



SDG 5: Progress, gaps and recommendations for the UK

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The UK government, through its negotiators predominantly led by DFID, was at the forefront in promoting a specific goal on gender equality, together with gender mainstreaming across all the goals. It has made some noteworthy steps towards implementing this in policy and practice. For example, DFID's Strategic Vision for Gender Equality: A Call to Action for Her Potential, Our Future and its commitment to 'Leave No One Behind' is an important recognition of the centrality of gender equality to the SDG agenda and the need for equitable progress.¹ There were also positive responses to the introduction of the International Development (Gender Equality) Act 2014, calling on DFID to improve its consideration and monitoring of gender equality in its work to reduce poverty.²

The importance of tackling structural causes of gender inequality is recognised within Agenda 2030, going beyond addressing the needs of individual women and girls. Moving forward there are a number of areas that the UK government should address, outlined below, to remove these structural barriers and so contribute to the implementation of Goal 5 alongside many of the other Goals. Priority should be given to measures that benefit the many women and girls who face multiple, intersecting, discriminations based on class, race, age, disability, sexuality and other factors, and who experience the greatest obstacles to empowerment.

Gender inequality is not a women's issue – it affects everyone. Therefore, working across various issues (including by working with men) is both necessary and effective for supporting gender equality and women's and girls' rights. This will contribute to changing attitudes

and behaviours to promote women's empowerment and challenge discrimination. There is a need for a UK strategy that is more explicit in how it promotes the rights of women, linking its human rights and development work.

In short, it is necessary for the UK government to pursue a "twin-track" to women's rights: ensuring direct support for policies and programmes that promote the rights of women; and ensuring that the structural barriers to gender equality are recognised through mainstreaming across all policies and programmes, especially the recognition that women in marginalised communities are likely to face greater challenges.

Policy coherence and cross-departmental strategy

The SDGs are a comprehensive framework that recognises the complex needs faced by the most marginalised people, including women and girls, who can experience multiple and intersecting challenges. They provide an important opportunity for the UK government to achieve better policy and practice for promoting gender equality, such as Women Peace and Security, the DFID Strategic Vision for Gender Equality, and other human rights frameworks.³

Policy coherence is absolutely vital if gender equality is to be achieved, both in the UK and internationally. For example, the UK government must ensure that efforts in other areas such as trade, avoid undermining progress on Goal 5. From a women's rights perspective, longer-term approaches should be integrated into "crisis responses", particularly around political empowerment and livelihood support.

1. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/708116/Strategic-vision-gender-equality1.pdf

2. <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2014/9/section/1/enacted>

3. Ibid.; and <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-national-action-plan-on-women-peace-and-security-2018-to-2022>

The commitment to “Leave No One Behind” is yet to be consistently embedded and applied to UK government policy and programming, particularly as it relates to gender equality and women’s rights. As discussed in the chapter on “Leave No One Behind”, reports indicate that the needs of the most marginalised people around the world are not yet being met. Women and girls’ lived experiences of marginalisation, emergencies, extreme poverty, violence and exploitation is multidimensional and interlinked. Delivering the SDGs will therefore require a much more nuanced approach to understanding who the most marginalised members of society are, and investing in them as an immediate priority.

DFID’s Strategic Vision includes a call to “work across girls’ and women’s lifecycles and on multiple areas simultaneously, with particular attention to adolescence.”⁴ This is welcome, given that the specific needs of girls and especially adolescents are often overlooked. However, more nuanced reporting that captures both age and gender will be essential if DFID is to meet its own call on adolescence, as will be the investment in more targeted policies, programming and funding, to ensure better progress for girls across all of the SDGs. The Strategic Vision also includes a commitment to “protect and empower girls and women in conflict, protracted crises and humanitarian emergencies.” This is vital.⁵ Once again, adolescent girls are often overlooked in humanitarian programming.

Women’s rights organisations and movements (WROs) and trade unions

The recognition in the SDG Framework that improving women’s representation and participation is crucial across all 17 of the Goals (from the household to international decision-making platforms) has largely been welcomed.

However, achieving this requires a monumental increase in funding available for women’s empowerment, particularly to support changes to break down barriers that women face in accessing women’s economic and political opportunities and services, such as decent work, health and education. Some progress was made in this regard in 2018. For example, additional funding via the Jo Cox Memorial Strengthening Grants, specifically its prioritisation of women’s empowerment by supporting women-led civil society. This report strongly welcomes the fund’s accessibility to small organisations in fragile and conflict-affected states.

