position as a donor to multilateral agencies to increase and improve their work on gender equality.</p>   | <p>Working with other donors to make sure the replenishment of the World Bank's International Development Association strengthens commitments on gender.</p>  |

**Influencing through position as a donor to multilaterals**

DFID looks to use its position as a donor to multilateral agencies to increase and improve their work on gender equality.

Working with other donors to make sure the replenishment of the World Bank's International Development Association strengthens commitments on gender.

Source: National Audit Office summary of the Department for International Development's documentation

# Appendix One

## Our audit approach

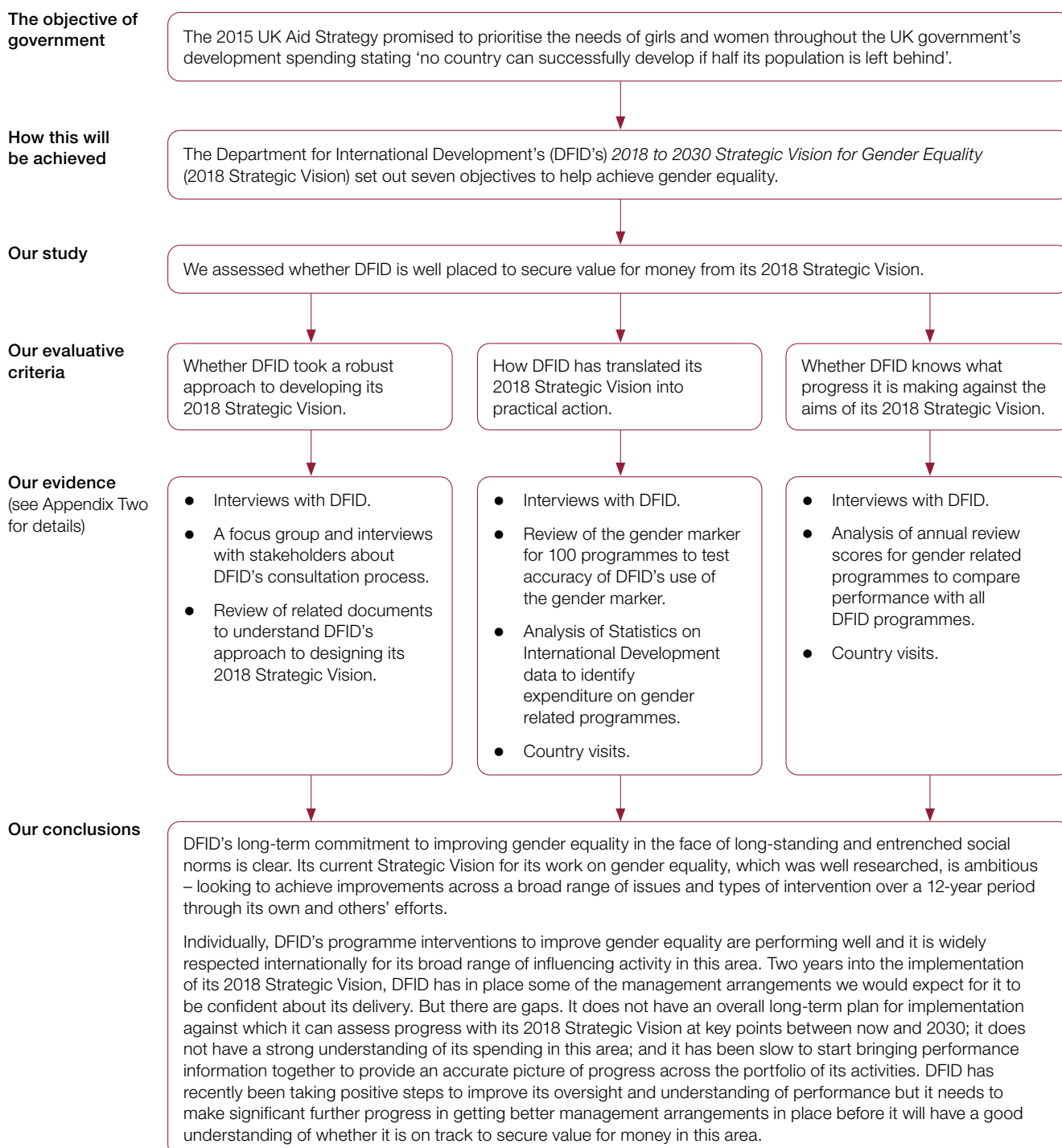
**1** In March 2018, the Department for International Development (DFID) published its *2018–2030 Strategic Vision for Gender Equality* (2018 Strategic Vision), which provides a framework for its efforts to improve the lives of women and girls. In this report, we examine:

