

REGIONAL ASSISTANCE PLAN FOR THE CARIBBEAN 2007-10

A Consultation Facilitated by CfD's
Caribbean and Latin America Task Group:

*A Collective response to DIFD's New Regional Assistance
Plan for the Caribbean 2007 - 2010*

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CfD

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Background

Connections for Development (CfD) is a UK-based, Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) led network of organisations and individuals with a particular interest in the international development (ID) agenda. The organisation has over 400 members who are committed to contributing to the effective shaping and delivery of International Development policies and activities in the developing countries of: Africa, Asia, Latin America, the Caribbean and the transition countries of Eastern Europe.

CfD's objectives are to ensure that BME communities in the UK contribute to and shape international development, through:

- creating opportunities for diverse BME groups to interact and identify common interest in international development and share learning and experience with each other;
- understanding, valuing and recognising the contributions made by BME groups to international development;
- ensuring that the capacity of BME groups is built so that they become more actively involved in international development;
- mainstreaming BME perspectives on international development within DfID and other development organisations;
- strengthening international development networks and channels of communication involving BME groups.

The mission of CfD is to promote and develop interest, raise awareness, co-operation and action on ID issues, and areas of activity such as poverty reduction amongst BME voluntary and community sector organisations in the UK, with interests in development overseas.

CfD has a commitment to build a stronger, better-informed and more effective UK BME community for ID, by providing a framework for the open sharing of views and constructive dialogue. By facilitating members to participate in an open, non-prescriptive and participatory manner, we endeavour to encourage a sense of ownership and participation in public policy debates.

In this context, CfD's Caribbean and Latin America Task Group facilitated a discussion, at its offices, on 26 June 2007. Below are the key points feeding in to the DfID consultation on the Caribbean RAP 2007-10.

General Points

Delegates commended the legibility of the consultation document which they said was very readable and had very useful and easily digestible information.

The meeting started with a general review of the key DFID motivations in the Caribbean RAP and their possible implications. The salient points were that:

1. DfID has informed of its departmental intentions to reduce administrative costs by at least 5% over the 2007-10 Comprehensive Spending Review period. There is a danger that this will result in a net reduction of revenue support to the Caribbean;
2. DFID is proposing to move away from direct support for **projects** across certain countries that it has traditionally supported, e.g. Jamaica and Guyana. Instead, DfID proposes an advisory and “technical assistance” role within these countries and in support of their respective strategic plans and structures, i.e. Medium-term Socio-Economic Framework (MTF) and Poverty Strategy Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP). We recognise that financial contributions to project activities are essential to help the successful delivery of these strategies. Delegates had strong concerns that the draft Caribbean RAP lacked sufficient reference to the role of community-based activities and, consequently, information as to **how** the loss of financial support to much needed project activities in these countries will be maintained and, indeed, investment increased.

Also noted was the concern that a lot of consultations around these issues have been conducted by DFID and others over the years and, though UK BME/Diaspora communities have eagerly participated in the processes (with very limited organisational capacity), meaningful acknowledgement and feedback has been, at best, patchy.

Response to the Draft RAP

Delegates looked at DFID RAP Objectives as stated on page 16 of the document and gave their comments and reactions to the ways in which these would be fulfilled.

Objective 1: Strengthening regional capacity to address vulnerabilities

- § This was generally welcomed as a worthwhile objective.
- § Notwithstanding this, this objective was viewed against the backdrop of DFID’s plans to pull out from direct support to projects in the region and to play a more facilitatory / advisory role. Delegates raised concerns that the document was vague on what, how and who would be responsible for covering the gaps created by such a pull out.
- § It was also noted that the draft RAP mentioned collaboration with other donors and funders but there was no evidence that these non-traditional donors

- § would have the same localised priorities in the region as those of DFID, i.e. their definitive programme priorities and funding criteria may not be compatible to the explicit needs in, say, the MTF and PRSP.
- § Delegates noted that the EC funding which DFID mentioned as an alternative in the document was actually targeted at the macro/capital projects in the region and did not have enough emphasis on projects that focussed on tackling poverty issues at grassroots levels. Further, it has been highlighted that the European Development Fund was also moving towards a more regional emphasis and that the slow disbursement of European Funds has led to a poor reputation for the EU in the Caribbean generally. These two issues present serious question as to how resources from Europe can respond to the economic deficits caused by DfID's move away from revenue support on the ground.
- § The issue of DFID partnership with regional partners was explored. Concerns were raised about the capacity of these regional partners and their ability to carry on the work that DFID had been undertaking in the region. These regional partners often suffered from lack of financial resources and DFID did not mention whether it was going to assist in funding them. It appeared that moves to the strengthening capacity without access to financial assistance to implement projects appeared contradictory.
- § Given that Tourism is one of the important industries in the region, the delegates were concerned that the RAP did not state how it will assist regional institutions in managing its negative consequences i.e. the HIV, AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases that are brought to the Caribbean by foreigners.
- § There appears to be little consideration of the negative impact of migration on the Caribbean. The region suffers from loss of skilled personnel, health staff, education etc, due to migration and there is insufficient information and profile of what is being done to address these imbalances.
- § The consultation document raises a lot of development issues that require attention but it does not indicate the specific outcomes nor does it demonstrate how DFID will engage with the localities. For instance, point 60 mentions DFID helping to maximise growth opportunities etc, but does not mention how this process will be undertaken and what the key deliverables are.
- § The issue of DFID's technical expertise mentioned in point 62 was viewed with great concern. Delegates questioned this expertise especially against the backdrop of the loss of the banana and sugar trade in the Caribbean. This could have been minimised had there been real partnership with those from the region with expertise to support the process.

