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National factors helping aid-funded programmes deliver: Kenya, Uganda, Ethiopia

Results from case studies on social protection, agriculture and health, programmes receiving ODA in Kenya, Uganda and Ethiopia

Briefing

Summary

While investment is a necessary factor for achieving development outcomes, alone it is not a sufficient condition. The quality of international assistance – how it is delivered, for example, or how it is aligned to national priorities, processes and wider enabling environments are also critical elements for success. Development Initiatives (DI) worked with national governments to identify and assess success factors across several predominantly aid-funded programmes in Ethiopia, Kenya and Uganda.¹

With input from national policymakers and development partners, DI looked at national-priority programmes heavily funded by aid that have had positive development outcomes (covering social protection, agriculture and health) and identified both what they achieved and what drove their achievements.

A key factor in the case studies we considered was an enabling environment: enabling policy frameworks to ensure ODA-funded projects align with national development plans, and political leadership and government commitment to enhance development outcomes, including scale and sustainability.

The case studies identify the funding trends and in-country factors that helped create this environment. They also outline some of the funding and implementation challenges that lie ahead for such programmes.

The conclusions we draw and key challenges we identify should support policymakers and development agencies based in the region as they plan and design programmes and projects.

This brief begins with an explanation of the consultative methodology adopted for the studies. It then presents the [specific programmes that are covered in the case studies](#), and the development outcomes these programmes have achieved. It concludes by highlighting [common factors that enabled aid effectiveness](#) in the case studies, and setting [out three challenges the countries face](#) in sustaining progress.

The full case studies that support these findings are also available:

- [Gender-focused ODA to health and agriculture in Ethiopia](#)
- [The role of ODA in delivering social protection programmes in Kenya](#)
- [Aid effectiveness in Uganda: Social protection in focus](#)

Further, a comprehensive overview of the recent aid funding landscape across the three countries can be found in our paper [Trends in traditional and non-traditional aid flows to Kenya, Uganda and Ethiopia](#).

Methodology

DI performed an initial round of quantitative analysis to understand the external financing landscape in each country. We then consulted stakeholders, including ministries,

development partners and implementing institutions, to identify priority areas for investigation. These co-creation exercises guided the team on the selection of programmes, the assessment period² and key informants for interview. We are very grateful to these stakeholders, many whom later peer reviewed drafts of the final reports.

Focus programmes of the country case studies

Our Ethiopia study applied a gender lens, focusing on a suite of programmes in the highest aid-funded sectors – health and agriculture. The study assessed the role of ODA in two suites of health sector programmes: sexual and reproductive health; and maternal, newborn and child health. Under agriculture, we looked at the Second-level Rural Land Certification programme,³ which has empowered women particularly.

The Kenya and Uganda studies considered social protection. This was not one of the sectors with the most donor funding, but in both cases it was heavily funded by aid and a recommendation from stakeholders. The Kenya study assessed the delivery of three social protection programmes:⁴ the Cash Transfer for Orphans and Vulnerable Children programme,⁵ the Hunger Safety Net Programme⁶ (HSNP) and the Home-Grown School Meals (HGSM) programme.⁷ The Uganda study looked specifically at the Expanding Social Protection (ESP) programme.⁸

In all three cases, policymakers and development partners highlighted these as programmes worth further study. In Ethiopia's case, actors wanted to learn more about development outcomes. In Kenya, there was interest in the question of sustainability. The focus in Uganda was the breadth of programme coverage.

Development outcomes of the focus programmes

The specific case study reports present key development indicators from each of the chosen programmes in detail. Here we present a few from each country as an overview.

Health programmes in Ethiopia have contributed to , between 2005 and 2021, a more than halving of both maternal and child mortality over 2005-2021, while fertility rates have reduced due in part to a three-fold increase in the use of contraceptives among married women. Data also indicates national reductions in new HIV infections and unsafe abortions, as well as significant increases in the proportion of children delivered in a health facility and receiving vaccination.

In Kenya, the predecessor programme to the HGSM programme enhanced the food security of children and reduced the burden on parents to feed their children, resulting in a direct cash saving of between 4% and 9% of annual household income between 1999 and 2008. It also promoted school attendance and retention of children in school. Improved retention of children in school mitigates the likelihood of child labour, child marriage and female genital mutilation.

