

Stand up for overseas aid!

RESULTS

We must ensure that UK aid remains focused on poverty reduction.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson has announced that the Department for International Development (DFID) will be merged with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) from September 2020. At RESULTS, we firmly believe that this decision is wrong and will diminish the UK's ability to fight global poverty, and to focus UK aid on those who need it the most, leaving no one behind. The Prime Minister's stated aim of bringing together the UK's foreign policy objectives and international development spending will inevitably reduce the focus of UK aid on poverty reduction and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and bring in other 'national interest' objectives such as defence and security.

The purpose of international aid is to help the poorest and most marginalised people, and it is part of our country's moral responsibility to contribute to a fairer world. Now is a crucial moment to fight to ensure that the UK's aid spending remains in the interest of the people whose lives are likely to be affected by this decision. This will require a redoubled focus on poverty reduction, Cabinet-level political responsibility for all aid spending across Government, and effective parliamentary arrangements to scrutinise all aid spending. To help ensure this, political will is urgently needed. This month, please write to your MP, explaining why you support the UK's international development efforts, and why we need to see the structures in Government and Parliament to keep UK aid as effective, transparent, and true to the goal of poverty reduction.

An end to DFID

On 16 June, Prime Minister Boris Johnson [announced](#) that the Department for International Development (DFID) will be merged with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) from September 2020.

The Prime Minister explicitly stated his purpose in bringing together the UK's foreign policy and international development spending as being to align aid with 'national interest' objectives including trade and national security. RESULTS firmly believes that this is wrong and that it will inevitably reduce the focus of UK aid on [poverty reduction and leaving no one behind](#).

Parliament's International Development Committee (IDC), which scrutinises Government aid spending, will also be abolished, with no indication yet as to what replacement structures will be created to ensure adequate parliamentary oversight of UK aid spending.

Transparency, effectiveness and accountability

According to the [2020 Aid Transparency Index](#), DFID, which [currently spends 73% of the UK aid budget](#), has a very good track record of aid spending, unlike the

Foreign Office, which ranks 38th out of 47 donor agencies, with poor scores for the information it provides on its objectives, evaluations and impact. The UK Government must make the improvements needed to ensure that all Government Departments spending UK aid receive a grading of 'good' or above.

To ensure that the public is reassured that UK aid is spent as well as it can be, and to ensure that poverty reduction is at the heart of aid spending, [effective parliamentary scrutiny is essential](#). The excellent work of Parliament's International Development Committee (IDC) and the [Independent Commission for Aid Impact](#) (ICAI) must be continued (as the IDC is likely to be scrapped in its current form). The existing Foreign Affairs Select Committee will not be able to review aid spending in depth, alongside its other responsibilities.

Similarly, maintaining a Cabinet Minister whose sole focus is on international development is essential to ensuring the focus of UK aid on poverty reduction is raised at the highest level of UK politics, and that the focus on achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) remains. With his broad remit for foreign affairs in the national interest, the Foreign Secretary alone will not be able to do this effectively.

International standards for aid spending

As well as focusing on poverty reduction, all UK aid spending must meet the [internationally agreed definition](#) of Official Development Assistance (ODA). It is not acceptable to spend UK aid on security or the national interest. In other countries where there have been similar mergers between the Government's foreign affairs and aid functions, such as Australia and Canada, [there have been concerns](#) about their to focus sufficiently on poverty alleviation.

Progress is at risk of being reversed

After two decades of progress, it is estimated that [70 to 100 million people](#) will fall into extreme poverty this year, and that all the progress on poverty since the launch of the SDGs in 2015 [will be lost](#). Due to COVID, at least 80 million children under the age of one are at risk of missing routine vaccines for diseases such as measles and polio. The World Food Programme predicts that globally, [hunger will double](#) over the next year. And globally, [1.1 billion children and young people are out of school](#), with the poorest children hit hardest.

With countries facing extreme economic downturns because of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is predicted that total ODA from international donors could decline [by up to US \\$12 billion](#). While developing countries' own governments provide the vast majority of financing for social programmes, they are also facing cuts to public spending and, in many cases, incurring unsustainable levels of debt. In these circumstances, the poorest and most vulnerable people are at the greatest risk, and international aid remains vitally important.

What next for UK aid spending?

The Prime Minister has re-stated the Government's commitment to spending 0.7% of the UK's national

income on aid, but this must remain focused firmly on poverty reduction. With a likely recession caused by COVID-19, a reduction in the UK aid budget is [widely predicted](#), and the Government is currently conducting a review of aid spending in the light of an expected reduction in the UK's Gross National Income (GNI) in 2020. This makes it more essential than ever that the UK aid budget is firmly focused on where it can have the most impact.

Political will is needed

Now is a crucial moment to fight to ensure that the UK's aid spending remains in the interest of the people whose lives are likely to be affected by this decision. This will require a redoubled focus on poverty reduction, Cabinet-level political responsibility for all aid spending across Government, and parliamentary arrangements to scrutinise aid spending effectively. Whichever Government Departments spend the aid budget, it is vital to ensure that it is spent as transparently and efficiently as possible, in line with the paramount objective of poverty reduction. To help ensure this, political will is urgently needed now.

What you can do now

This month, please write to your MP, explaining why you support the UK's international development efforts, and why we need to see new structures in Government and Parliament to keep UK aid as effective, and transparent as possible, and focused on the goal of poverty reduction. Please make your letter as personal as you can, as letters that stand out will have the most impact on the reader. If you have recently met your MP, or have a date for a virtual meeting already in the calendar, please raise this urgent issue with your MP or write a follow-up letter, asking them to write to the Prime Minister about your concerns.

Take action!

1. Please write to your MP, explaining why you support the UK's international development efforts, and why we need to see the structures in Government and Parliament to keep UK aid as effective, transparent, and as true to the goal of poverty reduction as it possibly can be. Use [Background Sheet 1](#) to help write your letter, and [Background Sheet 2](#) for additional information on aid focused on poverty reduction. You can find your MP's contact details at <https://members.parliament.uk/members/commons>

2. Some MPs have already spoken out against the DFID / FCO merger, and some will have signed this [Early Day Motion](#) opposing the decision. Check if your MP has signed this motion, and if not, consider asking them to do so.

Let us know that you've taken action by emailing Dela at delanderson@results.org.uk.