



Irish Aid Lesotho Country Strategy Programme (2008-2012) Evaluation

In early 2012 Irish Aid commissioned an independent evaluation of the Irish Aid Lesotho Country Strategy Programme. The evaluation was carried out by the Evaluation and Audit Unit (E&A) of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) with support from Independent Consultant Muriel Visser. Expertise for the evaluation was drawn from the E&A Unit, Policy Planning and Effectiveness Unit and Africa Section.

A detailed assessment of CSP results was carried out by a task team in Maseru comprising of Embassy Maseru staff and task team members representative of partner organisations. This piece of work was facilitated by Louise Knight (consultant).

The following is the executive summary of this evaluation.

The views expressed in this report are those of the evaluation team.

Context and Background

1. Lesotho has received bilateral aid from Ireland since 1975, and is the longest running of Ireland's bilateral aid programmes. Initially funding was targeted at specific projects in education, healthcare and human rights, maintaining a strong focus on poverty reduction and with substantial technical input from Ireland. From 1999 Ireland shifted the way it provided aid to Lesotho, from funding Irish Aid managed stand-alone area-based projects to supporting Government programmes.
2. Weak systems and limited capacity across all areas of Government have affected the extent to which Government systems have been used in practice, and both reforms and progress have been slow. The 2008-2012 Lesotho Country Strategy Paper (CSP) was the first of a generation of results based management programmes for Irish Aid. The CSP was approved on the basis that the Government of Lesotho and Irish Aid would jointly work together to improve and strengthen the public service (particularly human resources) and public financial management systems for service delivery through a results-based approach.
3. The 2008-2012 Country Strategy Paper (CSP) was designed at a time when Irish Aid envisaged increasing budgets and resources. This was reflected in the design and ambition of the Lesotho Country Strategy Paper (CSP). The economic downturn in late 2008 impacted on the budget with a reduction in budget from a planned €75 million to an actual of €43 over the 5 year period 2008-2012.
4. Lesotho's development prospects are inextricably linked to relations with its large neighbour South Africa. These relations have been mixed in the past and this has been an impediment to economic growth and diversification. However there is potential for positive change following the recent elections and strong public statements from the Prime Minister indicate a recognition of the need for closer co-operation. Several key sectors of potential growth in the Lesotho economy are areas where there is significant scope for exploring co-operation with South Africa.

Programme Design and Implementation

1. The 2008-2012 Country Strategy Paper (CSP) sought to bring a sharper focus to Ireland's engagement in Lesotho with a move away from a broad objective of poverty reduction to attaining better and more sustainable social development outcomes. The assumption was that improved systems and capacity would have positive outcomes for service delivery in key sectors such as health, education and water. The Country Strategy Paper (CSP) was designed as a joint CSP with the Government – this was seen as the most effective way of ensuring that CSP objectives and outcomes were achieved.
2. The evaluation finds that the **overall choices and strategies in the Country Strategy Paper (CSP) were relevant to the country context and priorities of Irish Aid and the Government of Lesotho at the time** and correctly recognised that systems reform and strengthening is a fundamental to the long term development of the country. However, some of the problems of implementation could be traced back to under-elaboration of the practicalities of how to

actually address systems reform in the Lesotho context, given the acknowledged lessons from previous CSPs particularly around government capacity. The evaluation also found that the Country Strategy Paper (CSP) design process was largely Irish Aid driven and insufficiently owned by the Government of Lesotho. There were tensions **between the need** to fit in with the international aid effectiveness agenda which has proven difficult to implement, the CSP guidelines and design process, and the legacy of inherited projects from the past.

3. As a result, the implementation of the Country Strategy Paper (CSP) faced a number of challenges which emanated from a combination of design issues, assumptions around commitments and systems which did not materialize, as well as from challenges in implementation related to capacity constraints in both the Government of Lesotho and Irish Aid. Other challenges – such as those related to poor aid coordination, limited government ownership, and disparate projects – have characterised the context in Lesotho for many years now and also impacted on the programme.
4. The assessment of the Evaluation is that the programme has been **effective predominantly in the area of improving service delivery** (where Irish Aid has traditionally been strong) – in particular in remote rural areas - with some important lessons learnt which are being replicated, and can be used to inform programmes in other countries.
5. The Evaluation’s conclusions on **efficiency and sustainability** are more conservative, with concerns about the challenges to scaling up interventions and for which the required systems and capacity – and in some cases commitment – may not be in place.
6. Overall the evaluation finds that the Country Strategy Paper (CSP) did not achieve the intended objective of moving the relationship between Ireland and Lesotho to a more strategic level, in part due to different perceptions on both sides as to what level of engagement was envisaged. The pragmatic realignment of the programme at the mid-term review stage and the planning process for the evaluation has brought a closer level of understanding between Lesotho and Ireland, albeit with the programme focused on more modest objectives.