- whether DFID took a robust approach to developing its 2018 Strategic Vision;
- how DFID translated its 2018 Strategic Vision into practical action; and
- whether DFID knows what progress it is making against the aims of its 2018 Strategic Vision.

**2** Our audit approach is summarised in **Figure 17**.

**Figure 17**

## Our audit approach



# Appendix Two

## Our evidence base

- 1 We have reached our independent conclusion on the Department for International Development's (DFID's) design, implementation and monitoring of its *2018–2030 Strategic Vision for Gender Equality* (2018 Strategic Vision) by analysing evidence collected between May 2019 and February 2020. Our approach is outlined in Appendix One.
- 2 In designing and carrying out our work, we drew on a variety of sources.
- 3 **We interviewed staff in DFID, other government departments and stakeholders** involved in delivering gender focused development spending overseas.
  - Within DFID, we interviewed staff responsible for delivering key aspects of its 2018 Strategic Vision, and teams with corporate roles underpinning its delivery.
  - We interviewed staff in the Foreign & Commonwealth Office, Department for International Trade, Ministry of Defence, and the Stabilisation Unit.
  - We ran a focus group and held interviews with stakeholders involved in DFID's consultation process to get their views on DFID's approach to designing its 2018 Strategic Vision.
- 4 **We reviewed key documents**, including:
  - DFID and cross-government strategies relating to gender equality;
  - records and outputs from DFID's internal and external consultation exercises;
  - Gender Equality Delivery Board papers;
  - DFID gender equality guidance and training materials, and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) gender equality policy marker guidance;
  - briefing material, policy and programming documents for the five interlinked pillars in its 2018 Strategic Vision; and
  - examples of influencing activities on gender equality.

**5 We considered reports from the Independent Commission for Aid Impact which were relevant to our work.**

- *DFID's efforts to eliminate violence against women and girls*, May 2016.
- *Accessing, staying and succeeding in basic education – UK aid's support to marginalised girls*, December 2016.
- *DFID's approach to supporting inclusive growth in Africa*, June 2017.
- *DFID's approach to value for money in programme and portfolio management*, February 2018.
- *The current state of UK aid: A synthesis of ICAI findings from 2015 to 2019*, June 2019.
- *ICAI follow-up review of 2017-18 reports*, July 2019.
- *The changing nature of UK aid in Ghana – Country portfolio review*, February 2020.

**6 To test the accuracy of the gender equality policy marker used by DFID to report on gender related spend, we reviewed the application of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's Development Assistance Committee's gender equality policy marker assigned to 100 programmes.**

- We examined the top 100 programmes by expenditure from the Statistics for International Development data for 2018.
- Using information from the business case, performance log-frame and the latest annual review, we tested each project against the criteria listed in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's Development Assistance Committee's gender equality policy marker guidelines to decide whether the project should be marked as principal, significant or not targeted.
- We compared our rating with the rating assigned by DFID to identify the error rate.

**7 We analysed the Statistics on International Development (covering each year from 2009 to 2018) to understand changes in Official Development Assistance spending over time, by department and by sector.**

**8 We conducted country visits to Ethiopia and Nepal**, to gain an understanding of how DFID's 2018 Strategic Vision is implemented in practice and to better understand the challenges of this in the context of, for example, prevailing social norms. During the visits we reviewed:

- the development and implementation of its 2018 Strategic Vision from a country-office perspective;
- how gender equality focused programmes and the UK government's influencing agenda are delivered in country; and
- the challenges departments face in designing, implementing and monitoring programmes focused on tackling gender inequality.

We interviewed UK government officials responsible for management of the UK work in each country as well as teams with responsibility for management of individual projects and programmes with a gender equality focus. We also interviewed implementing partners and met with beneficiaries for some programmes.

