



# **BOND Review of the DFID Governance and Transparency Fund**

**Joni Hillman  
Donor Advocacy Officer  
BOND  
jhillman@bond.org.uk  
January 2009**

## Contents

1. Background	3
1.1 Introduction	3
1.2 Background to the DFID Governance and Transparency Fund	3
1.3 Background to BOND's review of the DFID Governance and Transparency Fund	3
1.4 Survey Purpose and Methodology	4
2. Recommendations and Next Steps	5
2.1 Guidelines and Information for Applicants	5
2.2 Clarifying Processes and Roles	5
2.3 Promoting Partnership Working	6
2.4 Next Steps	6
Appendices	
1: Survey Form	7
2: Summary of Quantitative Ratings	10
3: Consolidated Survey Responses	11
2: Letter from BOND to DFID, 4 July 2007	29

# 1 Background

## 1.1 Introduction

This report was researched and written by BOND (British Overseas NGOs for Development), the UK's broadest network of NGOs working in international development<sup>1</sup>, with support from the steering committee of the BOND Funding Working Group<sup>2</sup>.

2008 has seen a shift in BOND's approach to funding for UK NGOs working in international development. BOND's new donor advocacy programme<sup>3</sup> aims to secure 'more and better funding' for the sector over the long term by collectively influencing for change to create an enabling funding environment for BOND members.

A key part of this approach is to ensure financial security for the UK NGO sector by ensuring funders of international development have a full understanding of the significance and quality of the work that UK NGOs contribute to.

It is also about challenging BOND members to think creatively about the value they add and how best to communicate this to donors, to look strategically at their financial base, and to encourage organisations to consider new sources of finance, such as the private sector and philanthropy.

Our work with donors looks at a range of issues around good grant-making practices and how donor behaviour and approach can both promote and hinder good development. Learning, accountability, impact and evaluation and are just some of the areas in which we facilitate debate and positive change between donors and our members.

## 1.2 Background to the DFID Governance and Transparency Fund

DFID launched the £100 million (later increased to £130 million) Governance and Transparency Fund in February 2007 to support citizens in developing countries in holding their governments to account, recognising that civil society has a key role to play in promoting accountable governance and transparency in the global South<sup>4</sup>.

## 1.3 Background to BOND's review of the DFID Governance and Transparency Fund

Following several changes to the timeframe of the Fund and then major delays in the announcement of successful proposals, many BOND members, particularly members of the BOND Funding Working Group, felt that it was important that BOND provided a space for feedback on their experiences of applying to the Governance and Transparency Fund and communicated their thoughts and suggestions to DFID to ensure an opportunity to learn from the experience was not lost.

---

<sup>1</sup> BOND (British Overseas NGOs for Development) is the UK membership body for non-governmental organisations (NGOs) working in international development. Established in 1993, BOND now has over 340 member organisations, from large organisations with a world-wide presence to smaller, more specialist organisations working in specific regions or with specific groups of people. More information can be found on the website [www.bond.org.uk](http://www.bond.org.uk)

<sup>2</sup> The BOND Funding Working Group provides a forum for BOND members to share their experience of relationships with UK donors. It works closely with the BOND secretariat on lobbying and influencing activity with UK donors. More information can be found on the BOND website [www.bond.org.uk/pages/fwg.html](http://www.bond.org.uk/pages/fwg.html)

<sup>3</sup> More information about BOND's approach to donor advocacy can be found on the BOND website [www.bond.org.uk/pages/donor\\_advocacy.html](http://www.bond.org.uk/pages/donor_advocacy.html)

<sup>4</sup> More information on the background to the DFID Governance and Transparency Fund, including guidelines, criteria and terms of reference, can be found on the DFID website [www.dfid.gov.uk/funding/gtf.asp](http://www.dfid.gov.uk/funding/gtf.asp)

Consequently, the BOND secretariat agreed to co-ordinate feedback from members, via a survey, and use this data to compile a series of recommendations to DFID.

#### **1.4 Survey Purpose and Methodology**

A survey of applicants to the DFID Governance and Transparency Fund was conducted by BOND, running from 28 July 2008 to 29 August 2008. The stated aim of this exercise was to 'generate constructive feedback for DFID and other donors on processes around the application to and disbursement of substantial funds for international development'.

The survey was not intended to generate detailed statistical information but to 'provide an opportunity for BOND members and their partner organisations who applied to the Governance and Transparency Fund, both successfully and unsuccessfully, to comment on their experiences and feed into learning for DFID and other donors'.

Information regarding the survey was communicated to BOND members through the BOND website, the BOND Networker magazine and via emails to the BOND Funding Working Group and to all BOND member organisations.

BOND members were encouraged to involve their partners in the South in responding to the survey questions and the survey was open to both successful and unsuccessful applicants to the Governance and Transparency Fund.

Survey respondents were assured that their name and organisation would not be used in the final report. Similarly, answers and comments will not be attributed to individuals or organisations.

Nine questions were asked in the survey. A full copy of the survey form and consolidated and anonymised responses can be found in Appendix 1.

A total of 26 responses to the survey were received, one of which was a Southern partner organisation.

All respondents were successful at concept note stage. Five respondents had their final proposals funded.

## **2 Recommendations and Next Steps**

Ten key recommendations for future fund management at DFID that emerged from the BOND survey of applicants to the Governance and Transparency Fund are listed below. The recommendations are clustered into three areas: guidelines and information for applicants; clarifying processes; and promoting partnership working.

### **2.1 Guidelines and Information for Applicants**

- 2.1.1** Ensure clear and transparent guidelines and application processes, and a comprehensive timetable of milestones and deadlines, are issued when a fund is launched and that these are kept to as closely as possible. A large number of applicants to the GTF expressed frustration at the shifting deadline for the final announcement of decisions. This caused problems in dealing with the expectations of the numerous local partners involved in all applications.
- 2.1.2** Wherever possible, guidelines, deadlines and application processes should not deviate from those originally issued without good reason. If amendments are made, there should be full transparency on the reasons for this and an acknowledgement that changing information and shifting deadlines has an adverse impact on organisational planning processes.
- 2.1.3** Consultation with potential applicants, preferably through BOND, should take place before guidelines and application processes are finalised and launched, not afterwards. Potential applicants are likely to provide constructive and practical input into the design of a fund and will be able to comment on how proposals will impact on their organisations and their partners, enabling DFID to obtain a more realistic view on time frames and fund design.
- 2.1.4** DFID should have a clear position on what kind of proposals they will fund and what they envisage a fund achieving and communicate this to potential applicants. Although many applicants to the Governance and Transparency Fund appreciated the broad and open approach to defining governance, it was clear that some proposals were rejected because they did not 'fit' with predetermined definitions of governance that had not been communicated initially.
- 2.1.5** For funds that aim to attract proposals working over a long time period (such as the five years for Governance and Transparency Fund projects), across multiple countries or regions, and involving multiple organisations, DFID should take a more flexible approach to word limits in the application process to enable more detailed explanations and narrative. While word limits encourage clarity and a level playing field, some survey respondents felt that they were unable to communicate complex, long-term plans using the limited word count available.

### **2.2 Clarifying Processes and Roles**

- 2.2.1** DFID should reconsider its increasingly common practice of outsourcing fund management to external, private sector consultants. This system devalues the relationship between DFID and its civil society grantees, a relationship that is potentially strong and positive. It also raises concerns about the loss of institutional knowledge and learning, which are held outside of DFID and the Civil Society Department when external consultants are employed.
- 2.2.2** The roles and responsibilities of DFID staff and any third parties (in the case of the Governance and Transparency Fund this was a consortium led by KPMG acting as Fund Managers) should be agreed and clearly and transparently communicated from the outset, rather than being agreed after a fund has been launched.

