

# The development imperative: How to convince your MP that the UK should contribute to development



This month we will be visiting our newly-elected or re-elected MPs at their first constituency surgeries, to ask them to become strong supporters for international development. We will be competing against many other interests, as people concerned about many different issues will all be calling on their MPs to take action. We therefore have to make a strong argument about why international development is a crucial issue for the UK, and importantly how they as MPs can make a real difference.

For some MPs it will not be necessary to go back to basics such as why we should care about development, as some will already be committed to the issue. In addition, the three main UK parties (Conservatives, Labour and Liberal Democrats) along with many of the smaller parties (Scottish National Party, Plaid Cymru and Green) are committed to meet or exceed the UN target of 0.7% to be given in development assistance by 2015. It would be a good idea at the beginning of your meeting to ask your MP what their views on development are, to help you to gauge how much you need to talk about development generally before talking specifically about the G8 and maternal and child health.

This background sheet sets out suggested arguments you can use if you do need to convince your MP of the merits of international development from basic principles, as well as some more sophisticated arguments on efficiency and corruption.

## **Argument 1: The UK public cares deeply about international development**

The UK population is renowned around the world for a deep sense of philanthropy and for caring about international development. Many global movements on aid, debt and trade originated in the UK, demonstrating an unusual level of awareness about global poverty for a developed nation. This means that your MP's constituents are likely to care about international development – and you are living proof of the fact that they do. You can use the One Campaign's 'Thought Book' to support your argument at this point – see the end of this sheet for more details.

## **Argument 2: It is our moral duty to help those who need it**

The UK is one of the richest countries in the world. With 1.4 billion people living on less than \$1.25 a day – barely enough for food, with nothing left over for educating their children or paying for healthcare – those who have the ability to help others should. Even following the economic crisis, the UK is in an extremely privileged position globally. The crisis, which the UK must share some responsibility for causing, has led to an estimated 90 million more people living in poverty in the developing world, whereas these countries did not contribute significantly to the crisis. It is simply morally wrong that those who did not contribute to the crisis should be paying such a high price from its effects.

## **Argument 3: Development is not expensive**

Many of the interventions that could make a massive difference to the world's poorest people are not expensive. It would cost just \$1 billion to provide fortified ready-to-use food for all the world's 20 million children suffering from severe acute malnutrition. This would have a massive impact in reducing child deaths, and would also have positive knock-on effects on the long-term health of the children leading to a healthier adult population and a more promising future for developing countries. Hundreds of other similar examples are available.

The UK aid budget is actually very small – even the international target set by the UN for aid from developed countries is just 0.7% of GDP. The UK this year gave 0.52%, but has pledged to reach the 0.7% figure by 2013. This aid has achieved a remarkable amount. The UK's budget for aid to education, for example, is £1 billion per year. With this money, the UK is supporting as many children in primary school outside the UK as the UK government educates in the UK, at a fraction of the cost.

#### **Argument 4: Development is in the UK's interests too**

We live in an ever more interconnected world, where what happens in remote countries has an indirect, or sometimes even direct impact on the UK. We heard in last month's [conference call](#) from Purna Shrestha, a former teacher from Nepal, who argued that inequality in access to education was one of the factors at the root of Nepal's decades-long civil war. Conflicts do not stay within borders – they are drivers of migration and frequently destabilise whole regions. A recent report from the International Institute for Sustainable Development on [Trade, Aid and Security](#) points out that 'although conflict may now be more strongly associated with poor countries than in previous decades, its impacts affect us all, wherever we live.'

Similar arguments can be made on other issues, for example disease. Poor countries bear a higher burden of disease than rich countries, due to having weaker health systems and insufficient resources to control the spread of infectious diseases. But this also impacts on the rest of the world, as germs do not respect borders. Tuberculosis (TB) is a perfect example. Although it was largely eradicated in the UK in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries it is making a re-emergence thanks to drug resistant strains, which are exacerbated by failures to adhere to treatment, particularly in situations where health systems are weak. TB rates are now rising dramatically in many parts of the UK, and London has become the TB capital of Western Europe.

