

Rt Hon Douglas Alexander MP
Secretary of State for International Development
Department for International Development
1 Palace Street
London
SW1E 5HE

Wednesday, 26 August 2009

Dear Douglas Alexander,

UK Gender and Development Network Response to DFID White Paper: Eliminating Poverty – Building Our Common Future

The UK Gender and Development Network would like to welcome the Department for International Development's White Paper, Eliminating Poverty – Building Our Common Future. The commitment to increase spending on aid comes at a critical time for the world's poorest as the global economic crisis threatens to derail progress in ending poverty.

We broadly welcome DFID's commitments to gender equality throughout the paper, but are keen to discuss further how these will translate into tangible, funded targets to benefit women and promote their rights.

The GAD Network is a diverse membership network of leading practitioners, academics and consultants working on gender and development issues in the UK, which has been actively advocating for greater attention to gender and development issues since its founding in 1985. We feel strongly that the voices and needs of women and girls living in poverty should be central to the UK government's approach to development, and look forward to continuing to work with DFID to achieve this.

The network was pleased to have the opportunity to meet with the White Paper team on 27 April, and to submit a written response to DFID's discussion document (sent 27 May). Whilst we appreciate that DFID signalled its commitment to gender equality and women's rights by meeting with the network, we were disappointed that we did not receive a response to our submission. We look forward to hearing from you in response to our comments outlined below.

Yours Sincerely

Ceri Hayes

Interim Chair

UK Gender and Development Network

UK Gender and Development Network Response to DFID White Paper: Eliminating Poverty – Building Our Common Future

Overall:

- We strongly welcome DFID's commitment to tackle the inequalities faced by women. However we are concerned that these commitments do not go far enough in recognising that women's empowerment and gender equality are key drivers for ending poverty.
- We are concerned that despite the inclusion of women and girls throughout the White Paper, DFID still currently lacks concrete targets and dedicated funding on women's rights and gender equality.
- Moreover, any commitments to gender equality and women's empowerment must be backed up with gender sensitive monitoring and evaluation and preceded by gendered planning processes including gender impact assessments.
- The GADN believe that DFID already have many of the tools to ensure that gender equality remains central to its work, including the Gender Equality Action Plan and commitment to the MDGs. However, these tools will only be effective if backed up by resources for building and sustaining leadership, staff capacity and systems of accountability for gender equality policy commitments in DFID *and* in its partner governments.

Specific commitments:

- The GAD Network welcomes the inclusion of measures to tackle VAW, and specifically sexual violence, in conflict situations. However VAW is a key barrier to women realising all their rights and to their ability to lift themselves and their families out of poverty across the spectrum of development issues. We are therefore disappointed that DFID has not yet developed a coherent strategy on violence against women as a central issue for tackling poverty.
- We welcome DFID's recognition of the importance of ensuring women and girls access to good health, education and economic opportunities as a means of breaking the cycle of poverty and building resilience to shocks. We would like to see this analysis translated into tangible targets for providing services, and economic opportunities for women and girls, particularly in fragile and conflict affected countries.
- It is already widely recognised that women and girls will bear the brunt of climate change in particular in relation to water scarcity. Whilst we welcome DFID's commitment to the Global Framework for Action we believe it is vital that secured access for women and girls to clean water supplies and sanitation is an important part of any DFID strategy.
- We are pleased to see DFID recognise the importance of women's political participation in peace building through its references to UNSC Resolutions 1325 and 1820 - this is an important step forward. However, we are disappointed not to see women's political participation as an important theme throughout the paper as part of a core commitment to good governance.
- We are pleased that DFID has publicly supported the creation of a UN agency for women and has committed to doubling its funding in this area, but we believe this agency will only be effective if there is a substantial increase in funding committed. The UK GADN and global GEAR campaign (Gender Equality Architecture Reform) are calling for an initial level of \$1 billion to be set. As a key ally of the new UN agency, it is important that DFID takes the lead in contributing a far more ambitious level of funding.