# Appendix Three

## Country case studies

We visited Ethiopia and Nepal to gain an understanding of how the Department for International Development (DFID) implemented its *2018–2030 Strategic Vision for Gender Equality* (2018 Strategic Vision) in practice and to better understand the challenges of this in the context of, for example, prevailing social norms.

Drawing on the Department for International Development's documentation, this appendix provides the context for UK aid in Ethiopia and Nepal, the challenges faced by women and girls in those countries and details of the programmes we reviewed.

### **Ethiopia**

#### Background to UK aid in Ethiopia

The Ethiopian government has used its own resources and international aid to boost economic development and lift millions out of poverty over the past two decades, through significant investment in public services. Since the early 1990s, primary school net enrolment has risen from 20% to 93%, and access to clean water from 14% to 65%. Since 2000, under-five mortality has fallen by 60% and maternal mortality by 53%. The proportion of the population living in poverty has reduced from 44% in 2000 to 23% in 2016. In recent years, Ethiopia's economy has grown by about 8% per year. The government's push to industrialise is creating new jobs for its people, and economic opportunities for countries such as the UK.

However, Ethiopia remains a country with enormous development needs. Ethiopia still has high rates of chronic childhood malnutrition (38%) and maternal mortality, and female genital mutilation/cutting and early marriage lead to acute gender inequalities. Further support is required to help Ethiopia continue on its path towards lower-middle income status, ensuring no one is left behind.

The UK relies on a stable Ethiopia that is supportive of its foreign policy priorities in the Horn of Africa, particularly in relation to Somalia and South Sudan. Ethiopia is the largest contributor of peacekeeping forces in the world and particularly in its neighbourhood. Ethiopia hosts the second largest refugee population in Africa (890,000 refugees) from South Sudan, Somalia, Sudan and Eritrea. It is also a transit country for Eritrean and Somali refugees migrating to Europe: 40,000 to 50,000 take the 'central Mediterranean' route each year. Ethiopia therefore has a critical role to play in deterring irregular migration.

### The position of women and girls in Ethiopia

**Sexual and reproductive health:** In 2015, Ethiopian women had on average 4.6 children, nearly two children less than the average reported in 1990. Despite this progress, Ethiopia's population doubled from around 50 million in 1991 to 102 million in 2016. Three-and-a-half million (one in five) married women of reproductive age are currently not using contraception, but wish to postpone their next birth, or stop childbearing altogether. By providing family planning choices for everyone who wants it, Ethiopia will be able to: increase women's voice, choice and control over their reproductive health; slow down population growth; and enhance economic growth.

**Education:** Although Ethiopia has made much progress in ensuring all children get an education, girls and disabled children still face huge barriers, particularly those in very remote areas, where harmful social norms and cultural practices can be harder to challenge and change. Barriers include: early marriage, abduction, risky migration, poor hygiene facilities, domestic chore burden, parental attitudes, language of instruction and safety and security on the way to and within school.

**Economic empowerment:** Ethiopia is one of the poorest countries in the world and faces a huge challenge to create economic opportunities for the two million young people entering the labour market each year. The Government of Ethiopia's ambition is to become the light-manufacturing hub of Africa and it is targeting the creation of two million manufacturing jobs. The large-scale recruitment of mainly young women in the industrial parks offers huge opportunities for social and economic empowerment. However, formalised work and urban living will be a new experience for most and pose risks as well as opportunities. DFID has identified that it is critical that approaches to address gender-based violence, childcare, and awareness of rights are thoroughly embedded in all the DFID's interventions.



**Political empowerment:** Since 2018, women are well-represented in the Ministerial Cabinet (around 50%) and also leading public and government institutions. Ethiopia's parliament also appointed the country's first woman President in October 2018. Women continue to face barriers in accessing positions in the political and public sphere, such as negative cultural attitudes, including reservations about women's leadership as well as a lack of affirmative actions, such as mandatory quotas or training activities.

**Violence against women and girls:** Ethiopia has laws to prevent child marriage, forced marriage, female genital mutilation and other forms of violence against women and girls. But implementation capacity is limited and the cultural norms make identification and reporting difficult. Gender-based violence is under-reported because of cultural taboos and victims' lack of trust in the legal system and there is a lack of effective management, knowledge of laws and coordination between different actors. Sexual violence and sexual harassment in the workplace are reportedly prevalent in Ethiopia. Female genital mutilation rates have reduced significantly since 2000 for younger girls and in urban areas but is still prevalent in rural and pastoralist areas.