#### **Argument 5: Corruption**

One argument that is often levelled against investment in development aid is that many people believe that aid does not reach those it is intended for because it is siphoned off by corrupt government or NGO employees. Although corruption exists and is a real problem, this view is certainly exaggerated. Recently the Department for International Development (DFID) revealed that since 2005 almost £720,000 of DFID's budget had been lost to 'fraud, corruption or abuse'. While this is clearly unacceptable, it also represents a very low rate of fraud, as it amounts to just 0.0045% of DFID's budget over that period, or £1 in every £22,000. Compared to other areas of government it comes across very favourably: according to the 2010 inaugural National Fraud Authority report, £260 million of Housing Benefit was lost to fraud in 2008-09 alone. That is 1.5% of the housing benefit budget, or £1 in £65. DFID has recently reacted in a very robust manner to discovering fraud in their education aid to Kenya, freezing payments to the Ministry of Education and issuing visa bans for 20 officials suspected of misappropriating money.

There is always room for improvement in any government expenditure, but the charge that aid is wasted because it is all misappropriated is just not accurate.

#### **What can your MP do?**

The vast majority of the UK's support for international development is delivered through the UK government aid budget. It is therefore crucial that this is scrutinised effectively and the government is encouraged to adopt more effective policies in their development aid. MPs have a vital role to play in this, as they are able to ask Parliamentary Questions, which must be answered by the Department in question. They are also able to apply other more subtle pressures on the government through speaking with Ministers more informally.

Changes in policy really do come about because of this pressure – you can give an example from RESULTS's recent work if you want:

- In September 2009 RESULTS activists spoke to their local MPs about the impact of charging user fees for healthcare in the world's poorest countries. They asked their MPs to call on the UK government to put more pressure on the World Bank to clarify their policy on this issue to more clearly oppose user fees. The government responded to say that they would push the Bank on this issue – this was the first time that they had agreed to challenge the Bank on policy issues related to their health programmes. The World Bank is now gradually moving towards the consensus position that user fees for basic healthcare are harmful to poor people and should not be imposed by low-income country governments.
- In August 2009 RESULTS activists wrote to their local MPs about the potential of microinsurance to help poor farmers adapt to the impact of climate change, and asked them to call on the government to push for this mechanism to be included in the Copenhagen negotiations. The immediate reaction from the government was that they did not intend to push for this. However, several activists responded to the government via their MPs, providing further evidence for the need to include the measure in Copenhagen, and the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Microfinance also raised the issue at various parliamentary meetings. The government then changed their stance, and due to their support it looks likely that microinsurance will be included as an adaptation mechanism for climate change in text to be agreed later this year by the UNFCCC.

Together as a team, you and your MP can have a real impact, ensuring that the UK's aid to development is as effective as possible and really contributes to ending poverty.

### **The One Campaign's 'Thought Book'**

To support your argument that the UK public care deeply about international development, we have teamed up with the [One Campaign](#) to provide you with a publication called a 'Thought Book'. This is a light-hearted document containing cartoons to illustrate some of the issues that the UK public care about.

The One Campaign is a predominantly online campaigning group with a following of 2 million people around the world, including thousands across the UK. One produced the book by carrying out a poll of their most active UK supporters, asking them what they would like the government to prioritise in development over the next 5 years. One gave the responses to artist Paul Davis, who produced cartoons to illustrate them.

You can use this book as a concrete demonstration that the UK cares. In it, you will find the following quote from Jennifer Crago in London: "The UK has been a world leader in the eradication of extreme poverty. This MUST continue. The British public care about these issues and the government must continue to deliver."

There are cartoons illustrating the need for healthcare and for attention to maternal and child health in the book – you can use these as a route into talking about this month's action on the G8 and maternal and child health. [One's most recent petition, calling for maternal and child health to be a priority at the G8](#), already has over 10,000 signatures – and by the time you go to visit your MP will have many more!