**2.2.3** Criteria for advancing from the concept note stage to full proposals should be more qualitative, rather than being based on basic administrative eligibility criteria, and more detailed and constructive feedback should be given at the concept note stage. This approach would:

- Enable organisations to make significant improvements to their proposals following concept note feedback, ensuring the highest quality proposal is submitted;
- Eliminate poor quality bids at a far earlier stage, when it is clear that the concept is not in line with DFID's objectives, therefore reducing the cost and time for both applicants and DFID staff, and giving high quality proposals a statistically greater chance of success;
- Enable greater learning for both successful and unsuccessful applicants. Learning could be further developed by sharing more details of the successful proposals with all applicants, with transparent explanatory notes detailing why these proposals were funded.

## **2.3 Promoting Partnership Working**

**2.3.1** Where applicants are encouraged to develop partnerships with organisations in the South, and to build consortium bids, sufficient time should be allocated for this to take place, enabling maximum consultation with and participation from partner organisations. (BOND raised this issue with DFID in July 2007. Please refer to Appendix 2 for a copy of the letter).

**2.3.2** Applicants selected to advance to the full proposal stage should be given an opportunity to meet with an assessor face to face to ensure they have a full understanding of their final proposal. This is in line with other donors' practices, such as Comic Relief and the Big Lottery Fund.

## **2.4 Next steps**

BOND looks forward to hearing DFID's reaction to the recommendations outlined in this report. We would welcome the chance to engage in constructive dialogue on improving the design and management of DFID funding streams for the mutual benefit of NGOs and DFID. We look forward to working with DFID on these issues for the benefit of learning lessons and improving work towards our shared goal of improving the lives of those living in poverty in the global South.

Specifically, BOND suggests:

### **i) A Meeting**

BOND suggests that a follow up meeting is arranged between DFID and representatives of the BOND Funding Working Group to discuss the recommendations set out above in more detail and consider ways in which these recommendations can be integrated into DFID internal processes for future fund management.

### **ii) Continuing Dialogue**

BOND, and the Funding Working Group in particular, would value the opportunity to work with DFID to ensure that learning from the experience of the Governance and Transparency Fund is maximised for both NGOs who applied to the fund and for DFID's internal management processes to ensure the positive aspects of DFID's approach are retained and that recommendations made on improving processes are implemented, wherever possible, in the design and management of both existing and future DFID funding streams.



## Appendix 1

### Survey Form

#### **BOND Review of the DFID Governance and Transparency Fund July / August 2008**

##### **Introduction**

BOND is conducting a short survey on the DFID Governance and Transparency Fund to generate constructive feedback for DFID and other donors on processes around the application to and disbursement of substantial funds for international development. This exercise is not intended to generate detailed statistical information but to provide an opportunity for BOND members and their partner organisations who applied to the Governance and Transparency Fund, both successfully and unsuccessfully, to comment on their experiences and feed into learning for DFID and other donors.

Please return your answers to Joni Hillman at BOND [jhillman@bond.org.uk](mailto:jhillman@bond.org.uk) by Friday 29 August 2008.

##### **Basic Information**

###### Confidentiality

Please note the basic information you give below will not be used in communications with DFID or any other donors or organisations.

No answers to the survey questions or comments will be attributed to particular individuals or organisations in the final report to DFID.

BOND may wish to follow up certain comments with you to gain more information and clarity, if necessary.

**Name**

**Organisation**

**Job Title**

**Email**

**Did you apply to the Governance and Transparency Fund?**

**Y / N**

**Was your Concept Note successful?**

**Y / N**

**Was your Final Application to the Governance and Transparency Fund successful?**

**Y / N**

##### **Survey Questions**

**1. How would you rate the initial information made available to you by DFID about the kind of proposals the Governance and Transparency Fund would support?**

1 = Poor      2 = Average      3 = Good      4 = Excellent

Comments:

**2. How would you rate the initial information made available to you by DFID about the process of applying to the Governance and Transparency Fund?**

1 = Poor      2 = Average      3 = Good      4 = Excellent

Comments:

**3. How would you rate the communication and feedback from DFID on Concept Notes?**

1 = Poor      2 = Average      3 = Good      4 = Excellent

Comments:

**4. How would you rate the process of going forward to the Full Proposal stage? Was the information made available to you by DFID clear about the timeline and information required?**

1 = Poor      2 = Average      3 = Good      4 = Excellent

Comments:

**5. How would you rate the quality of communication and feedback you received on the Full Proposal?**

1 = Poor      2 = Average      3 = Good      4 = Excellent

Comments:

**6. Overall, what did you think was positive about the application process for the Governance and Transparency Fund?**

Comments:

**7. Overall, what could have been done differently?**

Comments:

**8. Do you have any constructive suggestions for how any aspect of the application process could have been improved? In particular, are there approaches other donors take which could have been used by DFID?**

Comments:

**9. Do you have any other comments about the Governance and Transparency Fund that you think would be useful to include in the final report to DFID?**

Comments:

**Please return your answers to Joni Hillman at BOND [jhillman@bond.org.uk](mailto:jhillman@bond.org.uk) by Friday 29 August 2008.**

## Appendix 2

### Summary of Quantitative Ratings

The table below indicates rating responses for the first five survey questions. Please note that not all survey respondents provided a rating for all the questions.

	Poor		Average		Good		Excellent	
	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage
<b>1. How would you rate the initial information made available to you by DFID about the kind of proposals the Governance and Transparency Fund would support?</b>	2	8%	11	42%	12	46%	1	4%
<b>2. How would you rate the initial information made available to you by DFID about the process of applying to the Governance and Transparency Fund?</b>	4	16%	11	42%	11	42%	0	0%
<b>3. How would you rate the communication and feedback from DFID on Concept Notes?</b>	8	31%	15	58%	3	11%	0	0%
<b>4. How would you rate the process of going forward to the Full Proposal stage? Was the information made available to you by DFID clear about the timeline and information required?</b>	4	17%	13	54%	7	29%	0	0%
<b>5. How would you rate the quality of the communication and feedback you received on the Full Proposal?</b>	9	35%	8	31%	9	35%	0	0%

## Appendix 3

### Consolidated Survey Responses

<p><b>1. How would you rate the initial information made available to you by DFID about the kind of proposals the Governance and Transparency Fund would support?</b></p>
---

The initial information available via BOND was sufficiently clear, sufficiently focused and timely enough to enable us to begin developing our submission effectively.

Although I respect the view that DFID wanted to see what ideas were out there, I think they needed to be a bit more realistic about the effort and cost of putting this type of bid together. Some more clarity from their point of view of what would be positively looked at would have been good. The feedback we received suggested that they could have been more open about that – i.e. that there were parts of our suggestion that weren't what was wanted – and if they knew that, it would have been good for us to know up front...

The guidelines on the kinds of proposals the Governance and Transparency Fund would fund were much too vague and did not provide enough of a "steer".

The guidelines were detailed and helpful and there were additional FAQs for further guidance. There was a good deal of information provided both on the website and via an initial briefing to interested applicants.

There was limited information on the scope of the fund – this was left very wide, and left potential for speculation about what may or may be successful. To me it raised questions about transparency of how decisions would be made on the fund. Consultation did take place through BOND, and some changes took place as a result of that, but ultimately the Fund had a momentum of its own, and the consultation was not meaningful at a level that had a real impact on how the massive amount of money allocated could be used most effectively.

The information was clear but the wide range of themes/countries etc was unhelpful – clearer priorities would have helped cut down number of bids (and must have been needed at some point in the assessment process anyway).