The programmes we looked at in Ethiopia

In **Ethiopia** we reviewed eight programmes including five managed by DFID's Ethiopia country office and three centrally managed programmes (**Figure 18** on pages 56 and 57).

**Figure 18**  
Ethiopia programmes

| Description   | Pillar                                    | Budget                       | Duration  |
|---|---|------------------------------|-----------|
| <p><b>Private Enterprise Programme Ethiopia (Managed by DFID's Ethiopia country office)</b></p> <p>To support access to finance for small and medium sized businesses, especially those owned and run by women, and to support productivity and growth in the horticulture, leather and textiles sectors in order to raise incomes and create jobs.</p>   | Women's Economic Empowerment              | £70 million                  | 2012–2020 |
| <p><b>Land Investment for Transformation (Managed by DFID's Ethiopia country office)</b></p> <p>To support the Government of Ethiopia in the provision of map-based land certificates to farmers in four regions and assist them to fully benefit from increased investment and productivity through the development of the rural land market and its supporting operations. The project will be a driver to increasing income by 20% for more than 500,000 households. It will also secure land ownership for 6.1 million households, by certifying 14 million parcels of land (of which more than 70% are jointly or individually owned by women).</p>  | Women's Economic Empowerment              | £72.7 million                | 2014–2020 |
| <p><b>Civil Society Support Programme Phase II (Managed by the British Council on behalf of DFID's Ethiopia country office)</b></p> <p>A capacity development programme designed to support Ethiopia's civil society organisations to foster state accountability to citizens based on trust, and to enhance evidence-based engagement that results in a better quality of basic public services for communities in the country. The programme particularly targets the hardest-to-reach and under-served communities, that is, women, men, girls, boys, people with disabilities and vulnerable groups affected by social marginalisation, geographic remoteness, under-resourcing and overlooked development issues all over the country.</p> | Women's Political Empowerment             | £12 million                  | 2017–2023 |
| <p><b>Women's Integrated Sexual Health (A centrally managed programme)</b></p> <p>To increase the uptake of comprehensive sexual and reproductive health services to reduce maternal deaths and to prevent the use of and access to unsafe abortion, including for marginalised and young women. It will enable women in target countries to safely plan their pregnancies and improve their sexual and reproductive health.</p>  | Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights | £212 million (global budget) | 2017–2021 |

**Figure 18** *continued*  
Ethiopia programmes

| Description   | Pillar                                    | Budget   | Duration                   |
|---|---|--|----------------------------|
| <p><b>Family Planning by Choice Programme (Managed by DFID's Ethiopia country office)</b></p> <p>To deliver 'family planning for everyone who wants it' in all of Ethiopia by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a improving the availability of modern family planning services at primary health care units;</li> <li>b reducing regional disparities in access to and voluntary use of modern family planning services; and</li> <li>c improving capacity of, and domestic financing for, the Ethiopian health service delivery system for providing comprehensive family planning services.</li> </ul> | Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights | £90 million                                      | 2017–2020                  |
| <p><b>Girls Education Challenge Fund (GEC) Phase II (A centrally managed programme)</b></p> <p>Phase II will enable up to 1.3 million marginalised girls (previously supported through Phase I) to transition on to secondary education and into further education, training or work. It is also supporting up to 190,000 highly marginalised girls who are out of school to access education and relevant skills for life and work.</p> <p>There are four GEC projects in Ethiopia including the Girls Education Challenge – Transition: Excelling against the odds.</p>   | Education                                 | £500 million (global budget)<br><br>£4.7 million | 2017–2025<br><br>2017–2021 |
| <p><b>Support to General Education Quality Improvement Programme for Equity (Managed by DFID's Ethiopia country office)</b></p> <p>A programme to transform education system performance, producing better school leadership and more educated school leavers, especially disadvantaged girls and children from poor communities. The focus is on reducing inequalities in education participation and achievement through pre-primary expansion, better education for girls, refugees and up to 24,000 students with special needs.</p>  | Education                                 | £90.5 million                                    | 2018–2022                  |
| <p><b>Gender and Adolescence: Global Evidence (GAGE) (A centrally-managed programme)</b></p> <p>GAGE is a nine-year mixed methods longitudinal research and evaluation programme following the lives of adolescents in diverse developing country contexts. GAGE will generate new evidence on 'what works' to enable poor adolescent girls to emerge from poverty and fast-track social change for themselves, their families and communities and their countries.</p>   | Multiple pillars                          | £26 million                                      | 2015–2024                  |