Despite this, there remain significant opportunities for the UK to further its contribution to the achievement of the Goals – particularly **Goal 5** – through partnerships with women’s rights organisations and movements.

There is a growing body of research that demonstrates that WROs are important catalysts in interventions to promote

4. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/708116/Strategic-vision-gender-equality1.pdf
5. Ibid.

greater gender equality and realise women’s rights.⁶ Research also shows that progress towards gender equality can only be achieved through demand driven approaches – through women’s mobilisation, awareness raising and collaborative action, as opposed to traditional supply driven interventions aimed at empowering individual women.⁷ WROs are particularly well placed to increase women’s consciousness and agency and have pioneered a range of effective models for mobilising and empowering women to come together to know and claim their rights.⁸

Supporting WROs is also a key mechanism to implement the principles of “Leave No One Behind”, with its implication that women who are rural, low caste, LGBTI,⁹ living with disability or HIV positive should all be included and movements representing these groups be specifically engaged in work with women’s rights movements.

However, despite their added value, WROs continue to struggle to secure quality resources necessary to carry out their work. Whilst there has been a slow increase in aid focused on gender equality, this has yet to translate into greater support for WROs. The most recent data published by the OECD DAC shows that only a tiny 1.4%, or \$400m, of gender focused aid has been committed to support WROs and gender equality institutions.¹⁰

Trade unions and wider labour movements have also continued to play a key role in promoting gender equality in many contexts. Trade unions are organising women workers, informing them about their rights and supporting collective agency at work and in wider society. As the International Labour Organisation (ILO) has highlighted, collective bargaining and tripartite negotiations are an effective mechanism for achieving gender equality. Collective agreements have advanced flexible working arrangements for both women and men and shared family time, and included measures to reduce the gender pay gap, for example.¹¹ Through broad based alliances, progress is being made to improve social dialogue, legal protections and access to social protection for women in the informal economy, where most women work, in line with ILO Recommendation 204.¹² Approaches to funding should factor in the important role that WROs, trade unions and alliances can play in promoting gender equality.

6. <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/american-political-science-review/article/civic-origins-of-progressive-policy-change-combating-violence-against-women-in-global-perspective-19752005/810036AC92E6A7E245A083E3EEE4EFA0>

7. <http://www.awid.org/Library/Women-Moving-Mountains3>

8. www.womankind.org.uk/2013/03/why-support-womens-rights-organisations

9. Lesbian, bisexual, trans and/or intersex.

10. http://www.oecd.org/dac/stats/documentupload/Aid%20in%20support%20ENG%20for%20web%20March%202015_EN_Full.pdf

11. www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_protect/---protrav/---travail/documents/publication/wcms_528947.pdf

12. https://www.ilo.org/ilc/ILCSessions/104/texts-adopted/WCMS_377774/lang--en/index.htm; and <https://www.ituc-csi.org/social-dialogue-to-achieve-the-20691>

Monitoring and accountability for women's rights and gender equality

The International Development (Gender Equality) Act of 2014 calls on DFID to consider whether development assistance will reduce poverty in a way that will also reduce gender inequality.¹³ This report particularly welcomed transparency from the UK government in sharing overall CSSF spend on gender equality. The expansion of the Gender Equality Act requirements to all ODA and non-ODA CSSF programmes is also a positive step, but unless this data is collected and published it is difficult to see the extent to which CSSF funds are truly advancing women's rights and gender equality. It also makes it difficult to assess the UK government's overall progress on **Goal 5**.

In practice, it is nearly impossible to gauge how much ODA is spent on women's rights and gender equality. Any funding on these issues should be tracked and reported on to ensure that it is mainstreamed into broader DFID policy and programming, as well as monitoring where it may be necessary for the UK government to increase their investment. This should be done using a Gender Equality Marker (GEM) and be integrated into DFID reporting processes (eg annual reporting).



Target 5.2:

Eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation.