The information was very broad-brush which was good on the one hand (not prescriptive, encouraging innovation, etc.) but ran the risk of organisations spending a lot of time developing programmes of work that would not be funded because they were not what DFID was looking for. More thought could have given to what kind of proposals were likely to be successful and how this could best be communicated before going live with the call for proposals. The 'Governance and Transparency – some thoughts' document was helpful for getting a sense of where DFID was coming from with this Fund. The 'key elements' of the Fund were also clear from the start (e.g. larger-scale proposals only, one funding round, granting of 85% of the funds to local partners, etc.).

We were not clear if DFID and the assessors had a definition of governance to which they were working. In answer to questions on this the answer was 'no, we are flexible' – but when pushed on private sector governance (a key focus for our proposal) it appeared there was a framework being used.

The information became available on a "drip-feed" basis over a period of time, but it was clear and easy to understand.

It is necessary to find a balance between presenting the fund priorities so as to give applicants a clear idea of what kind of projects will fit, and allowing the applicants the right of

initiative in identifying the appropriate approach. It could be said that the Governance and Transparency Fund guidance should have given slightly clearer indication of what would be supported, though we did appreciate the flexibility we were given in developing the programme.

Clear definitions and good discussion about governance and transparency. Encouragement to think laterally and originally.

The remit of the fund was quite broad and despite an information session organised by the BOND Funding Working Group, we were initially unclear about the specificities of the topics that the Governance and Transparency Fund would be able to fund.

I attended the consultative meeting in London prior to the development of the full specs for proposals – I was concerned then that the Fund team would not have sufficient background knowledge on the specific nature of the co-operative sector and did raise this issue. The brief for the proposals did seem fairly wide so we were encouraged by this to apply.

Information seemed to be drip fed via emails and the website and was just not very comprehensive.

The initial information didn't give us that much information about what specific types of projects they wanted to fund – just general information about Governance and Transparency. It was also a very frustrating process with the deadlines and information constantly changing and no clear vision from DFID about what they wanted to achieve.

## **2. How would you rate the initial information made available to you by DFID about the process of applying to the Governance and Transparency Fund?**

The information was incomplete and then the dates kept changing.

Pretty comprehensive information provided, and useful to have a meeting in DFID to address questions.

We had no problems understanding or complying with the process.

As it turned out, very poor. The timeline changed several times from what was initially communicated, partly in response to NGO feedback about the first deadline over summer, but also in response to internal DFID issues. The timing of these things is as important as anything else as it is the basis of complicated planning processes. If DFID wants proposals based on participation, this requires good planning – which is difficult to do when the process keeps changing.

While the process was more or less clear, the deadlines were not; e.g. the deadline for the full proposal was initially set at 31 August, and then moved to 28 September after concerns were raised about the tight turnaround time. While we appreciate there was pressure to spend the allocated GBP 100m we feel that the process for submission of concept notes, and then full proposals, was rushed.

The process was fairly clear but the change in time schedule made it difficult to plan and carry out consultation with partners.

The actual information that was given was clear, and the guidance on formats, and the flexibility within that was appreciated. However, I have not ranked this as good, as there were timing issues that were problematic, firstly that the deadlines given were insufficient to allow for proper consultation with partners and development of partnerships, and secondly timing issues where promises were made on timings by DFID that were not met. Overall, this was disempowering, and had an effect contrary to the aims of the fund: instead of encouraging

the development of new and innovative partnerships in governance and transparency work, and encouraging the engagement of a range of civil society bodies to work together effectively, the timings will have forced agencies back to tried and trusted routes, or to try to put together new partnerships that are less than meaningful. The lack of clear criteria for assessment, and the open nature of the call will have meant that countless hopefuls will have wasted precious resources in the development of programmes for submission. Again this must be contrary to the aims of the fund.

Some lack of clarity about DFID's and KPMG's role.

Would have been easier to have an application form rather than being told to lay out info as you liked but in a suggested format.

It was clear from the start that it would be a 2-stage process (Concept Notes followed by Full Proposals), and that the first stage would only be a basic eligibility check. However the more detailed information was not available up-front, but rather made available in a piecemeal fashion, with new developments happening on a weekly basis (e.g. changes to deadlines, additions to FAQs, email Updates) throughout the process, which was frustrating at times.

Bit too much chopping and changing at the start, especially mixed messages about consortia applications.

Funding modalities (application processes etc.) should have been sorted out (e.g. with KPMG) before the application process started. I.e. grant manager should have been recruited before the call for proposals was launched. Lack of clarity about the funding rules & regulations while applying for a proposal hampered the quality of the proposed proposal and project.

It was not immediately apparent when the deadlines were on when funding would be put in place.

I don't have all the documents now, but I think it was alright. Although there was a lack of clarity about timelines.

The two-phase process was always highlighted and made clear at all times. What wasn't as clear was the criteria used to shortlist at concept note phase. While we were told that tough decisions would be made to avoid organisations dedicating time and resources to developing full proposals, the decision making process was not clearly laid out.

It was a fairly straight forward application process once they had finally decided on the deadline.

Information seemed to be drip fed via e-mails and the website and was just not very comprehensive.

Timescales were unrealistic – especially if DFID expected full participatory consultations for developing proposals.

### **3. How would you rate the communication and feedback from DFID on Concept Notes?**

They did what they said they would do, but it only told us we were eligible to go on to then next stage. There were no clues as to what really wouldn't work and what would for the next stage.

The information we received enabled us to take account of the feedback in our full application.

There was no feedback, only informing whether or not the concept note had been successful.

This was clear.

There was no information provided except to state that the concept note had been accepted. However, I am not sure that anything else was required at that stage.

To be fair, DFID had always said the first stage would be an administrative one – i.e. was the proposal administratively in line and were the participants eligible. Therefore the feedback was bound to be of limited use.

However, what this meant was far too much competition in the full proposal round, with very little qualitative feedback on the concept note to work from.

No feedback at all received on the concept note, or how to improve it. Main problem was that the concept note was not approved on the quality of the project, but on eligibility. (As per guidance 3.5: At concept note stage, no judgement was made about the strengths or weaknesses of the work).

The concept note stage was not used effectively, either to weed out proposals, or to provide constructive feedback to allow agencies to improve the project between concept note and full proposal (or to make a decision not to proceed with working on the full proposal).

The lack of feedback on the concept note content therefore also meant that some issues raised by DFID in their feedback on the rejected full proposal were issues that could and should have been raised at concept note stage.

While we appreciate that the process needed to be competitive, what was also problematic was the combination of DFID contracting out the selection process (thereby drastically diminishing direct contact with DFID) as well as lack of clarity in the guidelines.

All the above factors meant that we, our local offices and our partners across 7 countries spent weeks at great cost working up a full proposal that had a diminished chance of success.

This was exacerbated by the fact that almost 300 concept notes (out of 450 received by DFID) were asked to submit a full proposal; of 272 proposals submitted, only 38 were funded, in principle giving a 1/7 chance of success.

Would have been better if they'd cut down number of bids after concept stage, rather than letting so many go through, as if they were putting off making a decision.

DFID committed to sending feedback on Concept Notes within 4 weeks and indeed we received a decision on our Concept Note within a month. However, there was no feedback to speak of – simply a confirmation email that our submission had been approved and that we were invited to submit a full proposal. There was absolutely nothing in terms of constructive feedback or comments/suggestions on our proposed programme of work (although we did not expect much because we were aware that the first stage was only really to check eligibility). We feel that it was somewhat irresponsible of DFID to provide no indication at the Concept Note stage as to the quality of the proposed programme of work or the likelihood of it being funded. At least some feedback and judgement could have avoided a lot of effort and disappointment at Full Proposal stage.

No in-depth feedback was given on the concept notes. Solely an invitation to submit a full application.

