



Introduction

On 16 June 2020, the Prime Minister announced the Department for International Development (DFID) will be merged with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) and that the Foreign Secretary will have the final decision on how and where official development assistance (ODA) is delivered. There has been widespread opposition to the merger in the international development community.

Scotland's International Development Alliance (the Alliance) represents a broad range of Scottish based actors engaged in global development activity across over 100 countries. These actors include international NGOs, faith-based organisations, companies, universities, charitable trusts and individuals.

Alliance members unanimously propose that equitable outcomes for the world's poorest and most marginalised people be set as an explicit key priority for the new department that has the foreign affairs and international development mandate. Achieving this will be the key test of the merger's effectiveness, and of the UK Government's commitment to improving policy coherence for sustainable development.

The new Foreign and Development Office must ensure that the UK maintains its leading role in meeting the universally agreed pledge to 'leave no one behind', a risk now heightened in the context of the pandemic.

The UK's national interest is supported by this commitment as it continues to demonstrate global leadership in achieving the UN Sustainable Development Goals by 2030.

While ensuring effective coherence between the UK's development and foreign policies has the potential to maximise impact, there are legitimate concerns that the merger could result in the UK's national interest skewing the development policy agenda, while undermining overseas development assistance effectiveness, transparency and scrutiny. It is essential that clear measures are put in place to demonstrate the effectiveness of the merger over time and equally to monitor and act upon risks associated with it.

This briefing outlines four broad commitments that are needed and sets out how the UK should contribute to international development in the short and medium future given the new institutional structure chosen by the current government.

1. Commitment to poverty eradication and aid effectiveness

Whether justified as a moral obligation, altruism, enlightened self-interest or otherwise, poverty eradication in low-income countries is of vital importance to the UK and the world and is expected by the UK public to be the principal purpose of expenditure on development assistance. There can be no drift away from this as a result of this merger.

As such, the primary purpose of all UK ODA, whichever government department spends it, must be to promote and specifically target the economic development and welfare of developing countries. Adherence to OECD Development Assistance Committee rules enhances the UK's standing in the international community of donors, as does compliance with existing UK provisions under the 2002 International Development Act and the 2014 International Development (Gender Equality) Act.

The commitment in legislation to allocate 0.7% of Gross National Income to ODA is something to be proud of and is an important element in international perceptions of the UK as a world leader in international development.

UK ODA allocation decisions must be led by the greatest human need, not the greatest opportunities to further the UK's commercial and diplomatic interests. Decisions to allocate funding must be backed by evidence of how they contribute to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

Foreign policy, trade and investment policies should not undermine human rights or efforts to tackle the climate crisis, and there must never be a return to tied aid.

2. Commitment to accountability, transparency and scrutiny

All UK ODA, regardless of which department spends it, should be fully transparent and accountable to the UK taxpayer. DFID currently leads global efforts on aid transparency. It is critical that all UK aid follows the IATI standards of transparency and that scrutiny bodies that have a specific development focus remain in place as independent entities to ensure full accountability.

On the basis the merger goes ahead, the UK Government should therefore:

- Ensure that a cabinet level Minister is accountable for International Development to Parliament;
- Support MPs to retain a Select Committee in the House of Commons with responsibility for scrutinising ODA spending and activity across Government separate to the existing Foreign Affairs Committee
- Retain the Independent Commission for Aid Impact, to ensure effective scrutiny of the effectiveness of all aid against international development objectives.

3. Commitment to the SDGs and the Paris Agreement on Climate Change

All UK ODA needs to be aligned to the Paris Agreement on climate change, and promote sustainable development as outlined in the International Development Act. This will require a shared strategy that is primarily focussed on eradicating poverty, but also tackles the environmental and climate related impacts which perpetuate poverty.

The new integrated Foreign and Development Office must commit to delivering the Sustainable Development Goals, and is in an ideal position to do so, given the availability of DFID experts who can ensure that the UK remains a respected player in these matters. And, given the chance to apply their expertise through the new department, DFID experts can help the UK be the world leader in helping the world to achieve the SDGs and fulfil its Paris Agreement commitments, especially on adaptation.

International development continues to have significant public and cross party support across the UK, in part the result of sustained, far-sighted commitments by DFID to engaging young people through formal education. The new Foreign and Development Office should maintain support for domestic achievement of target SDG 4.7 through funded Global Citizenship Education programmes that have demonstrated significant impact, such as the 2012-18 UK Global Learning Programme.

4. Commitment to safeguarding DFID's expertise

The UK government has an immensely talented and internationally respected team of specialists in poverty alleviation and development within DFID. The UK government should make best use of them, alongside its equally well respected team of diplomats in the FCO to ensure its foreign policy builds capacity in the lowest resource countries especially those affected by conflict and other humanitarian crises, including the climate emergency.

To ensure DFID's technical expertise (in East Kilbride, London and internationally) is embedded within the new department, it should be retained within a unified, coherent and dedicated administrative structure with development and conflict specialists infused throughout the new department.

All of the new department's work should be supported by evidence-based country-specific strategies accountable to the people and communities they seek to support.

DFID's expertise in supporting long-term economic development and good governance, especially in fragile contexts, means the new department's development leadership must also be represented at the highest level on the National Security Council.

About Scotland's International Development Alliance

The Alliance is the membership body in Scotland for everyone committed to creating a fairer world, free from poverty, injustice and environmental threats. [Our membership](#) brings together a diverse range of organisations and individuals including over 200 international NGOs, faith-based organisations, companies, universities, charitable trusts and individuals that operate in over 100 countries.

This briefing was co-written and agreed by members of the [Alliance Policy Committee](#). For more information contact lewis@intdevalliance.scot