

Thursday 13 November

Future of UK aid and development assistance - Windracers Ltd. written evidence

Dear Chair,

We are submitting evidence to the International Development Committee's inquiry into the future of UK aid and development assistance to share lessons from our experience delivering logistics using a British built heavy-lift long-distance drone. Our submission focuses on how technology developed in the UK can strengthen aid delivery, reduce costs and build local capacity, supporting both humanitarian impact and national capability.

Windracers would welcome the opportunity to provide further detail or demonstration of how autonomous cargo drones like [Windracers ULTRA](#) can enhance the delivery of humanitarian aid. We would be pleased to meet with the Committee or officials to discuss how this capability might support the UK's development and humanitarian objectives.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Stephen Wright". The script is cursive and fluid.

Mr. Stephen Wright
Founder and Chairman
Windracers Ltd

Written evidence submitted by Windracers Limited



Figure 1 - Windracers ULTRA

Background

Windracers Ltd. is a British aviation company that engineers, manufactures and operates [Windracers ULTRA](#), a dual-use heavy-lift drone that delivers logistics missions in challenging environments. The original target use case for ULTRA was delivery of humanitarian and global development aid. This remains a priority alongside our extensive work with Ministry of Defence in support of the Ukraine Armed Forces, the British Antarctic Survey on unlocking climate data and supporting University of Alaska (Fairbanks) research on serving remote communities.

Windracers ULTRA is the world's most accomplished dual-use heavy-lift drone. It has a payload of 150kg and a range of 1000km, specifically designed for, and relevant to, UK aid. ULTRA has flown thousands of kilometres in real-world missions across Europe, North America and Antarctica. Windracers have an operational hub in Malawi and later this year is due to deliver essential medical supplies in Democratic Republic of Congo with Aviation Sans Frontieres.

Headline recommendations

- Refocus UK aid on areas where the UK holds a clear comparative advantage, such as technology, innovation and logistics.
- Reform humanitarian aviation to integrate dual-use heavy-lift drones, reducing costs and environmental impact while improving reliability.
- Support the establishment of a predictable, multi-year drone logistics service through an anchor customer model, either funded by HMG or through facilitation with a major aid partner.
- Build local capability by training operators and technicians in partner countries to sustain long-term logistics capacity.

Full response

1. How should the Government be prioritising UK Official Development Assistance in the coming years?

Summary:

- UK aid should focus on areas where the UK has a clear advantage: innovation, technology and logistics.
- Backing long-term, locally operated delivery systems would replace short-term pilots and improve value for money and the skills of communities.
- A multi-year anchor customer model could demonstrate UK engineering capabilities, modernise humanitarian logistics and strengthen local economies.

Longer form answer:

Official Development Assistance (ODA) should focus on areas where the UK can make a distinct and lasting contribution - using innovation, technology, and logistics to deliver measurable humanitarian impact.

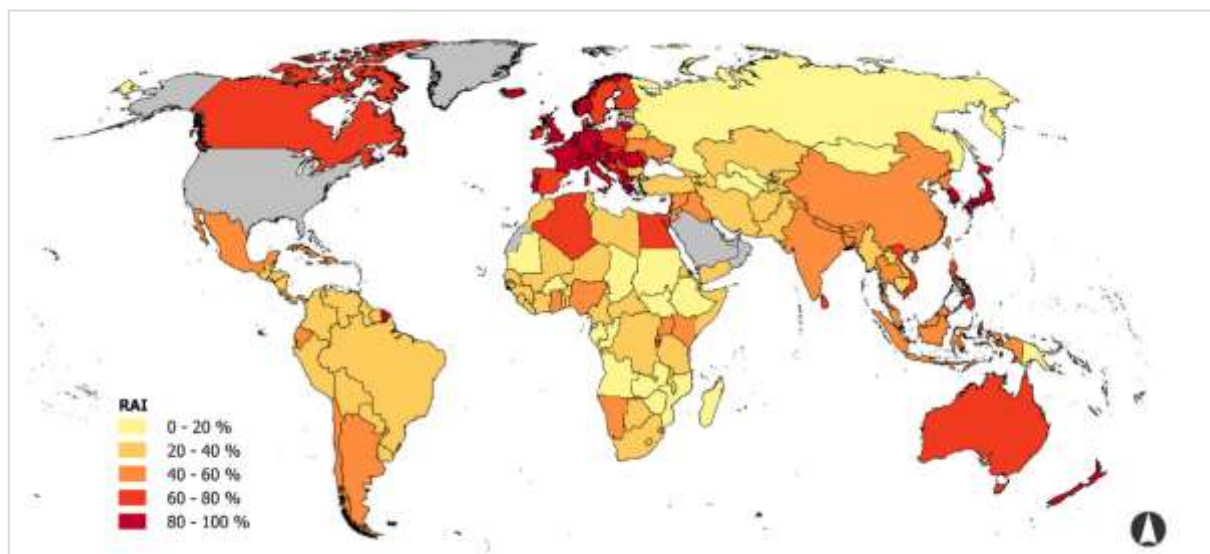


Figure 1 - Rural accessibility index using OSM and secondary road networks (Footnote 1).

Around 450 million people in Africa live in areas inaccessible by paved road for parts of the year¹. In such environments, physical delivery of aid remains essential. The challenge lies in the 'middle mile', the gap between central warehouses and isolated communities, where logistics costs can consume up to 60–80% of total humanitarian expenditure.²

This is where UK innovation can make a difference. Drones such as Windracers ULTRA, capable of carrying 150kg over 1,000km, can operate without crew or runways, delivering essential supplies to communities that are otherwise unreachable.