I think we only got perfunctory comments. No real indication of the strengths and weaknesses of our proposal.

Our understanding was that the concept note was more to assess eligibility of the project rather than quality. We therefore did not anticipate guidance on which aspects interested them.

As far as I remember there was only an answer that said one had got through to the next round. There were no useful constructive comments on each individual concept note.

There was very little feedback on the content of the Concept Notes, only that we were invited to submit a full proposal.

The reasons for which the full proposal was ultimately rejected were not at all addressed in the feedback on the concept note. Some weak points were easily remediable which meant the proposal would have stood a better chance of success.

Initially our concept note was rejected on technical grounds and we challenged this with the team in South Africa. It was then found that the missing documentation was simply that a single page had been copied twice and the next page accidentally missed. The manager then wrote to say that the scrutiny had been 'overzealous' and that our concept note had been successful.

My impression is that the reviewer had not fully understood the concept note and the implications of the institutional arrangements that we were proposing.

At the concept note stage too many applications were let through – it was mainly a tick box process about whether you had been able to fill the form in properly – no constructive feedback on how likely your application was to be funded was given.

Not very helpful. A lot of work went into creating the concept note but they only seemed to be assessed on the most basic criteria.

**4. How would you rate the process of going forward to the Full Proposal stage? Was the information made available to you by DFID clear about the timeline and information required?**

The timeline changed and the information required was not as full as would have been helpful. Having managed to have cross stakeholder consultation meetings in the countries concerned in a tight time frame, it would have been good to know that so much work by us in the UK and by our programme and partner colleagues had a better chance of success.

There were 2 months allowed for the writing of a major proposal – one of these months being August when many people are away on holiday. There was no flexibility regards the deadline, although disclosure of the result and feedback was repeatedly delayed.

This was clear – but the constant changing of when a decision on funding would be made was very confusing.

The information was clear. Of course, the fact that the process did not materialise as per DFID's intentions was disappointing.

Full proposal guidance was extremely vague on expected content of project. Once the full proposals were submitted, the process became opaque, in particular with respect to the long delay in announcing the results.

The information was OK but the process was actually quite rushed (the timeline was too short).

The original timeline for submission of Full Proposals was completely unrealistic for proposals of such size and complexity (only 1 month after Concept Note decisions). The deadline (which was further complicated by the fact that this happened during the holiday period, in July/August) was extended after DFID revisited its timetable, to give a 2-month window for full proposal development and submission (which was still tight, but do-able). The guidance on the information required was fine, although very limited on certain areas, particularly the budget. As we were later requested to submit a more detailed budget in a particular format,

we feel that time could have been saved by prescribing a clear and definitive budget format at the start of the process.

DFID should have prescribed proposal components in more detail and with more rigour. E.g. DFID should have provided an application format (both narrative & budget) instead of giving rough headings.

The timelines were clear but in terms of the final decision changed all the time which obviously hampered organisational planning.

A rough timeline and information was provided, but not kept to at all. Very poor provision of information on the reasons for delay and the likely timing for a decision.

The information was generally clear but the timeline was not at all kept to on their side.

Yes, the deadlines were clear at this stage.

There was lack of clarity on the timeline and the format required. Deadlines kept changing and clarification had to be sought. For example on the length of the submission e.g. was it 5 pages or was it 6000 words, was the log frame included in the word count etc? And lack of clarity over which information could be put into Section A.

All questions were answered promptly and new information sent out regularly. Website could have been updated quicker.

The obvious comment here is that the timeline for the response from DFID was totally inadequate and both our partners and we found this very frustrating. This is a classic double standard – while we would have been penalised for late submission of the bid, applicants could do little about the DFID delays.

No. It all seemed a bit hurried and confused.

Once the final dates had been agreed it was fairly straight forward to apply – though again the information about what they wanted to fund was quite vague. The application form was also fairly short without when you consider that each project was likely to be for around £5million.

##### **5. How would you rate the quality of communication and feedback you received on the Full Proposal?**

It seemed unclear as to why we didn't succeed, so it would be helpful to understand what those who did succeed did differently, or were there criteria that we had failed to understand?

Good, given the high volume of proposals assessed.

The feedback was very thorough and justified in its rationale for why our proposal was ultimately rejected.

In particular the delays in the final announcements were farcical. This was ultimately delayed by DFID for four months, since the contracted managing agent completed their work on time. This was contrary to the aims of the fund to encourage partnership and collaboration and to work with a range of partners.

It was frustrating, but then rejections always are – so I've scored this as average. Our problem with the feedback was that it basically all said – this is good, but we want more detail, or how will you specifically do this. It was very tough to get the level of information required for five years into a short format proposal – fundamentally it was not possible to provide the level of detail DFID said they wanted in retrospect. In fact, the feedback we

received went very much against the grain of what they had said they wanted, which was programme, top line information, not project-specifics.

Key points of feedback on the full proposal were issues that could have been raised at concept note stage.

One point related to insufficient information about partners; however, there was a strict word-count on the proposal which perhaps did not take into account the amount of information needed on multi-country proposals working with a large number of partners.

The amount of time it took to get a decision – including several apologetic emails promising a response that never came on a particular day – was appalling.

Emails were coming to addresses on their original email list, not including new ones actually given on the funding proposals – emails had to be passed on from colleagues.

Best feedback came from Steve Nally in a BOND Funding Working Group meeting, not through formal feedback to applicants.

Final feedback received was useful, though the comments would have been relevant to the concept note and so would have been useful in doing the full bid (rather than when they were too late).

We appreciate that each applicant got detailed feedback on the full application which is a big effort as there were many agencies invited to submit a full application.

We were turned down partly for fair reasons but some of the feedback we received was rather unfortunate, particularly regarding our budget. DFID did not provide a budget format so we developed our own format, keeping in mind DFID said they would get back to the applicant in case there were questions about the budget or narrative. In the end no questions were asked about our budget and the concerns they raised could easily have been explained (should we have had the chance) and justified. E.g. they queried salaries of some of our staff members which were in fact the amounts given were for more than 1 person...

Feedback on Full Proposals was subject to what felt like endless delays! We were originally told to expect decisions by mid-December; then mid-January; then the end of January; then mid-February; then the end of February; then the 3rd week of March; then the end of March... at which point we were told that the end of March was unrealistic and that from then on DFID would not set a date but simply inform us if/when there was any progress! It was the 3rd week of April before we received feedback on our submission. These delays (some 4 months in total) were very difficult to manage internally (in our case, across 19 countries and more than 30 partner organisations all anxiously waiting for the funding decision!). In terms of the actual feedback, this was very standard and we would have appreciated a much more tailored response to our submission (e.g. what was it that DFID liked? Why was it successful?). More thoughtful and reflective feedback would have been most useful not only for our own learning but also to give us a sense of what the key considerations were during the appraisal process.

A couple of insightful comments, but overall pretty thin feedback which seemed to be drawn from a generic set of responses.

The only information that we received was that the proposal was good enough to be funded, with some minor adjustments, but we simply didn't get funded. It was not clear why our proposal ultimately wasn't chosen.

We were asked for some specific further information.

There were some limited and completely valid comments on the full proposal, and DFID/KPMG was flexible and helpful in our response to these.

Given the word limit it is difficult to see how the extra detail could have been included. Comments re detail of partner experience were valid. These were included in an earlier draft and then cut to meet the word limit. Comments about management of the project were valid as I felt we were unclear on this and also the transition to concrete government action and changes in natural resource management.

Concise, clear and valid.