In Uganda, between 2009 and 2013, the ESP programme expanded coverage of direct cash transfers to more people experiencing vulnerability and was scaled up to cover all

districts in Uganda (although it has not managed to finance all activities or cover all originally targeted groups). There is evidence that the investments made in the ESP programme have led to improvement in human capital, national development and growth. Impact evaluation of Social Assistance Grants for Empowerment, a key component of the programme, reveals that investments made by donors were cost effective. Besides the direct positive impacts on beneficiaries, the pilot's multiplier effects include a substantial increase in employment, an increase in primary and secondary school attendance, and a reduction in the proportion of households eating fewer than two meals per day.

Programme sustainability could also be considered a development outcome: the social protection programmes we studied in Kenya and Uganda managed to reduce their heavy reliance on aid.

Conclusion: Five factors enabling aid effectiveness

In all three countries Key informants attributed development outcomes of the selected programmes to the support provided through international assistance.

Our case studies established that investment is undoubtedly a critical factor for achieving positive development outcomes. However, an enabling environment (enabling policy frameworks to ensure ODA-funded projects align with national development plans, and political leadership and government commitment) enhances development outcomes, including scale and sustainability.

1. Enabling external policy frameworks

Regional and global policy frameworks were found to facilitate and even drive the setting of priorities and targets. For instance, global commitments by Ethiopia's health sector led to the domestic prioritisation of sexual and reproductive health. This meant the global paradigm shift created national impact: moving from a focus on population control to reproductive health (especially as a fundamental right of women and girls).

2. National government commitment

National government commitment reinforces the effectiveness of ODA in social sectors. As documented in the case studies, this is demonstrated either through enacting supporting and complementary policies that bolster and sustain programme outcomes, or by increasing allocations to programmes, which can lead to sustainability and a reduction in donor funding. An example of the former is a 2019 policy change from the National Bank of Ethiopia, which allowed farmers to use land rights certificates as collateral to access loans from banks and microfinance institutions. This supported the donor-funded capital budget for the national land certification programme, which improved tenure security.

3. Political leadership

In all the programmes assessed, the respective governments showed strong leadership in the ownership and implementation, which played a role in outcomes. Key informants also emphasised the importance of national government taking the lead, from programme conceptualisation to implementation under functional donor–government coordination platforms. Personal commitment and passion by ministers overseeing programme implementation also catalysed the effectiveness of aid in the programmes studied.

4. Alignment to national plans

The country assessments found alignment of ODA to national plans and priorities allowed for better accountability on aid spending, clearly defined ownership and political goodwill between actors. In Kenya, for instance, key informants reported that the alignment of development partners' priorities with one of the programme's objectives led to a strong multistakeholder partnership and support from both the government and communities.

5. Context-specific approaches

There were also unique context-specific approaches – 'organic approaches' – leading to development outcomes. For instance, the Ethiopia study found that the country follows approaches in the health or agriculture sector that are purpose-built ('fit for purpose'), minimise time and cost, but are also easily adaptable to context and understood by locals. Since early 2000s, the country has mobilised around 40,000 professional health extension workers at the lowest level of administration. These workers reach communities directly, aided by grass-roots support from millions of part-time volunteers in the Women's Development Army. This has facilitated access to healthcare for households in remote areas of the country, particularly for women and adolescents.

Wider challenges that countries face and recommendations

During our research, we identified a number of challenges countries face maximising and sustaining the positive development outcomes of aid interventions. What common challenges are experiences in Ethiopia, Kenya and Uganda, and how could they be addressed?

Across the countries, finance needs are greater than the current level of investments. This is evidenced by the low coverage of programmes, reflected either in regional disparities in development outcomes (in Ethiopia's case) or number of beneficiaries (Kenya and Uganda).

Recommendation: To address the gap between needs and investments, improve programme coverage and reduce regional disparities, donors and national actors should prioritise resource allocations to pro-poor programmes. Initially, these allocations should be needs-based, determined through a thorough assessment to ensure that communities or regions with the highest need receive adequate funding while aiming for the long-term objective of universal access to such services.

African countries are seeing declines in external financing.⁹ Shortfalls in domestic resources, combined with the debt burden, concerns about the sustainability of development gains. This is exacerbated by the heavy reliance of programmes on ODA financing, particularly in Ethiopia and Uganda. In Uganda for instance, since the government has taken over the ESP programme, it has not managed to finance all activities or cover all originally targeted groups.