Source: National Audit Office summary of the Department for International Development's programme documentation

## Nepal

### Background to UK aid in Nepal

Following successful elections in late 2017, Nepal is now implementing its new Federal Constitution, agreed following the 10-year civil war. The constitution has the potential to give more Nepalese an economic and political stake in the country's future and strengthen the foundations of both stability and prosperity.

Nepal has the potential for higher, inclusive economic growth through the development of hydro-electric power and through sectors like agro-processing, light manufacturing and tourism, which present significant opportunities for UK business, and for trade with India and China. This potential is hampered by complex investment rules and processes, a costly and unreliable energy supply, poor transport infrastructure, political instability, weak institutions, poor governance and gender disparity.

Nepal is highly vulnerable to natural disasters and climate change which can push populations back into poverty, destroy infrastructure and undermine growth. The 2015 earthquakes caused extensive damage and Nepal remains at high risk of a catastrophic earthquake. Nepal is the 16th poorest country in the world and the second poorest in Asia (after Afghanistan) in terms of per capita income. Out of a population of 28 million, 23% live on less than \$1.25 a day. The poorest people live in the inaccessible west of the country or are from the dalit (untouchable) caste. High unemployment means that about 1,500 Nepalis migrate for work every day to countries such as the Gulf states, Malaysia and India. Nepal is ranked 145th in the world in the Human Development Index, a situation which has not improved significantly since emerging from conflict in 2006.

### The position of women and girls in Nepal

**Sexual and reproductive health:** Only 15% of married adolescent girls age 15–19 and 24% of married women aged 20–24 are currently using a modern contraceptive method. Unmet need for family planning has been estimated to be highest (35%) for married girls age 15–19, followed by 33% among married women age 20–24. In Nepal childbearing begins early. Almost one-quarter of women who were aged 25 to 49 in 2016 had given birth by age 18, and nearly one-half by age 20.

**Education:** In Nepal, a complex set of interrelated social and structural barriers contribute to girls' greater dropout, especially when they reach secondary school. These barriers include restrictions on girls' movement during menstruation and lack of access to menstrual supplies due to taboos. These barriers not only prevent girls from attending school consistently, but also result in lower performance in exams compared with boys. Son preference is also widespread, which means that families are less likely to invest in their daughters' education – particularly in poorer communities that rely on agricultural production, with which girls can help. Early marriage and pregnancy are also correlated with girls' school dropout rates. Girls do not tend to marry while still studying, but because many families encourage early marriage, even in childhood, girls may come under pressure to leave school to do so.

**Economic empowerment:** There is considerable inequality of opportunity within the labour market; women only make up 19% of non-farm waged labour and only 6% of migrants are women. Nepalis lack enough well-paying jobs, and access to these jobs is difficult for women and marginalised groups. The challenges for young women to access skills training are particularly high. Their limited education makes the barriers to formal skills training almost insurmountable. Their families often do not give importance to girls' education, including technical skills training. The majority of girls get married early. Ninety per cent will have had their first child by the age of 25. Training at an early age followed by some job experience or training at a later stage after their children have grown up is crucial to allow mothers to re-enter the labour market. With many men leaving the country to work, Nepal's labour force is more reliant on women workers. The feminisation of Nepal's labour force and the disadvantages women face compound the damage to Nepal's economy

**Political empowerment:** Women have the right to vote, the right to participate in all state structures and bodies and the freedom to form a political party, union or association. However, women face socio-economic and cultural obstacles to reach political participation, in that many women have not had access to formal education, or the training required. Women still fulfil traditional roles in society, such as housewife and mother, and, even should they be socially mobile, often lack the resources or family support to enter politics. Additionally, threats of violence or sexual harassment to those participating in politics in Nepal may act as a deterrent.

**Violence against women and girls:** Despite many new laws relating to sexual and gender-based violence, considerable implementation gaps exist in almost all social policies related to women's rights, ranging from various harmful practices, sexual violence, and domestic violence to trafficking – these continue to pose a considerable challenge.

