UK Aid Direct Small Charities Challenge Fund applications (Review 1) and the lessons learnt

Photo courtesy of a UK Aid Direct grant holder
Overview – Small Charities Challenge Fund

The Small Charities Challenge Fund (SCCF) is open to any small-sized, not for profit UK-registered organisation, with an income under £250,000.

Applications are invited for projects of up to 2 years with a maximum grant of £50,000.

Eligible countries are the same as for previous UK Aid Direct rounds; the 50 countries with the lowest Human Development Index, as well as countries that DFID consider to be of high or moderate fragility.

Purpose:

“Grants to support and strengthen the work of small UK registered charities to help enhance their capacity to carry out work in the priority countries in efforts to tackle poverty and work towards achieving the Global Goals.”

The application process has been tailored to simplify the requirements, in keeping with the size of the organisations applying and the grants available.

There is a 1-stage application process for SCCF grants and applications are reviewed by an independent technical team.

Review 1

Next steps

The UK Aid Direct technical team has pulled together a summary of their general observations regarding applications, broken down into the following areas:

- Experience
- Identifying need
- Logical clarity
- Evidence
- Scale and realism
- Value for money
Experience

Many applications were received from relatively young UK organisations. For organisations lacking a track record in grant management and project delivery, it is all the more important that the project design is sound, and that delivery capability is demonstrated persuasively.

Identifying need

Successful applications were able to show that their proposals arose from an in-depth understanding of local context, meaningful consultations with beneficiary groups, and co-ordination with relevant local government departments or other organisations. They would also indicate why (and by whom) a beneficiary group had been selected, placing the target group in wider context.

Logical clarity

Most proposals were able to articulate the development need that they wanted to address. However, the most common weakness encountered was a lack of logical linkage between the “need identified” and the “intervention proposed”. Successful proposals were able to provide clear, logical reasoning that described how the intervention would address the problem and lead to lasting developmental impact. Similarly, highly-rated proposals described their planned activities in quantified and unambiguous terms.

Evidence

The inclusion of evidence at each stage of the proposal was a defining characteristic of successful proposals. The need was described in factual terms, supported by relevant statistics; the capability of implementing partners was demonstrated, by citing specific prior experience; and the likely impact of the intervention was backed up by evidence.

Scale and Realism

A common deficiency in proposals was an unrealistic and inflated number of estimated beneficiaries – often with no description of how this number was arrived at. Successful proposals explained explicitly, how the number of beneficiaries had been calculated, and the estimates themselves were prudent and realistic.

Value for Money

A very small number of proposals were eliminated because they did not appear to offer good value for money. If beneficiary numbers are small, then it is important to demonstrate the rationale for this and define the long term developmental impact. More generally, administrative and management costs should be proportional, with the budget focused chiefly on activities that generate direct developmental benefits.