A fairly short letter was received with what we felt to be limited feedback. Perhaps more importantly we were concerned with what we saw as the inference in this response that governance was linked to governments. When Hilary Benn, as Secretary of State launched the Governance and Transparency Fund, he made it very clear that the governance will be designed very widely. The rejection letter stated that, “the rationale could have been strengthened by addressing state governance issues more directly”.

This indicates to us a departure from the principles enunciated by Hilary Benn, and an over narrow definition of governance by those who evaluated the full proposals. It also indicated a lack of understanding of the specific nature of co-operatives as democratically run enterprises and the importance of governance issues for private sector organisations such as co-operatives.

There is indeed a general weakness in DFID in its inability to work with the private sector, which is based upon a misunderstanding of what comprises private sector organisations.

After being kept waiting for many, many months which was frustrating in itself we didn't really receive any satisfactory feedback.

The constant delays were a source of great frustration. As the process had been contracted out, we expected decisions to be made according to the agreed timeline. However, the feedback was relatively prompt and comprehensive.

My impression was that the reviewer had only a very basic grasp of what was proposed. Some of the questions and concerns posed would have been answered by a more careful reading. I suspect it was undertaken by someone under great time pressure.

A bit weak really as the reasons for rejection were not really glaring weaknesses or mistakes and could easily have been rectified through a clarification conversation – which DFID did initially propose to carry out.

The final feedback document provided by DFID was generally ok.

The primary reason given for the rejection was a lack of detail – but this need for detail was not really in-keeping with initial DFID guidance.

Perhaps the feedback also failed to acknowledge the level of collaboration and participatory consultations that had gone into developing this proposal. More importantly, the feedback failed to acknowledge the serious impact of DFID's poor time-management.

## **6. Overall, what did you think was positive about the application process for the Governance and Transparency Fund?**

The idea was good and the intended openness is to be applauded. In reality it felt difficult and unclear, which I imagine in part was a reflection on the changes DFID itself was undergoing.

The whole process was positive, in as much as DFID provided more than enough information to enable us to identify and develop the aspects of our work which would be most appropriate for a Governance and Transparency Fund submission, and the types of activity and outcomes that would be most likely to meet the Governance and Transparency Fund objectives. Similarly there were no problems in terms of the presentation of the application, with the information required being clear at all times.

Because the funding line was a one-off, and with a specific remit, more background information was provided on it, and on DFID's related thinking in a broad sense, than is generally the case with the regular streams (e.g. Civil Society Challenge Fund, Development Awareness Fund).

The application format was helpful, and relatively easy to work with/within. Certainly a lot more helpful than the current Civil Society Challenge Fund format!  
Much of the Fund information (and the updates) we received came via BOND, so naturally I don't know how much of this was simply being channelled through BOND at DFID's behest, and how much was prompted or pro-actively organised by BOND itself. Either way, the level of information was undoubtedly helpful to us.

The level of funds available for this area of work was fantastic and I really welcome the fund as an example of DFID's forward thinking –focusing on the demand side of governance as well as some pretty controversial supply side stuff. The idea behind the very open and accessible approach was also good, although points made in answer 7 suggest it could have been done differently.

Steve Nally was excellent in providing extremely quick and useful feedback to individual questions. The FAQs were also helpful.

Clear criteria and transparent application process.

Open to Southern organisations  
Open to trade unions  
Encouraging of consortia (initially, then changed which was very disappointing)  
Taking governance seriously

The Civil Society Department were willing to engage flexibly, within certain parameters, and were open about the political difficulties that they were facing.

Information and advice were good, and even during the prolonged wait for a final decision, DFID was very diligent in keeping us informed of the process and the delays.

Having a concept stage to at least eliminate some bids was helpful, rather than everyone having to do full bids. But not enough bids were eliminated.

We appreciated the openness of the process and that fact that there were no pre-judgements on what was needed. This gave a variety of organisations the chance to think creatively and hone in on the less obvious. The Fund also encouraged partnership and innovation, particularly at the local level (e.g. with the granting of 85% to local partners and the requirement to work through a variety of local partnerships and networks). The Governance and Transparency Fund DFID Programme Manager was also fantastic throughout the process, responding quickly and clearly to queries and sending out regular updates.

Initial face-to-face launch / briefing  
Southern organisations could apply directly  
Consortia (initially) encourage...  
Fairly open format for applications

The Governance and Transparency Fund showed clear commitment of DFID for governance & accountability in developing countries  
Agencies of very different sizes (in terms of annual income and staff levels) were invited to apply and were successful  
Global coverage allows for a wide range of geographical areas to be covered and confirms the need to address governance & transparency not only in the Least Developed Countries

A very interesting approach for DFID, which moves its civil society support into a key area. For us, the process of preparing the full proposal was demanding but (hopefully) worthwhile in developing thinking in a significant area for the organisation with some key partners.

One of the attractions was the relatively short "turn round time" (i.e. the time between application and decision).  
It opened up a new possible source of funds for a wide range of development players.

For us internally, it was a good process to refine our proposal writing and program development skills. Being specific about objectives, outcomes and measurement.

For the size of grant it was relatively painless. The uncertainty came at the beginning when it was not at all clear when the deadlines would be, which meant that we needed to be ready to move very quickly. In the event, there was longer than we had anticipated. However, the information provided through BOND enabled us to have done a lot of preparatory work so that we would have been ready to submit more quickly.

The decision making process also was not helpful, with several unexplained delays.

Clear guidelines and feedback. Prompt communication about changes to deadlines.

The process was generally smooth and the formats clear.

It made organisations think differently about the different kind of partners they could work with. It generated a lot of original thought, energy and interest about the process of promoting governance and transparency and provided a vehicle through which organisational discussions could be structured in this area.

The fact that the money was made available to fund such projects.

Speed of communication, willingness to engage with applicants in a variety of ways.

I think the Governance and Transparency Fund represented a serious commitment from DFID to addressing a core development issue - and we felt that it represented a good opportunity to support the disability movement in the South with demanding representative and inclusive good governance.

It was nice to be given the opportunity to apply to a new fund and we appreciate that the fairly flexible nature of the fund meant we could explore a new and exciting range of projects and programmes with a number of new partners.

Developing a consortium and working with our partners.

I have been involved in quite a few similar applications in the past 20 years and this was amongst the worst in terms of the quality of communication and efficiency of the grant making body

## **7. Overall, what could have been done differently?**

A clearer and more realistic time frame from the start.

Clearer criteria for each stage.

A different first stage, so that more applicants would be eliminated at the concept note stage so that so much time allocated to all those applicants could have been used for other work.

Feedback on the successful applicants.

Given only 38 proposals out of some 272 submitted were funded, it would have been better for both DFID and successful concept note applicants if far fewer concept notes were invited to submit a full proposal. Not enough applications were filtered out at concept notes stage. The most frustrating and poorly handled aspect of the process was the constant delay in announcing funding decisions, compounded by a steady stream of 'Governance and Transparency Fund Update' emails which actually said very little – only that the decision was delayed yet again. Had fewer proposals been submitted then this might have been avoided. As it was, expectation inevitably mounted for many organisations only for them to be disappointed.

Realistic timelines at all stages of the proposal and decision making process.

Shortlist fewer concept notes and proposals (less wasted effort for everyone).  
Make it easier for civil society organisations to bid for the tender to manage the fund.  
Make UK consortia possible by allowing real costs if justified rather than an automatic cap on UK costs irrespective of the number of NGOs involved.

Too many organisations were admitted to the full proposal stage leaving DFID overwhelmed with a substantial task of assessing them. Applicants themselves became sceptical of their chances of success once it was clear how many organisations had been invited to submit a full proposal. In future, DFID needs to be much more ruthless in culling concept notes that don't make the grade, saving us all considerable time and effort in pursuing proposals that are unlikely to be successful.