Efforts to prevent violence against women and girls (VAWG) must focus on social change, including challenging harmful social norms, as well legislative and policy changes. To effectively prevent VAWG, efforts must also be multi-sectoral, including health, education and justice. It is also critical that survivors of violence are supported via survivor-centred holistic services, including shelters, helplines, psycho-social support, and that there are robust mechanisms to ensure perpetrators can be brought to justice. The priority that DFID has given to ending VAWG has been welcomed, including investment through the What Works research programme.¹⁴

Trafficking and exploitation are currently high on the UK's political agenda, although with a focus on the more gender neutral Target 8.7. In 2015 the government introduced the Modern Slavery Act (see **Goal 8**, including for implications on global supply chains and decent work) and in 2017 the prime minister launched a Global Call to Action to End Forced Labour, Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking. However, the latter includes just one reference to women, where it urges

13. <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2014/9/section/1/enacted>

14. <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/funding-for-what-works-to-prevent-violence-against-women-and-girls>

signatories "to protect the most vulnerable; including those affected by conflict and humanitarian situations, people on the move, marginalised groups, and women and children."¹⁵ This should be stronger, given that, of the 45 million people who are affected by forced labour and forced marriage globally, over two thirds are women and girls.¹⁶

DFID policy has a clearer focus. The Strategic Vision includes a pledge "to reduce the number of girls and women affected by trafficking and modern slavery", alongside a call to integrate gender equality in a number of areas including modern slavery.¹⁷ DFID currently funds seven programmes that include work on trafficking and exploitation, alongside other issues, and has recently pledged £20m to the Global Fund to End Modern Slavery. Not enough of them look at the specific age and gender-related vulnerabilities affecting girls below the age of 18, despite evidence suggesting that they now make up almost one quarter of trafficking victims globally.¹⁸ Alongside existing spending, DFID has announced five future programmes. At present the descriptions for all five are gender neutral.

According to the ILO, there is increasing understanding that gender based violence is both a gender equality issue and an occupational safety and health risk. Many trade union bargaining agendas now include provisions on gender based violence in an effort to prevent and address sexual harassment at work, in large part through mobilisation of women in unions (see **Goal 8**).¹⁹



Target 5.3:

Eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation.

Since 2015, the UK government has demonstrated its commitment to achieving this specifically by supporting and investing in a number of global initiatives to address child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation (FGM). DFID has demonstrated strong leadership and commitment by making the largest ever investment to support the end of FGM in a generation through £50m in funding in 2018 for work across Africa, building on the momentum from a significant investment of £35m in 2013.²⁰

15. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/759332/End-Forced-Labour-Modern-Slavery1.pdf

16. <https://www.walkfreefoundation.org/news/initiative/global-estimates-modern-slavery/>

17. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/708116/Strategic-vision-gender-equality1.pdf

18. http://www.unodc.org/documents/Global_Report_on_TIP.pdf

19. https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_protect/---protrav/---travail/documents/publication/wcms_528947.pdf

20. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-aid-makes-largest-ever-investment-to-help-end-fgm-worldwide-by-2030>

An evaluation of DFID’s earlier investment towards galvanising an African-led movement of grassroots organisations to initiate local dialogue showed that movement-building and social change communications, especially with youth, have been highly effective at changing the narrative around ending the practice and catalysing social change. Rightly so, there will continue to be a core focus on funding community programmes and grassroots campaigners.

Following the 2014 Girls Summit, DFID has helped to maintain attention on girls’ empowerment and child, early and forced marriage in the international political arena, including by funding a number of effective programmes, such as the £39m Accelerate Action to End Child Marriage. DFID has also made some efforts to integrate child marriage in other bilateral programmes, including the forthcoming Stopping Abuse and Female Exploitation Programme in Nigeria, and child marriage features in some critical initiatives, such as the Girls Education Challenge Programme and some humanitarian programming.

DFID’s policies and programmes on FGM and child marriage should be better integrated into large investments focusing on women’s economic empowerment, education, nutrition, SRHR and social protection, in line with the findings of the ICAI report on DFID’s work on violence against women and girls.²¹ This will lead to more sustainable change in the lives of girls and women.

We urge DFID to ensure investments and services are both girl-focussed and address structural inequalities, such as harmful gender norms. There are significant opportunities for DFID to ensure a greater focus on child marriage in humanitarian and fragile contexts, including the Middle East and North Africa region where the level of child marriage is increasing.²²

 **Target 5.4:**

Recognise and value unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies and the promotion of shared responsibility within the household and the family as nationally appropriate.

DFID’s commitments under its EDS on the economic empowerment of women and girls is much welcomed in the sector.²³ This work should focus on addressing the unequal distribution of unpaid care and domestic work, taking a

21. <https://icai.independent.gov.uk/report/vawg/>
 22. <https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Child-marriage-and-humanitarian-crises-June-2016.pdf>
 23. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/dfids-economic-development-strategy-2017>

context-specific approach and investing in the provision of gender responsive water, electricity, transport and public services such as healthcare and childcare.