The programmes we looked at in Nepal

In **Nepal** we reviewed seven programmes including four managed by DFID's Nepal country office and three centrally managed programmes (**Figure 19** on pages 60 and 61).

**Figure 19**  
Nepal programmes

| Description   | Pillar                                    | Budget   | Duration                          |
|---|---|--|-----------------------------------|
| <p><b>Skills for Employment (Managed by DFID’s Nepal country office)</b></p> <p>This programme will provide young Nepalis with the opportunities to improve their employability, productivity and decision-making. It will expand DFID’s ambition on skills training in Nepal, by providing skills training to at least 100,000 poor and disadvantaged young Nepalis – especially women – so that they can access better jobs and higher incomes.</p>   | Women’s Economic Empowerment              | £29.5 million  | 2015–2022                         |
| <p><b>Hamro Samman (Managed by DFID’s Nepal country office)</b></p> <p>The programme aims to reduce the incidence of human trafficking by strengthening action across the three pillars outlined in the Palermo Protocol: protection, prevention, prosecution. It will work with all spheres of the Government of Nepal, civil society organisations and private sector, taking a partnerships approach, focusing on two sectors: foreign employment and the domestic entertainment industry.</p>   | Violence Against Women and Girls          | £4.5 million   | 2018–2022                         |
| <p><b>Family Planning Project (Managed by DFID’s Nepal country office)</b></p> <p>To address unmet need for family planning among excluded and vulnerable women in Nepal by reducing unwanted pregnancies and unsafe abortion through increased access to and use of modern methods of contraception.</p>   | Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights | £15.3 million  | 2013–2020                         |
| <p><b>Girls Education Challenge Fund (GEC) Phase II (A centrally managed programme)</b></p> <p>Phase II will enable up to 1.3 million marginalised girls (previously supported through Phase I) to transition on to secondary education and into further education, training or work. It is also supporting up to 190,000 highly marginalised girls who are out of school to access education and relevant skills for life and work.</p> <p>There are five GEC projects in Nepal which aim to improve learning opportunities and outcomes for more than 16,000 of the country’s marginalised girls, including three “Leave No Girl Behind” projects, that support girls with disabilities, adolescent brides and girls from disadvantaged caste groups.</p> | Education                                 | <p>£500 million (global budget)</p> <p>£20 million</p> | <p>2017–2025</p> <p>2017–2025</p> |

**Figure 19** *continued*

## Nepal programmes

| Description   | Pillar           | Budget        | Duration  |
|---|------------------|---------------|-----------|
| <p><b>Gender and Adolescence: Global Evidence (GAGE) (A centrally managed programme)</b></p> <p>GAGE is a nine-year mixed methods longitudinal research and evaluation programme following the lives of adolescents in diverse developing country contexts. GAGE will generate new evidence on ‘what works’ to enable poor adolescent girls to emerge from poverty and fast-track social change for themselves, their families and communities and their countries.</p> <p>In Nepal, the GAGE programme is following approximately 1,700 adolescent girls in Nuwakot, Tanahun and Morang districts.</p> | Multiple Pillars | £26 million   | 2015–2024 |
| <p><b>Evidence for Development (Managed by DFID’s Nepal country office)</b></p> <p>The aim of this programme is to improve the lives of poor people through more effective policy formulation and resource allocation by the government of Nepal, facilitated by the provision of higher quality data that is used frequently. The UK will provide up to £26 million over five years to strengthen the government of Nepal’s own capacity to generate data and use evidence more effectively.</p>   | Multiple Pillars | £26 million   | 2015–2023 |
| <p><b>Science for Humanitarian Emergencies and Resilience (SHEAR) (A centrally managed programme)</b></p> <p>SHEAR supports world-leading research and innovations in flood and drought risk monitoring and warning systems in Sub-Saharan Africa and landslip prone regions of South Asia. The programme aims to enable greater and more effective investment in disaster resilience and earlier action to respond to imminent natural hazards by providing decision makers with enhanced risk mapping and analyses and more reliable warning systems.</p>   | Multiple Pillars | £17.9 million | 2016–2021 |

Source: National Audit Office summary of the Department for International Development’s programme documentation

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