UK priorities for poverty reduction.

Help ensure the UK continues to prioritise vital international development programmes.

In June, Prime Minister Boris Johnson announced that the Department for International Development (DFID) will be merged with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, to form a new ‘Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO), whose work starts from the beginning of September. While the intention behind this move is to align the UK’s foreign policy, defence and international development priorities, it is vital that this does not detract from the UK’s ability to fight global poverty, and to focus UK aid on the world’s poorest and most marginalised people. The new FCDO must ensure that its priorities, policies and programmes continue to focus firmly on this goal.

With the new Department setting its priorities and plans right now, this is a crucial time to remind the Government that the main aim of UK aid spending is poverty reduction. This should guide the Government’s choice of priorities, which should include: a continued focus on the importance of education; renewed commitment to nutrition programmes; ongoing support for the fight against infectious diseases such as TB and COVID-19; and strong support for immunisation programmes. As always, political will is needed to make these priorities a reality, and it is vital that the Government sees that there is strong public support for the new Department to focus on these important ‘human development’ objectives. This month, please write to the Foreign Secretary, Rt. Hon. Dominic Raab MP, who will now be responsible for the UK’s international development work. Please ask him to ensure that UK aid focuses on these vital priorities in order to end global poverty and to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

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 Office to create a new ‘Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office’ (FCDO) to take over the UK’s international development efforts from September 2020 under Foreign Secretary Rt. Hon. Dominic Raab MP.

Details of how the new Department will work and its priorities have not yet been announced. The Prime Minister stated that the purpose of bringing together the UK’s foreign policy and international development spending is to align aid with ‘national interest’ objectives including national security. RESULTS believes that this is wrong and will reduce the focus of UK aid on poverty reduction and leaving no one behind. Indeed, have been expressed by some that rather than enhancing the UK’s international standing, the move could damage it.

Integrated review

The Government has announced an ‘Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy’ to define its vision for the UK’s role in the world over the next decade. This is a chance for the Government to set out the purpose of the UK’s international development efforts, how we use our resources to help overcome poverty and achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and how this will contribute to the UK’s role in the world. The review is calling for evidence from all interested parties and RESULTS will be making a submission to this.

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 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015 will be lost. In addition to the deaths caused directly by COVID-19, the indirect impacts of the pandemic on access to health services will be huge. For example, at least 80 million children under the age of one are at risk of missing routine vaccines for diseases such as measles and polio. For example, in Pakistan and Afghanistan, the world’s two remaining polio-endemic countries, it is thought that 50 million children have missed out on polio vaccines.
The COVID-19 pandemic is predicted to massively increase food insecurity and hunger, and increase the number of malnourished children, making efforts to tackle malnutrition more important than ever. And the impact of the pandemic on education systems and on young people’s learning and wellbeing is increasing daily, with 1.1 billion children and young people out of school. School closures hit the world’s most marginalised children the hardest, including girls, children with disabilities, and those fleeing conflict.

With countries facing big economic downturns because of the pandemic, total overseas development assistance (ODA) from international donors could decline by up to US $12 billion. Developing country governments provide the vast majority of financing for their own social programmes, but many have had to cut public spending, with some also facing unsustainable levels of debt. In these circumstances, the poorest and most vulnerable people are at the most risk, and international aid remains critical for their future.

A reduction in 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, and this must remain focused firmly on poverty reduction. With a likely recession caused by COVID-19, the Government has announced aid cuts of £2.9 billion. It has not yet announced which programmes will be cut – a critical question to be considered by politicians when Parliament returns from its summer recess on 1 September. The reduction in the UK aid budget will make it more essential than ever that our limited resources are firmly focused on where they can have the most impact.

What should UK aid focus on?

The Government must ensure that the priorities and policies of the new FCDO focus firmly on the ‘human development’ programmes necessary for poverty reduction. This means that they should:

- Ring fence education spending in the new FCDO and commit to increasing the proportion of ODA spending on education to 15%.
- Commit to reaching 50 million women and children with high impact nutrition interventions over the next five years.
- Continued strong support for global immunisation.
- Continued support for the fight against infectious diseases such as TB, HIV and malaria.
- Prioritise the Government’s strategy to end preventable child deaths, investing in primary health care, including immunisation, nutrition and infectious disease control.
- Provide additional support for the global response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Political will is needed

As always, political will is needed to make these priorities a reality, and it is vital that the Government sees that there is strong public support for the new Department to focus on poverty reduction and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. If you were able to take our July action to express concern about the DFID / FCO merger, thank you! This month, please write to the Foreign Secretary, Rt. Hon. Dominic Raab MP, who will now be responsible for the UK’s international development work. Please ask him to ensure that his new Department focuses on these vital priorities in order to end global poverty and to achieve the SDGs in the next decade.

Take action!

1. Please write to the Foreign Secretary, Rt. Hon. Dominic Raab MP, who is taking over responsibility for the UK’s aid spending. Please tell him why you support the prioritisation of vital human development programmes, and why they are vital to ensure that the new FCDO continues to focus its efforts on poverty reduction.

Contact details:

Rt. Hon. Dominic Raab MP, Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, FCDO, King Charles Street London, SW1A 2AH. Email: fcocorrespondence@fco.gov.uk

2. Consider responding to the Government’s call for evidence for its Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy by 11 September (please respond in your own name rather than on behalf of RESULTS). This will allow you to feed your ideas directly to the policy formulation process.

Let us know that you’ve taken action by emailing Dela at dela.anderson@results.org.uk.