
Mark Pont, Assessment Programme Lead

Neil Jackson
Chief Statistician
Department for International Development
(by email)

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Dear Neil

STATISTICS ON INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Thank you for the positive participation and engagement of you and your team during our recent short review of compliance of your Statistics on International Development (SID) against the [Code of Practice for Statistics](#). I am pleased to confirm that these statistics should continue to be designated as National Statistics.

We reviewed these statistics, which were last assessed in 2015, to reaffirm that they are produced independently and that they offer useful insights to users. Our focus has been on trustworthiness, how the statistics are produced, and how feedback from users has influenced the innovation and development of these statistics.

We found many positive illustrations of good practice in the Statistics on International Development:

- The statistics, data and explanatory material are presented clearly, impartially and objectively, and DFID has implemented the recommendations of the [2015 OSR assessment](#).
- It is easy to find information about user engagement, and about the impact that this has: the DFID team clearly invests considerable time and effort in reviewing the methodology and presentation of the statistics in line with international requirements and wider user needs. The timing of the statistical bulletins; the commentary explaining the statistics; and the data supplied with the bulletins have all been improved in line with user feedback.
- The statistics have been subject to several methodological changes, with more changes planned from 2019. These changes have been pre-announced and accompanied by clear technical notes.
- The team acts as advocates for the Code, engaging proactively with colleagues in DFID and other organisations who contribute data to SID, seeking to improve their understanding of the Code – why it is important and what it means in practice for DFID statistics.
- The team has shown initiative and innovation in its attempts to more efficiently serve users of SID within DFID, producing a self-service interactive dashboard of findings.

We identified several areas where we consider that the transparency and presentation of the statistics could be enhanced:

- First, we require DFID to improve the clarity and completeness of its publication plans for its official statistics outputs: this will ensure coherent and straightforward access to all of DFID's official statistics. While the release timetable for SID publications is clearly explained

on DFID's GOV.UK pages, and the release date of the next SID publication is pre-announced through the GOV.UK release calendar, the release dates and arrangements for the publication of the associated Gross Public Expenditure (GPEX) tables and for any ad hoc requests are currently unclear.

- We consider that you should add more detail to the data quality assessment that accompanies the statistics (Annex 4 of the published statistical bulletins). We welcome your commitment to making clearer the level of data quality concern you feel is relevant to the statistics, and to including more detail about data production processes and quality checks, with reference to data received from organisations other than DFID. More detailed documentation of your arrangements for assuring the quality of data will help reinforce the trustworthiness of the statistics.
- With methodological changes affecting both 2018 and 2019 statistics, we ask that DFID continue to be transparent with users about the reasons for, and impact of, these changes. The team already provides clear technical notes: we recommend more of this detail, particularly regarding the impact of changes on the statistics and time series, be included in the statistical bulletins.
- Finally, SID statistics are released twice each year: first in a provisional form and then in a final form. The provisional statistical bulletin is, by necessity, shorter than the final statistical bulletin. However, we recommend replicating some of the infographics and statistical coverage notes from the final bulletin in the provisional, to enhance its value.

What really shone through in our conversation with the DFID team was its ambition and willingness to improve these statistics. The team has several innovative ideas for how it might make changes to increase the value of the statistics and make them more accessible to a wider range of users. We fully support this ambition and recommend the team continue to engage with producers, users, potential users and other stakeholders to ensure that any changes enhance the value of these statistics. OSR will look forward to continuing to engage with the team over the coming months.

Looking beyond the SID, we are pleased to see that DFID has adopted a further recommendation of our 2015 assessment and is voluntarily complying with the Code of Practice in the preparation of their annual DFID results estimates, which monitor delivery of DFID's Single Departmental Plan (SDP) and the UK Aid Strategy. This action demonstrates DFID's commitment to the pillars of Trustworthiness, Quality and Value in its wider statistical outputs.

I am copying this letter to Kate McDermott (Acting Head of ODA monitoring, eligibility and reporting).

Yours sincerely



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