Objective 2: To support evidence-based, inclusive and poverty-focussed policy processes and frameworks.

- § Reference point 63. The RAP does not specify the partner institutions that DFID will work with. Also, there were still concerns about the limited level of responses to the pro-poor agenda due to the limited number of partner institutions that DFID is working with. Concerns were raised as to how grassroots communities will be engaged in this process?
- § Ref point 65: There are concerns that the participation mentioned in this instance may not be generally diverse and participatory in nature.
- § The MTF could be affected negatively by the decision by DFID to pull out and change of modus operandi in the region.
- § Point 65 was also read in conjunction with point 14 and 47 and delegates were concerned by the lack of clarity and coherence around the contributions and roles of key stakeholder partners and donors and the potential role of Diaspora communities in the mix.
- § On the whole, delegates cited that the objectives as mentioned in point 65 suffered from lack of clarity on exactly what DFID was committing itself to do in region.
- § Ref 67: DFID's aspiration to continue to do meaningful poverty reduction activities is compromised by its reduction in investment in projects on the ground. There lacked clarity over the way in the deficit/gaps will be filled and, indeed, increased, and specifically the complications that are mentioned e.g. the assistance from non traditional donor. Should these new donors not be welcomed on board and encouraged to increase their activities?
- § Delegates were concerned that the messages of HMG alignment behind the MTF does not carry the same feeling of strength of determination as the Cross-Whitehall Jamaica Forward Strategy on safety and security issues.

Objective 3: Promoting Safety, Security and Access to Justice

- § There was concern that the security plan mentioned in the RAP seemed to be more inclined towards protecting and supporting the UK/EU interests.
- § There were also concerns about the inadequacies of the wider policing of the community.
- § However, the greatest concern was the retraction of DFID's support to projects, especially those that are starting to improve the situation in certain regions, and it was felt that this would result in increased localised poverty and criminal activities. It was stressed that reduction in crime could only be achieved, hand-in-hand, with a robust poverty reduction strategy.

Cross-Cutting Themes

- § Delegates believed that a comprehensive and coherent poverty reduction strategy should have a robust and coherent cross-cutting theme, in addition to particular focus on gender, HIV/AIDS and Disaster Risk Reduction.

- § There were concerns that the partners that DFID implies in point 72 may not be sufficiently diverse enough and, if not, the objectives may not be met.

Strategic Prioritisation and Design

- § There was a concern that DFID has, for reasons of relevance and motivation to them as a department, dedicated to narrow its work areas to those where they have skills and capacity and without equal consideration of the specific support needs of Jamaica, Guyana and the wider Caribbean.
- § There were concerns as to who would be responsible for monitoring how the gaps are being filled when DFID pulls out; is this explicit in the monitoring framework?
- § Delegates also called for a clearly defined exit strategy for DFID especially in those areas where significant community development programmes were taking place.
- § Point 77: Delegates were concerned by the language used in this point which could be perceived to be patronising, especially considering that UK government departments themselves still have a way to go on issues of accountability and equal access to and outcomes from key services.

Modalities and Ways of working

- § Concerns that there is no clear and coherent plan for filling the vacuum that will be created if DFID reduces its portfolio of projects;
- § There is also a need for clear definition of 'technical assistance' and how this will bring added-value to the region;
- § There were concerns that core funding and financial support to the regional institutions may create secretariat dependencies and may erode regional autonomy

Key Partners

- § Ref point 89: Concerns were raised over DFID's tendency to work with larger NGO bodies and less so in these types of ways with more specialised Black Caribbean and Diaspora organisations. The unique and highly valuable role of Diaspora communities is not mentioned anywhere in the draft RAP, which was noted with concern.

Resources

- § Ref point 90: The 5% reduction in administration costs mentioned by DFID in this instance was perceived to have a direct impact on the support levels given to the Caribbean.

Recommendations

- § DfID should support access for a wider and diverse partner base i.e. UK Diaspora and regional indigenous groups.
- § The Caribbean RAP should acknowledge and demonstrate how DFID will establish close and supportive working relations with the Diaspora and indigenous groups in delivering the strategy in the RAP going forward and to address a number of the concerns mentioned above.
- § That a clear strategy is committed to ensure that Jamaica and Guyana receive a net financial increase to project activities from external donors and that there is genuine coherence taking place across the donor family
- § Mechanisms should be put in place to track funds and to ensure NGO accountability and, particularly, that their activities are strategically relevant to needs on the ground.
- § There is need for feedback on the activities being carried out in the region; evaluations of previous donor projects are needed that demonstrate the key strengths and weaknesses of the projects.
- § DFID needs to establish common ground with the new and non traditional partners coming in to the region. This would increase the capacity and potential benefits to the localities.
- § Poverty reduction programmes should be viewed in the same light as HMG cross Whitehall Jamaica Strategy: only reducing poverty will result in a reduction of crime and security for the population.
- § DfID should explore and support programmes that offer ‘whole systems’ support to key areas in the Caribbean and forms of good-practice working.