Recommendation: The primary responsibility of financing development lies with the national government. With competing needs globally, the economic downturn in many donor countries, reduced appetite for providing ODA grants to the countries facing the greatest challenges, and escalating humanitarian and climate crises, countries will be forced to rely more on their domestic resources. To ensure the sustainability of programmes beyond initial, donor-funded investment phases, it is vital that the overall strategic plan includes a roadmap for ongoing financial sustainability (with a heavy emphasis on domestic resource mobilisation and allocation).

There were country-specific challenges in all three case studies. These include:

In Ethiopia, a constant state of emergency threatens to reverse gains achieved over the years. In Kenya, operational challenges affected the programme, including recipient inclusion and exclusion errors and unpredictability and delays in disbursement of cash transfers. In Uganda, the government's failure to honour commitments to donors erodes their trust and commitment.

Recommendation: Donors financing national programmes need to consider unique challenges that require openness to unique and context-specific approaches, which may at the same time have implication beyond programmes and sectors considered. For example:

In Ethiopia, strengthening resilience and emergency preparedness alongside promoting peaceful coexistence and social cohesion is a priority.

In Kenya, it is important to improve operational efficiency and reliability by adopting advanced data management and monitoring systems, which enhance the interoperability of data.

In Uganda, accountability mechanisms should be established to ensure that commitments are honoured, and domestic funding allocations should be increased to reduce dependency on external aid – a blueprint that could lend lessons to other sectors as well.

Notes

¹ These were chosen due to DI's presence in the eastern Africa region, and extensive experience in the specific countries.

² Particularly the start year. (The end year had to be 2021, the latest available data from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's Development Assistance Committee's Creditor Reporting System at the time of the assessment.)

³ The Second-level Rural Land Certification programme has made the economic empowerment of rural Ethiopian women possible. For example, it enables access to credit, with a disproportionately positive effect on the capacity of female-headed households to invest in productive activities – including by giving them access to credit and enabling them to participate in the land rental market. It has especially benefited married women, as it is conditional on joint titling as well as entitlement of female headed households. This has enhanced tenure security and reduced land related disputes.

⁴ Which fall under 'other social infrastructure' category of the OECD-DAC database.

⁵ Established in 2004, the Cash Transfer for Orphans and Vulnerable Children programme provides regular, predictable and unconditional cash transfers to households that are experiencing poverty and are taking care of orphans and vulnerable children. It is aimed at strengthening the capacity of households experiencing poverty to care for and protect orphans and vulnerable children; retaining orphans and vulnerable children within their families and communities; and promoting the development of human capital of orphans and vulnerable children.

⁶ Established in 2007, the Hunger Safety Net Programme provides unconditional cash transfer to households in the arid and semi-arid lands region that experience recurrent climatic shocks to alleviate extreme hunger, poverty and vulnerability.

⁷ In 1980, the Ministry of Education and the World Food Programme (WFP) implemented the School Meals Programme (SMP) as a safety net aiming to tackle the negative effects of hunger on education. The programme was implemented in the arid and semi-arid lands regions and informal settlements in Nairobi where food insecurity is high. WFP led the management and implementation of the programme: it provided in-kind food assistance, which it procured using multi-donor funding, and collaborated with the Ministry of Education to distribute the food to participating primary schools. To promote greater national ownership and sustainability, the Ministry of Education and WFP agreed on a transition strategy in 2008 to gradually handover the responsibility of feeding children in schools to the government. This involved transitioning from the SMP, which was resourced and managed by WFP, to a new programme funded and managed by the national government. Accordingly, in 2009, the Ministry of Education established the Home-Grown School Meals (HGSM) Programme to provide meals to learners in primary schools that were previously supported by WFP in arid and semi-arid land (ASAL) counties and Nairobi's informal settlements.

⁸ The Expanding Social Protection (ESP) programme targets social protection to people experiencing the most extreme poverty. It started in 2010, with the aim of putting in place a national social protection system aligned with Uganda's National Social Protection Policy. The programme started with donor support for the implementation of a pilot phase of the senior citizens grant in 15 districts that ran until 2015 (phase one). During phase two of the programme (2015 to 2021), the coverage was subsequently scaled up to cover the entire country following the government's 2018 decision to roll out the grants to all districts. ESP is now rolled out as a key pillar of the social protection approach in Uganda.

⁹ Development Initiatives, 2023. Trends in traditional and non-traditional aid flows to Kenya, Uganda and Ethiopia. Available at: <https://devinit.org/resources/trends-in-aid-flows-to-kenya-uganda-ethiopia/>

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