Evidence from Windracers missions find that ULTRA can deliver aid at a much lower cost per kilogram-kilometre than conventional surface transport in many rural contexts, while operating with a fraction of the carbon footprint of crewed aviation. It also eliminates the safety risks associated with manned flights into insecure or austere locations.

¹ Mikou, M., Rozenberg, J., Koks, E., Fox, C., & Peralta Quiros, T. Assessing Rural Accessibility and Rural Roads Investment Needs Using Open Source Data. (Policy Research Working Paper 8746, World Bank, Feb 2019), p. 3.

² Kessler, M. (2021). Humanitarian Supply Chains: The Challenge of Cost Efficiency and Effectiveness. FCDO Helpdesk Report. London: UK Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office.

The UK invests heavily in innovation through organisations such as UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) and Innovate UK, but there is currently no joined-up mechanism to translate these technologies into sustainable aid delivery. A multi-year, government-backed ‘anchor customer’ model would bridge this gap, allowing drones to operate as part of regular humanitarian supply chain rather than short-term pilots.

By aligning ODA priorities with the UK’s comparative advantage in dual-use aerospace innovation, the Government could deliver greater value for money, measurable humanitarian outcomes and a world-leading demonstration of how British technology can leapfrog infrastructure barriers, just as mobile technology did for communications and banking across Africa.

2. How does the UK’s delivery approach for (a) development and (b) humanitarian assistance need to adapt to the changing funding and values landscape?

Summary:

- The UK should support locally operated logistics networks to cut costs and emissions.
- A multi-year anchor customer model, coordinated with partners such as the World Food Programme, would enable continuous delivery routes, build local skills and demonstrate British innovation in sustainable global aid delivery.

Long form answer:

In Africa, air operations can account for up to a quarter of total logistics costs, and in some humanitarian contexts up to 60–80% of total expenditure is spent on logistics.³

Reform is overdue if the UK is to maintain both impact and influence in global aid delivery. A 2024 review on sustainable humanitarian logistics in Africa notes that long-term service-based delivery models, including uncrewed systems, are critical for efficiency and resilience.⁴

The World Health Organization estimates that nearly two billion people worldwide remain beyond regular access to essential medicines, particularly in remote regions.⁵ Drones are increasingly being used to bridge this gap: in sub-Saharan Africa, they are now viewed as an essential component of public health supply chains.⁶

A two-to-three-year ‘anchor customer’ model with FCDO or partners, such as WFP providing baseline demand, would allow companies to establish continuous delivery routes for humanitarian supplies. Stable funding would create a viable business model while supporting local recruitment, training and maintenance, replacing the current cycle of short-term trials.

³ World Bank (2019). The economics of humanitarian air transport in Africa.

⁴ International Journal of Logistics Management (2025). Sustainable humanitarian logistics in Africa: an adaptive service-based model.

⁵ World Health Organization (2024). Access to Medicines and Health Products Annual Report.

⁶ Think Global Health (2024). Drones Deliver Humanitarian Aid in Africa.



Figure 2 - Windracers Operational Base - Kasungu Malawi

Later this year, Windracers and Aviation Sans Frontières are due to deliver aid flights into the DRC, further evidencing how middle-mile drones can extend humanitarian reach safely, sustainably and at a fraction of traditional cost.

This model would:

- Showcase British engineering in support of global development goals
- Strengthen regional technical and operational capacity
- Provide a replicable template for low-carbon humanitarian logistics

3. What needs to change to realise the goal of moving from paternalistic models and relationships to partnerships?

Summary:

- Localisation should focus on lasting technical capacity, with locally run delivery models that build resilience and turn aid delivery into partnership.

Long form answer:

Localisation should focus not only on community participation but on building lasting technical capability that enables local ownership of essential logistics and public services.

Globally, fewer than 2% of humanitarian funds are channelled directly to local actors, according to Development Initiatives (2024), despite longstanding Grand Bargain commitments to raise this to 25%⁷. Meanwhile, the OECD (2024) notes that local logistics networks remain the weakest link in many humanitarian systems, driving cost inefficiencies and dependency on external operators⁸.

Windracers approach aims to directly address these challenges by training and employing local engineers and operators to run autonomous aircraft systems.

Predictable “service window” operations, enabled through anchor customer agreements, would allow such infrastructure to operate beyond the initial donor funding cycle. This continuity supports local supply chains, strengthens resilience, and encourages regional trade by integrating humanitarian logistics with broader economic activity.

⁷ Development Initiatives (2024). Global Humanitarian Assistance Report 2024.

⁸ OECD (2024). State of Humanitarian Financing: Trends and Challenges.

Research supports this shift: the 2025 International Journal of Humanitarian Action highlights that locally managed, technology-enabled logistics networks can reduce operational costs by up to 30% and delivery times by over 60% compared to traditional expatriate-led missions⁹.

By aligning technology transfer, local skill development and predictable delivery services, the UK can help partner countries build resilience from within, reducing dependency on imported logistics and creating enduring economic and humanitarian value.

⁹ International Journal of Humanitarian Action (2025). Building Local Resilience through Technology-Enabled Logistics in Sub-Saharan Africa.

ANNEX 1

Bibliography

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