The process took far too long and we had originally hoped to start the project in April 08. We will now start in October 08. This has made planning extremely difficult and southern partners had been relying on the funding to carry out work.

More transparency on the criteria.

More realistic timescales for application – staged deadlines.

More consultation on how the funds available could be most usefully disbursed.

Less delays in announcements.

More time given for development of concepts and programmes.

More time given for the development of innovative partnerships.

The administration was poor – it took so long to get the results, far longer than expected.

There were delays at every stage, presumably mainly caused by the fact that the initial push for this was political, setting a very tight timeline for the civil service to act, at the same time as DFID was having its staffing resources stretched by civil service reform.

The selection process at the first stage should have been partly qualitative, not just administrative. The full proposals took a lot of work and a 15% chance of funding just wasn't enough. DFID should have taken through perhaps 200% of the funding it had available in value of proposals – i.e. agencies submitting a full proposal should have had a roughly 50% chance of funding. It's good to see what thinking is out there from DFID's point of view, but they could have done this at concept note stage and saved the UK and other NGO sector an awful lot of time. I think there were over 150 rejections? Concept note stages are generally a good thing, if quality is included in the assessment at this stage – I have no idea why DFID didn't do this, given everyone else (including their other funding lines) does. DFID's promise to look into other sources of funding for failed applications seemed to disappear pretty quickly. From what Steve Nally said, they tried the World Bank and when this failed, gave up? Given they're also funding a disability fund, which might have been interested in our proposal, that shows to me they didn't try too hard to make these links...

Assessment along the timelines promised.

It was somewhat ironic that for a Fund on transparency there should be such a lack of transparency on the process! The criteria on which the funding decisions were made and the process for arriving at those decisions remains somewhat unclear. Perhaps for those organisations that were not successful the reasons were made clear, but for successful organisations there was nothing to say why our proposals were chosen! Even though the list of successful applicants was published on the DFID website, very little information was made available on the actual programmes of work (only the organisation's name and the project title) or on the reasons for their success and how they fit with DFID's overall strategy for governance and transparency. The 'one application per organisation' rule was also incredibly unhelpful because this really limited our options. For example, we would have liked to have submitted a funding bid for our own programme of work and new/existing local partners while also experimenting (in a consortium bid) with different types of partners and programmes (e.g. private sector, media groups). The fact that each organisation could submit only one application during the one funding round put a huge amount of pressure to identify the 'right' project and also went against the spirit of innovation and new partnership that went with the Fund, as organisations were more likely to go with safer choices.

Not shortlist so many – lacked courage / practicality.

Realistic decision-making timetable.

Significantly fewer applicants invited for round 2. What DFID could have done differently is make the Concept Note stage application more competitive, in order to make sure that hundreds of NGOs would spend a lot of resources developing the full proposal. . What seems clear is that many resources were used by many agencies to apply for the grant. While acknowledging that there will always be unsuccessful full applications, having so many agencies applying for full proposals with the big majority of these agencies being turned down, seems to be a relative waste of resources.

Application format (narrative and budget) drafted and clarified before application process started, not during process.

The rule that only 15% of the budget could be used by the main applicant does not seem in line with DFID's effort to have development agencies work more effectively and be better able to monitor and evaluate progress. 15% is too low.

The deadline for preparation of full proposals was originally set for end of August 07, which presented real logistical problems. It would be good to address this obvious issue before setting the timetable and then having to change.

The delays on reaching a decision should be avoided – it points to real double standards, when a strict (and fairly unrealistic) timetable is set for proposal submissions while DFID is able to ignore the deadlines it has set for itself.

I think there was an effort to be as open as possible in inviting applications to the fund which led to a much larger than expected response, which in turn led to admin problems. Having a clearer focus might have helped.

The initial time for preparing and submitting applications was quite short, which led to less preparation than might have been desirable.

The short turn round time (application-decision) turned out to be unattainable: it might have been better to be more realistic from the outset.

The number of concept notes submitted and approved might have given a hint as to how many full proposals they could expect, and therefore either they could have been better prepared to handle them all or introduced tighter guidance at this stage to reduce additional investment by applicants.

For us, we were generally frustrated with the nature of the process in that it was only requesting large proposals (large funding requests – proof of history of handling large amounts of funding) which in turn meant that many organizations that support work on the ground, at the community level, like ours were competing with very large organizations. In addition, the groups that were funded to address gender issues were quite limited and not at all small to medium sized organizations, but large entities.

We would have expected more 'strong' proposals to be funded, even with limited or reduced budgets.

Deadlines should have been stuck to! It was ridiculous the number of emails we received extending the contractors decision deadline.

The word limit made it difficult to answer the questions fully, particularly issues raised in feedback after the concept note. However, having a word limit was infinitely preferable to having a badly designed and protected Word form to fill in (like this year's Civil Society Challenge Fund!)

It was helpful to have the advance information that BOND was providing, which meant that we had sufficient time to liaise with partners and to develop our thinking about the proposal. But otherwise the formal timings would have been limiting.

In view of the problems that unfolded, it would have been better if the practicalities of the Fund's administration had been finalised in advance of the application process.

DFID having a clearer process at the beginning, so that the first deadline was known at the outset. The decision making process could have been quicker, or the delays explained.

The delay in giving a final response was a bit disruptive. It may have been better to set a less tight timescale so that we could plan around this.

I feel strongly that the number of organisations requested to submit a full proposal was too high. Approximately 250 organisations were invited to submit a bid and only 38 were successful. Aggregated, this is an enormous amount of resources spent on putting proposals together. I feel that DFID should have had a clearer idea of the kind of proposal they wanted to support and should have reduced the number of organisations that got through to the second stage.

Could have extended deadline to allow more time for consultation with partners (especially as results were so late).

Quicker and clearer decision making, clearer criteria and focus.

Selecting a panel to evaluate proposals that had a more nuanced understanding of the governance and knowledge of private sector linkages to governance issues.

In terms of the process for managing applications / assessments and communicating with applicants re: decisions – overall, it was extremely poor.

Our full proposal was submitted before 28 September 2007. As with any proposal, it is essential for applicants and donors to fully respect deadlines.

The first communication from DFID regarding results came on 12 December 2007 – stating that results would be released by early January 2008. A later email then stated that decision-making meetings would take place on 7 January 2008, with results released on 18 January. This date was then moved to no later than 28 January 2008 – which, in turn, became 29 February.

Of course 29 February then became end of March 2008.

Finally, the result was released by DFID on 25 April 2008.

DFID's time-management and communication regarding the assessment process and announcement of results for this fund was very poor. This has a serious impact on both the organisational planning of applicants - and on maintaining positive communication with key partners in the field.

The following comments are those received from the main partner of our proposal:

For us, we are disappointed by the fact that so much preparation was done and country-level consultations were implemented only to get a negative response. This happens all the time - a case in point are the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper processes where disabled people spend huge amount of resources planning and providing input into the process and none of their proposals are included in the final documents.

We are very concerned about resource distribution trends when it comes to development cooperation as disability seems to fall off the table or parked into a special under-resourced budget areas such as 'welfare' spending/programmes.

We feel that part of the study should investigate prioritisation of disability within the Governance and Transparency Fund, and the skills of Governance and Transparency Fund personnel (or selection panel) with regard to the disability programming processes. What were the essential elements of the winning tender? Did the winning tenders reflect a commitment to the strategic disability agenda of mainstreaming, UN Convention, etc?

Far fewer applications should have been put forward to full proposal stage, as a lot of organisations wasted time (and associated costs) putting together a full application when so few were likely to be successful.