Summary of Results

1. Water

Irish Aid support to the water sector in the initial part of the Country Strategy Paper (CSP) period contributed to expanding access to services. There was a substantial focus on strengthening key capacity areas and on developing standards and strengthening monitoring in the sector. The decision to exit the water sector was timely and made sense in light of the overall context (other donors took over the support) and the constraints on the implementation of the programme. The exit process itself was managed appropriately.

2. Health and HIV and AIDS

There has been encouraging progress in the area of HIV and AIDS under the Country Strategy Paper (CSP). This component of the CSP sought to improve access to and quality of HIV prevention and to services through interventions in the education and health sectors. This

objective has been achieved through the mainstreaming of HIV and AIDS in education curricula and impressive improvements in access to Voluntary Counselling and Testing (VCT) and treatment in particular in rural areas. However, in addition, the Irish Aid programme has had a broader spin-off in terms of the expansion of health services in rural areas, improved monitoring, strengthening of human resource capacity, and policy changes which have an impact on broader health provision. Innovative strategies – with potential for replication - have been developed to address capacity constraints and to improve quality of service. Areas of innovation include the laboratory mentorship programme, the introduction of clinical mentoring, the development of innovative models of service delivery, and the use and recognition by the Ministry of Health and Social Work (MOHSW) of community volunteers in HIV and AIDS service delivery. The documentation of these practices has contributed to the Country Strategy Paper (CSP) strategy of building a stronger evidence base for interventions.

3. Education

Service delivery in this sector is challenging due to the remoteness of many communities where education is often the only government service. Nonetheless, there has been continued progress in access to education and some, though slower, progress in areas of quality. However, the evaluation observed that as the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) programme was still at concept stage at the CSP preparation, it was one of the new programmes not subjected to any detailed review process by Coherence or (PAEG) Projects Appraisal and Evaluation Group before approval. There have been challenges to the roll out of the education sector plan which reflect issues of technical and absorption capacity in the sector. The evaluation did not find evidence that the Irish Aid presence at country level – while appreciated by the Government of Lesotho (GOL) - during this CSP period in the education sector had added substantial value in terms of efficiency or effectiveness, over and above the option of providing support through the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) programme.

4. Governance

This outcome area has seen mixed results in spite of the high priority which was accorded to governance through a sector and cross-cutting focus in the Country Strategy Paper (CSP) design. Despite some notable results, including in terms of the recent elections, there is still insufficient ownership and support to this area in general by the Executive. Any future support would have to look carefully at modalities for implementation and at value-for-money issues.

The strengthening of civil society's advocacy work has proven to be particularly challenging. By the Mid Term Review (MTR) it was clear that the objective to support civil society advocacy was not realistic and was subsequently dropped. Active citizen participation in Lesotho's development continues to be desirable, but further careful thought is needed as to what role a donor such as Irish Aid could or should play, what might be appropriate and what results might be achievable.

5. Public Finance Management

Overall results of Irish Aid involvement in Public Financial management (PFM) reflect an overly optimistic ambition, and limited capacity and expertise to manage the programme. The emerging findings from a Public Expenditure and Financial Accountability (PEFA) Assessment conducted in 2012 show only very modest improvements in some limited areas of the Public Financial Management (PFM) system since the previous PEFA's in 2006 and 2009. It highlighted that fundamental weaknesses remain in areas such as procurement and the basic accounting, recording and reporting systems of Government of Lesotho (GOL). Programmes supporting capacity building in accountancy training and procurement showed poor results mainly due to inadequate programme management.

6. Aid Effectiveness

Irish Aid has been pursuing the aid effectiveness agenda in Lesotho for many years, yet progress has been very slow. The lack of ownership and leadership by Government to manage aid resources effectively remains an overarching concern. Without Government leadership donors can only play a marginal role in improving the impact of aid.