Women’s and girls’ disproportionate responsibility for unpaid care work underpins and reinforces every aspect of gender inequality. It restricts women’s agency and autonomy, reinforces stereotypes, and acts as an obstacle to moving out of poverty, preventing women’s economic empowerment and leading to their over-representation in insecure, part-time work. It also prevents them from engaging in political decision-making, including collective action to promote their rights. Globally, women perform between two and 10 times more unpaid care work than men.²⁴

Recognising, reducing and redistributing unpaid care work would have positive effects across different areas of women’s lives, increasing women’s opportunities to access education, income earning opportunities, participation in public life and leisure time.

Poor and marginalised women and girls, with limited access to public services and technology, carry the heaviest burden. For these low resource families in particular, with little access to private care or to flexible working, a shifting of child care responsibilities from women to men will not be enough, and an increase in the provision of public services must be a major part of the solution. DFID should build into country diagnostics on inclusive growth considerations of how unpaid care work constrains women’s economic opportunities, support the use of time-use studies and gender responsive budgeting (GRB), and measure the economic value of unpaid care work with better data collection and inclusion within national accounts.

 **Target 5.5:**

Ensure women’s full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life.

Women’s collective and individual voice and agency is both a fundamental right and necessary to improve outcomes for women in all aspects of decision-making. Only with this voice and agency can women have an equal say in their homes, communities and formal decision-making spaces, from local to global.

The ability to shape and share in discussions and decisions in public and private life is still all too often limited and remains a key structural barrier to the greater achievement of gender equality and a reflection of unequal power relations in our societies. Without agency, women’s power

24. https://www.oecd.org/dev/development-gender/Unpaid_care_work.pdf

to determine the choices they make is constrained. This is especially true for women from the most disadvantaged socio-economic, ethnic and geographical locations. In addition, women’s equal participation and leadership in decision making at local, national, regional and global levels is still too narrow in scope and too slow in its progress. As a result, many in the sector were pleased to see women’s participation and leadership added as a pillar of DFID’s Strategic Vision on Women and Girls. This new pillar should be accompanied by an implementation plan, including a framework for how country programmes will be incentivised and supported to invest in this crucial area of work.

In addition, DFID could go further by ensuring greater participation and influence of women and women’s groups in the design, implementation, monitoring and review of policies and programmes, including the UK’s contribution to the Goals. This should not be conducted as a one-off activity or consultation, but as part of an ongoing dialogue with a diverse range of women and women’s groups.

 **Target 5.6:**

Ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights as agreed in accordance with the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome documents of their review conferences.

The UK government was a strong proponent for the inclusion of SRHR in the international agenda. This leadership has also been important for achieving Target 3.7 (on sexual and reproductive health information, education and services, including family planning) and Target 5.3 (on harmful practices, including child, early and forced marriage and FGM).

SRHR is clearly stated as a key strategic area for achieving gender equality within DFID’s Strategic Vision, which calls for a bolder and braver “step up” in access to SRHR to ensure a transformational impact that will enable girls and women to be equal, empowered and safe.

The Vision recognises family planning and contraception as critically important for achieving gender equality (see Target 3.7). It also highlights the link between gender inequality and HIV acquisition and the importance of scaling up universal SRHR in a way that includes “action on sex and relationships education, HIV and other sexually transmitted infections, family planning, safe abortion, and maternal and newborn health.” However, it is not sufficiently apparent how all these related elements are being addressed or linked in DFID’s programmes to maximise synergies and leverage further funding. In order to deliver on “Leave No One Behind”, it is imperative that DFID promotes and protects the human

rights of all persons that choose to access comprehensive SRHR, placing emphasis on “reaching those furthest behind first.” There are key groups within populations that require further attention, for example older people and persons with disabilities, whose SRHR are not being adequately addressed in DFID’s work.

In the face of rising global opposition, DFID must be bolder in the fight for the human rights of all women and girls, who choose to access comprehensive SRHR. DFID has recognised safe abortion as a key life-saving intervention and its policy to address the issue is to be celebrated. The UK government should use its soft power and diplomacy more effectively to ensure that women’s rights, including access to safe abortion, are promoted and protected internationally.