We feel that DFID should have screened out applications at a much earlier stage to avoid raising expectations and wasting people's time. For example I know a number of organisations had an on-going series of meeting both in the UK and overseas over several months in order to ensure a truly equitable consortium was formed including undertaking extensive stakeholder consultation for a proposal which was not then funded. Whilst I understand that not all applications could be successful.

**8. Do you have any constructive suggestions for how any aspect of the application process could have been improved? In particular, are there approaches other donors take which could have been used by DFID?**

A more comprehensive screening at the concept note stage. While the intention was to see what was “out there”, presumably there would have been a number of applications that went on to the full application stage that could have been ruled out earlier on.

Regarding the approaches used by other donors, the Governance and Transparency Fund process mainly compared favourably, or at least equally. Improvements could undoubtedly be made; but I’m not sure that these would specifically involve anything that other equivalent donors are already doing. Compared to the European Commission, for example, who also deploy similarly focused Funds; some of which are regular, some periodic and some one-off, I think the level of enabling information provided by the Governance and Transparency Fund process was superior.

It might have been helpful to make use of a quantitative evaluation grid for both concept notes and proposals, as used by the EC in assessing concept notes and proposals. Presumably assessors for the Governance and Transparency Fund used some objective measure (scoring or ranking system?). The narrative feedback was helpful however.

Small grants to assist in development of consortia proposals when face-to-face meetings are necessary (e.g., as done by Barings, sometimes Comic Relief) – will give greater quality, counterbalance large organisations that have their own resources and allow proper consultation with partners.

Having realistic and fixed time frames at the start of the process would be useful and allow smaller organisations and partners to plan their future activities more clearly. Reasons for changes to time frames would be useful and avoid speculation.

Applicants were originally told that because of the aims and objectives of the funding, DFID would be willing to fund risky projects with new untried southern partners. DFID would recognise that governance is a challenging issue in many countries and that some projects may not succeed. They would also be willing to work with some weak southern NGOs in order to support them to become strong advocates in their countries. However, DFID/KPMG have put together very tight controls on the funding, and we consider the quarterly financial reports very onerous (more than EC for example). 15% for northern NGOs ongoing costs are not enough. The 15% is not just for administration, but for the programme management as well. DFID refused to acknowledge this, and there is a danger that recipients won’t have the funds to do more than contract manage their projects. Our organisation will have to add its own resources in order to ensure that learning opportunities coming out of the different partners’ work are shared.

The idea of openness is good – i.e. inviting applications from all over the world – provided you then give a reasonable chance of funding and have a reliable way of assessing the quality of the organisation.

Have more than 1 funding round to allow for learning between rounds. Have much clearer guidance on the types of projects to be funded and use the concept note stage to feed back on quality of proposed projects and to cut out the majority of bids, thereby ensuring that those agencies who work up a full proposal do so with better chances of success.

Wherever possible, continuing to allowing direct access of applicants to DFID to allow for discussion of proposals.

A chance to discuss proposals with the assessor, as happens with Comic Relief and the Big Lottery Fund, would have been helpful – particularly during production of concepts (to make sure our project fitted the key priorities) or after submission of concepts (to make sure the assessors understood what was written).

We understand that due to the huge amount of interest in the Fund (and in the interests of fair competition) DFID could not meet individually with organisations to discuss proposals. However it would have been extremely useful to hold an open Information Meeting (as DFID often does for particular opportunities, especially at country level) including the Fund Manager, relevant advisers, stakeholders, etc. and applicants. Such a meeting would have been a great opportunity for DFID to present its vision, guidelines, etc. for the Fund and also give applicants the opportunity to ask questions and gather information, from DFID or from other applicants (e.g. in identifying possible synergies and partnerships).

Too many concept notes were shortlisted – too much time was wasted by too many organisations.

Be accountable for errors / delays and transparent for the reasons.

Instead of solely checking eligibility DFID should already at Concept Note stage have set itself a target of cutting the amount of agencies being invited to Stage 2 (e.g. only value of 200% of total funding envelope should have been invited to submit full application). EU does this as well.

Greater clarity on the ‘governance concept’ would have been really helpful – probably resulting from more rigorous thinking within DFID on what were top priority focuses; what would be interesting to explore; and what would be outside the limits.

Greater recognition of the likely level of demand for new funding, particularly funding that opens up possibilities for a wide range of organisations. While this is welcome in one sense, it can raise expectations and can lead to orgs investing a lot in proposal writing with little chance of success. While larger organisations may be able to bear such costs, it is much harder for small organisations.

In a similar vein, such an exercise can raise expectations amongst partners and beneficiaries, who, in the interests of developing a realistic and evidence based proposal, need to be involved.

One issue is that because DFID made it clear that this was a one-off opportunity, it probably meant more people stretching themselves to submit applications. Having this as a regular resource (like the CSCF) would avoid this pressure.

It would have been a lot more constructive to actually have feedback for improvement and/or feedback on the original concept note – what was interesting/unique about our proposal that they wanted to hear more about?

Given the complexity of programmes that are chiefly made up of partner grants, the length of the programmes and the need for flexibility, I felt that DFID got it right. We were able to demonstrate what we wished to achieve within a cohesive programme without going into too much detail in areas that this wouldn’t have been helpful.

To look at the constructive feedback provided by DFID’s civil society challenge fund at the concept note stage.

Communication was the first key problem. DFID likes holding the recipients of grants to deadlines, but it reserves the right to change its own deadlines as often as it likes. The quality of the review process is another key problem. It is hard for me to accept that the individuals responsible had the right knowledge and experience for the job and/or that they had sufficient time available to them to do a good job.

I think that DFID was totally unprepared for the announcement of the Governance and Transparency Fund by the then secretary of state for international development and that if anything DFID tried its hardest to ‘catch up’, but failed.

Improved time-management of the assessment process and improved communication regarding results. It is not acceptable for results to be announced after the point at which the projects are supposed to have started!

Develop and stick to a realistic timetable.

Do a proper screening process at the concept note stage and don't let through an unrealistic number of applications – which meant that the workload was too great to be able to stick to the timetable.

Produce better guidelines about what type of projects they are interested in funding.

The EU screen at concept note stage and only allow double the number of applications they can realistically fund through – which means you have a 50:50 chance of getting funded.

DFID has wide experience of running various grant schemes, and therefore has its own internal learning to draw from. In the case of this grants programme we feel that that learning was completely thrown by the wayside, unrealistic deadlines imposed, and a massive grants programme, with very ambitious aims of partnership launched within a very tight timescale.

**9. Do you have any other comments about the Governance and Transparency Fund that you think would be useful to include in the final report to DFID?**

In principle a good idea with an impressive amount of money allocated to it. The following is feedback from our key implementing partner that would be useful to feed back:

“For us, we are disappointed by the fact that so much preparation was done and country-level consultations were implemented only to get a negative response. This happens all the time – a case in point are the PRSP processes where disabled people spend huge amounts of resources planning and providing input into the process and none of their proposals are included in the final documents.

We are very concerned about resource distribution trends when it comes to development cooperation as disability seems to fall off the table or parked into special under-resourced budget areas such as “welfare” spending/programmes.

We feel that part of the study should investigate prioritisation of disability within the Governance and Transparency Fund, and the skills of Governance and Transparency Fund personnel (or selection panel) with regard to the disability programming processes. What were the essential elements of the winning tender? Did the winning tenders reflect a commitment to the strategic disability agenda of mainstreaming, UN Convention, etc? There is a real risk that disability will fall off the DFID priority list in future.

It was a good idea – its execution was flawed. Hopefully it will still make a significant difference through the work it is funding.

It has encouraged us to focus on an area of work that we first explored through this application process, i.e. the links between violence against children and women and governance.