Lessons Learnt

1. Ireland is a long-standing partner to Lesotho. It is the only European mission of five bilateral missions that remain in Lesotho and as such the relationship is said to be highly valued from a Government of Lesotho (GOL) perspective. The current relationship works at the “business as usual level” where Ireland is seen as a long-term and loyal partner. This relationship has obvious limits in terms of achieving meaningful results and there continues to be a lack of clarity on the nature of the relationship by both sides. The fact that Ireland is the last remaining bilateral partner with country representation is significant and the presence of Ireland in Lesotho is considered important in this respect.
2. Moving the relationship between Ireland and Lesotho to a more strategic level requires clear identification of areas where strategic co-operation is possible and a more in-depth dialogue with the Government of Lesotho than was the case prior to the current Country Strategy Paper (CSP). The main bottlenecks at a system level, such as capacity, processes, incentives, etc., need to be clearly identified and addressed based on a realistic assessment and with strong commitment from the Government.
3. Interventions in areas such as institutional reform and capacity building require thorough and careful analysis. Addressing underlying issues such as motivation, leadership, culture, performance management and accountability is critical. Consideration across the board of whether there is genuine demand from the partner needs to be established before decisions to support capacity building are undertaken.
4. The Lesotho CSP (similar to the Ethiopia CSP) was a first generation programme using the results based management approach. Great efforts were made at the time to be clear on the results the programme was aiming to achieve. However in the period prior to the Mid Term Review (MTR) there were limited (if any) discussions with partners on their results frameworks and how they linked to the Irish Aid programme. This was recognised at the MTR and since then a serious effort has been made to rectify this.

5. Agreeing a results framework for a Country Strategy paper (CSP) is the beginning, not the end, of a process of managing for results, and such an approach requires appropriate resources from HQ and country level. Working with partners to ensure they too have clear results frameworks is paramount if the CSP is to achieve its objectives. At the start of the CSP there was no clear national strategic development plan and Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) framework for Irish Aid to align with and hence the results framework was constructed from various sector plans.
6. An appraisal and approval process needs to be in place to assess modalities for significant programme components that are not fully designed or in place at the time of Country Strategy Paper (CSP) approval. In the case of programmes in health, education and governance, arrangements were entered in to post Country Strategy paper (CSP) approval without adequate external appraisal. Risks and issues around resourcing could be addressed at this stage.

Looking Forward

1. Clear senior management direction and commitment on the parameters of any future engagement in Lesotho is essential and this **must** inform the next phase(s). There needs to be clarity on what Irish Aid expects, and what is achievable by the Government of Lesotho. A realistic timeframe for any expected fundamental system changes must also be provided.
2. It is unlikely that any meaningful work on a new Country Strategy paper (CSP) could commence before early / mid 2013 and even then work is likely to be of an exploratory nature. With this in mind the possibility of a 1-2 year “bridging” CSP should be considered. Such a Country Strategy Paper (CSP) could continue some of the activities that have worked reasonably well in the current CSP.
3. The entry point for any next CSP in 2013/2014 should be a robust, implementable National Strategic Development Plan (NSDP). This will require evidence of a strong commitment by the new Government to implementing the current NSDP or producing a new and credible alternative. If there is not clear evidence of the Government of Lesotho’s absolute commitment to the NSDP (or some revised strategic development plan), it should be interpreted as an indication that the Government is not sufficiently committed to development. Irish Aid should therefore not continue to engage without clear evidence of commitment.
4. Any future programme should be slimmer and more streamlined and should: a) set out its aims taking on board the political realities of where government stands; b) augment and consolidate areas of achievement (e.g. HIV and AIDS); and c) engage Irish Aid in new areas only where it can have a clear added value. This should consider the capacity of Irish Aid to do so within the broader mandate of poverty alleviation and should target areas where clear results can be demonstrated with Government of Lesotho (GOL) leadership and resource contributions / commitments. Issues of efficiency and sustainability will also need prominent attention.

5. In line with the recommendations in paragraph 4 above, care should be taken to avoid unwittingly engaging in short term project style activities or responding to ad hoc requests or opportunistic interventions.
6. In line with the approach of the Africa Strategy of September 2011, Ireland's official engagement in Lesotho should have a strong political and, to the extent possible, an economic dimension in addition to its development focus. These strands should be seen as mutually reinforcing and coherent.
7. Consideration of the broader regional dimension, including possible synergies and economies of scale by working across countries, should be considered in future programme planning. This would entail a broader study of regional issues and priorities, and a focus on more effective use of resources.
8. Opportunities for additional demand driven Technical Assistance (TA)¹ should be considered in any future programme, where the provision of TA has potential to enhance programme delivery or build relationships. Such Technical Assistance (TA) does not have to be on the traditional lines and could be sourced regionally.

If you would like a copy of the full evaluation report please email your request to eau.queries@dfat.ie

¹ Technical Assistance (TA) has been an important element of Irish Aid's support to the Health Sector through Clinton Health Access initiative (CHAI).