Rights-based approaches are essential for integrating SRHR in efforts to strengthen health systems, including community systems, and in making progress towards UHC (see Goal 3).²⁵ When DFID’s results framework on Reproductive, Maternal, Newborn and Child Health ended in 2015, SRHR were subsequently supposed to be incorporated into its Health Systems Strengthening (HSS) approach. However, progress in achieving this across the UK’s international development portfolio has been unacceptably slow. Also in 2015, DFID’s HIV and AIDS Strategy came to an end (see also **Target 3.3**).²⁶ At that time, civil society encouraged DFID to create a broader health strategy that would help the UK government fulfil its contribution towards achieving health-related goals and targets.

DFID should publish its approach to HSS as a priority, which: includes an accountable review framework; is led by the principle of “Leave No One Behind” and a human rights-based approach; and recognises the integral role of SRHR as part of an essential package of services and as part of a continuum of care.

 **Target 5.6:**

Adopt and strengthen sound policies and enforceable legislation for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls at all levels.

Aid alone will not be enough to realise gender equality and in many countries tax revenue is dwarfing aid as a source of development finance. The outcome of the Financing for Development Conference in 2015 recognised the increasing importance of domestic resource mobilisation for development, and the importance of taking a gender sensitive approach in social policy.²⁷

25. <https://www.thelancet.com/commissions/sexual-and-reproductive-health-and-rights>

26. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/67523/twds-zero-inf-ops-paper-hiv-dev-wrld.pdf

27. http://www.un.org/esa/ffd/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/AAAA_Outcome.pdf (paragraphs 6 and 20).

Decisions around taxation and fiscal policy are never gender neutral, as a result of the differing gendered roles that women and men occupy in both the productive and reproductive economy. As countries seek to raise increased revenue from taxation, it is critical that such strategies are based on an understanding of the different potential impacts on women and men (see **Goal 1, Target 1.a**).

GRB is a tool that governments and citizens can use to cost policies and programmes for gender equality within national action plans, allocate resources, and monitor the impact of spending and revenue decisions on gender equality. GRB requires technical capacity and political will to be implemented successfully. Nepal provides a good case study and work is now being done around an Act on Public Finance Management in Uganda.²⁸

This chapter is part of Bond's report, **The UK's global contribution to the Sustainable Development Goals**.

Access the rest of the report at bond.org.uk/UK-global-contribution-SDGs

Bond is the UK network for organisations working in international development. Bond.org.uk

28. For more information on GRB and other financing issues see: <http://static1.squarespace.com/static/536c4ee8e4b0b60bc6ca7c74/t/557e8e07e4b0ff7f4a6b8a5b/1434357255971/Final+GADN+Briefing+FFD+09.06+%281%29.pdf>

To achieve Goal 5, the UK government should:

- Ensure all ODA from across Whitehall is subject to the International Development (Gender Equality Act) of 2014. Track and publish all ODA spend using a GEM and integrate this into DFID reporting processes (eg annual reporting). Publish how much of UK ODA has been spent on women's rights, gender equality and meeting the needs of marginalised groups.
- Develop a clear strategy for better identifying, understanding, investing in and reporting on women and girls across various lived experiences of marginalisation, including age, disability status, ethnicity, caste, education, geography, sexuality and/or LGBTI identity, and child, early or forced married.
- Demonstrate the UK's commitment to delivering gender equality by increasing dedicated, core, longer-term funding for women's rights organisations and movements, or civil society organisations and trade unions working on gender equality.
- Build on the UK's existing work on VAWG by: increasing investment in VAWG programming; meaningfully mainstreaming prevention and response to violence into all DFID programmes; widely promoting the findings of the What Works Programme; and adopting a stronger focus on the trafficking and exploitation of women and girls in international advocacy and programming on modern slavery.
- Ensure interventions on women's economic empowerment take a care sensitive and gender transformative approach in measuring, reducing and redistributing unpaid care work. Create country diagnostics to measure the impact of unpaid care work on inclusive growth and constraints to women's economic empowerment. Recognise the role of collective bargaining and social dialogue in achieving gender equality and support the attainment of decent work for women.
- Ensure that women and girls are able to participate and have their voices heard throughout the processes of developing, implementing and reviewing any policies and programmes, including assessment of progress on the SDGs themselves.
- Support and implement the UN Women's Action Plan for Transformative Financing for Gender Equality.²⁹

Safe water and sanitation are human rights.

29. <http://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/news/action%20plan%20on%20transformative%20financing%20for%20gowe.pdf?vs=5346>