Given the very high number of high quality applications (indicating the appeal of this Fund and significant role played by CSOs in this arena, while DFID increased the original size of the Fund by £30m to £130m, what steps can DFID now take to provide funding for some of the purportedly excellent projects that could not be funded due to the limitations of the Fund size?

As mentioned above, we are concerned that because DFID has outsourced the administration of the fund, DFID staff will not be learning anything from the challenges facing NGOs involved in the different projects. Furthermore, there seems to be no mechanism for NGOs involved in different projects to learn from each other.

We would strongly urge DFID to learn lessons from this – it would be a step forwards if they were able to internally present a cost estimate to the sector as a whole in terms of the opportunity cost of developing programmes that would be short of the mark against unclear criteria – this may be a way of putting forward the case internally to learn from the

Governance and Transparency Fund. It would be very encouraging if DFID were able to give assurances that this kind of grant making will not be repeated, at least within the civil society sector.

It would be useful as well, I think, to refer to examples of more effective grant giving that DFID are involved in with civil society, and examples that I am able to think of are the PPAs, and the Civil Society Fund (which although both have their problems, are both hugely more effectively run than the Governance and Transparency Fund). There may be other examples from DFID regional offices that could be drawn from – e.g. DFID India INGO Partnerships Agreement Programmes, the Southern Africa Trust Fund established by DFID.

It would be good to see DFID's results analysed in a number of different ways, which presumably only they can do. E.g.:

- a) By nationality of main applicant
- b) By size of main applicant
- c) By previous DFID funding history of main applicant (e.g. PPA agency, level of CSCF funding, etc)
- d) Single agency or consortium
- e) By region of work
- f) By size of bid
- g) By DAC sector (e.g. health, education, etc)
- h) By target group (e.g. whole community, women, children, disabled people, etc)

Overall, this Fund was very much welcomed when it was launched. However, we remain concerned that the entire allocated amount of GBP 130m was allocated in one go. We believe this approach does not allow truly innovative, or pilot projects, and for these to be built on after learning between funding rounds.

It would also be helpful to have more information from DFID about what criteria were used for making the final selection of approved projects. In particular, it would be helpful have a more detailed analysis of the types of projects funded (i.e. whether lead grantee is northern or southern; thematic focus of project; information on how innovative the funded projects are etc).

The Governance and Transparency Fund was designed to hold governments to account; more than half the world's population are children and youth, however the list of funded projects does not seem to include a project which is focussed on this target group and their participation in governance.

In addition, we can understand that DFID may have wanted to keep the guidelines open to allow for innovative projects; however, the projects that were funded in the end are not innovative but rather more "traditional" type of governance projects.

Finally, it should be noted that the long delay in receiving notification of who was funded (and changing of notification deadline many times) may have damaged DFID's professional reputation, in particular with partner organisations.

It was obvious from the number of concept notes that were submitted that this was going to be heavily over-subscribed. It would have been useful for those in charge to reconsider their process at that stage, and be aware of the implications for assessments.

They clearly wanted to open the funding up to a wide range of organisations, which is good, and to encourage consortium or joint bids, which is good too. But in practice the timeframe just didn't allow for the necessary amount of discussion with other organisations.

The constantly changing date for final decisions was farcical. No one was accountable (oh sweet irony!). Steve Nally was hung out to dry. Where was the private sector contractor in all this, and how much were they paid?

It would be really interesting to hear from DFID their own perceptions of the Fund (what worked and what didn't work) and their impressions of the final portfolio as an outcome. What would they do the same/differently if they were to launch a similar Fund in future? Would they use a Fund Manager again?

Set this up as a permanent resource to complement the CSCF in recognition of the importance of governance and transparency. Take on board the feedback and experience of this round; consider limiting applications per round for specific issues/geographies.

It would be good to see examples of successful applications and how they managed to include all the information requested within the tight word limit and how they were able to show concretely how positive change could be measured.

It is important that the DFID team is better briefed concerning the importance of governance to private sector organisations and enterprises such as co-operatives and develops a more comprehensive understanding of governance issues today.

Design these funds to achieve maximum developmental impact, rather than ease of administration. Don't make the minimum bid so big as to exclude small NGOs who offer quality and innovation.

Don't open a new funding programme until all (or most) of the internal systems are in place to deal with it!

At this stage I am not clear about the level to which the Governance and Transparency Fund funded disability-specific proposals. Clearly the fund was considerable – so one would certainly expect a high-level of commitment from DFID towards directly addressing disabled people's rights to good governance.

If DFID are really serious about creating better governance and greater transparency then they need to realise that this will be a 20-30 year process which needs proper on-going investment.

We liked the approach taken by the fund and found putting together our application an interesting and useful process. It is a shame that it was a one-off funding round as we would be interested in submitting again even though our proposal was unsuccessful.

## Appendix 4

### Letter from BOND to DFID, 4 July 2007

Peter Kerby  
Head of Civil Society Team  
DFID  
Abercrombie House,  
Eaglesham Road,  
East Kilbride  
Glasgow G75 8EA

4 July 2007

Dear Peter,

BOND, the network of 320 UK-based NGOs working in international development, welcomes the creation of the Department for International Development's (DFID) Governance and Transparency Fund.

With the Governance and Transparency Fund, it is encouraging to see DFID frame the processes of governance in the context of formal and informal relationships between people and institutions that take time to develop and mature. In the think piece that accompanies the formal Governance and Transparency Fund guidelines, the need for acknowledging, understanding and supporting the development of governance systems that are devised through locally owned processes is expressed eloquently. As is stated, "Not everything can be done at once, especially in countries with limited resources and capacity."

It is therefore of some concern to us that this understanding of the realities of engaging in genuine and meaningful processes that result in appropriate, transparent policies and practice has not transferred to the management of the fund.

We feel that the announcement that full proposals would be expected by the end of August is directly contrary to the spirit in which the fund has been established and contradicts the guidelines, purpose and anticipated mechanisms of the fund.

The Governance and Transparency Fund guidelines clearly promote a principle of engagement with a wide range of partners from the South, with different perspectives and approaches. To quote:

"Proposals must address governance and transparency issues by working through a variety of local partnerships and networks. "

It is clear from our discussions about the funding mechanisms of major donors within the sector over many years, that producing a large and well considered bid with a range of partners takes considerable time and human resources. We feel that the time frame given for Governance and Transparency Fund proposals is too short if we are to develop applications using processes that are participatory, that encourage the bringing together of different perspectives and diversity in ways of working.

The fund also aims to provide funding directly to southern partners. However, we feel that the time allowed to develop full proposals will work directly against this important principle. Southern partners work in difficult circumstances; they have limited access to communications and resources and are dealing with first hand, immediate and pressing priorities. It is far less likely that Southern partners will be able to put together large and well developed portfolio bids in the given timeframe.

The short deadline works directly contrary to the purpose and aims of the Fund - and is potentially a waste of a significantly large amount of public funds.

Although DFID has previously stated ministerial prerogative in the way the GTF has been placed in its current timeframe, it is not clear why with the change in Secretary of State there is still a need for such a difficult deadline.

BOND therefore requests that this deadline is extended, at a minimum until the end of September but ideally to later in the autumn. We are convinced this would result in a higher number of quality applications that reflect the aims and ambitions of the GTF. It would allow civil society, especially in the South, to have a realistic chance of applying successfully and would ultimately have a greater impact on the very beneficiaries the fund is designed to assist.

Taking this opportunity to comment on DFID's approach to providing funds for civil society organisations, BOND would be very pleased to discuss reasonable timeframes for civil society funding mechanisms that would allow for the design of genuinely participatory projects.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Charlotte Imbert', written in a cursive style.

Charlotte Imbert  
Acting General Secretary  
BOND

Cc Steve Nally