

Governance and Social Development Group (G & SDG)
Policy and Resource Division (PRD)
Department for International Development (DFID)

Report on the Mid -Term Review
of
The Governance and Social Development Resource
Centre (GSDRC)

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Executive Summary

This report provides a mid-term assessment of the progress made by the Governance and Social Development Resource Centre (GSDRC) in delivering the outputs and purpose contained in the project memorandum. The GSDRC is a three year project to deliver knowledge services to the international development community and DFID staff on Governance, Social Development and Conflict related development topics. The services are provided through a contract between DFID and consortium comprising four organisations, led by the University of Birmingham.

The review was undertaken by a multi-disciplinary team from DFID and GSDRC between September and October 2007. The approach involved evidence based feedback from external and internal users of the GSDRC services, meetings with key internal and external stakeholders, written and oral submissions and information from project documents and related background material. The team also looked at other resource and research centres to provide comparisons and inform the assessment.

The GSDRC is an ambitious and innovative concept and within a relatively short period of time (18 months) has established itself as a provider of essential knowledge generation and 'just-in-time' rapid research dissemination services on wide ranging crosscutting topics covering governance, social development and conflict.

Satisfaction levels have been high among internal and external users. The review also observed that a number of social development, governance and conflict advisers did not know of the services. The profile of external users highlighted a significant northern country bias and needs to be more representative of individuals and institutions from southern countries.

The single platform bringing together knowledge for social development, governance and conflict interest groups has been a success and there is a growing demand for knowledge and rapid research. The help desk is very popular with an increasing number of queries in new subject areas.

With the growth in knowledge generation websites and resource centres, DFID would secure better returns from its investments through effective coordination and strategic planning.

Implementation has taken place in a context influenced by domestic and global politics and an evolving global development agenda. The requirement to work upstream on policy analysis, support country programmes, the priority given to the influencing agenda and to work across Whitehall has altered the profile of the user base, increased demand for new topics, changed the types of queries and

increased pressure for faster delivery.

The review finds that a significant part of the services provided by the GSDRC responds to the new agenda and is supporting partner countries implement their development programmes, and the international development community shape global development policy. With the shift in emphasis from DFID specific projects to supporting country programmes, partner governments want knowledge from DFID and they want it on-demand. Working with donor partners in promoting the harmonisation agenda also requires that DFID provides knowledge on demand. The review concludes that the GSDRC is delivering a service which was not previously provided by DFID staff.

Progress on outputs for the help desk, website and newsletters has been good. Staff have primarily used the GSDRC to gain knowledge and this could indirectly contribute to competency building. However, there were no explicit project-based activities to build specific competencies to DFID standards. This output is unlikely to be achieved and should be dropped from the logical framework. The commissioning services for consultants have been slow to take off and results have been patchy. There are some issues concerning fee rates, choice of consultants and use of national consultants. This output is likely to be achieved to a limited extent.

The project has suffered from lack of clarity on the roles and responsibilities of the project officer and this was compounded by frequent staff changes. There has been insufficient strategic guidance and oversight from the Steering Committee – in part caused by changes in HoPs to enable delivery of quality outputs and efficient use of project resources.

There are considerable pressures on the GSDRC resources to fund the growth in demand for more topic guides and updating of existing guides. The remaining budget is insufficient for completing the outputs. Other user departments have offered to make a contribution and resources from regional departments and central research need to be explored.

The project was designed for three years with an option to extend for two more years. Given the changes and the innovative nature of the project the review finds that three years is insufficient to specify, build and deliver GSDRC core services to users locally and globally. Taking all the factors into account, the review team concludes only partial achievement of the project purpose and some outputs are likely to be achieved. A two year extension would allow implementation of the changes highlighted by this review for the project purpose to be largely achieved. A summary of the main recommendation follows:

Performance, duration and funding of GSDRC services

The GSDRC should submit for DFID approval service delivery performance targets for achievement by end June 2008. G & SDG should adopt a funding

formula for core services through contributions from the main users and secondly, implement the recommendation from 2004 review of resource centres which makes the case for funding research dissemination services from central research funds. Subject to achievement of the performance targets by June 2007, DFID should secure funds for a two year extension of core services

Costing Core Services

GSDRC should propose for DFID approval a framework for costing the core services and specify the service levels that can be provided within the remaining funds. Maintenance and development of topic guides which cannot be accommodated within the budget should be paid for by the department responsible for the topic.

Commissioned Services

DFID procurement group should consider changes to the framework agreement for national consultants, a more flexible fee band structure and a reduction in the 15% management charge. GSDRC should strengthen the quality of the pool of consultants and DFID should conduct a review of commissioned services in July 2008 to determine future strategy.

GSDRC Management

The DFID Project Officer should be focal person for all GSDRC communications in DFID, with responsibility for ensuring the project is managed at strategic and operational levels to deliver outputs and achieve project objectives. The Steering Committee should comprise the HoPs and pro-actively engage with GSDRC management on strategic issues. Two – three academics and practitioners from the international development community should be appointed to represent the external users and advise the Steering Committee and GSDRC. Their role could evolve over time to full members of the Steering Committee.

Focusing and strengthening services

The main report contains detailed recommendations on strengthening services. Organisational arrangements for DFID contributions will be dependent on the type of service and factored into operational procedures to be developed by the GSDRC in consultation with DFID. All recommendations can be implemented within the remaining period of the current contract through better project management and in particular tighter management of the topic guides. However, there are several requiring more time before the full benefits can be realised. Sustainability will be critical and requires a DFID management policy decision on the future of resource centres.

Next Steps

Subject to approval by the Steering Committee of the review report, the DFID project officer should prepare a time bound plan for taking the recommendations forward.