

Effectiveness of UK aid

CBM UK response to IDC inquiry

CBM (Christian Blind Mission) works with partners across the world to bring change at an individual level, challenge systemic discrimination and support the voice and autonomy of people with disabilities and mental health conditions as agents of change, in development and humanitarian settings.

Introduction

1. CBM UK welcomes the International Development Committee's inquiry into aid effectiveness. This comes at a critical time as Parliament prepares to scrutinise the Government's Integrated Security, Defence and Foreign Policy Review and the UK's response to the COVID-19 pandemic.
2. CBM has over 100 years' experience working with people with disabilities and mental health conditions in low and middle income countries (LMICs), including as a key stakeholder of the Department for International Development (DfID). **One billion people** live with a disability, **80%** of whom live in LMICs¹, and this inquiry alongside the Integrated Review and Defence and Foreign Affairs Select Committees' inquiries provides the opportunity for a holistic consideration of the impact of UK foreign policy decision-making on the most marginalised groups across the world, such as people with disabilities.
 - i. **The definition and administration of UK aid – who should be responsible, and accountable, for targeting and spending aid?**
3. CBM UK believes that it is important for the UK Government to adhere to the current OECD definition and rules on official development assistance (ODA), that it should be administered with the promotion of the economic development and welfare of developing countries as its main objective. We urge the Government to maintain a focus on those who are often most left behind in LMICs and in humanitarian settings, such as people with disabilities – who are often at greater risk of poverty due to discrimination and exclusion.
4. DfID is key to the delivery of aid, as the lead department for ending extreme poverty, and should have a prominent role in the targeting and spending of ODA. It is therefore essential that the Department retains Cabinet level leadership and decision-making powers. DfID has been especially proactive in its work on disability inclusion and gender equality and it is important these areas remain a priority in UK aid if the UK is to uphold its commitment to leave no one behind. Therefore, the current proportion of ODA administered by DfID is entirely appropriate.
5. However, CBM UK recognises the valuable role other government departments (OGDs) play in delivering ODA, for example the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) role in strengthening global peace, security, governance and prosperity², the

¹ World report on disability. WHO and World Bank, 2011

² ODA allocation in the FCO: Financial Year 2019/2020

Dept. for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) work on climate change³; and for CBM in particular, the Department for Health and Social Care in supporting our mental health programme with partners in India, Nigeria, Kenya, Ghana and Uganda. It is important, therefore, that OGDs are able to administer ODA that falls within their area of expertise.

6. Overall, the administration of aid needs Cabinet level coordination, decision-making power and accountability as well as cross-government collaboration in prioritising, targeting and spending aid. In reality, aid is not apolitical, for either donor or recipient governments; but it is important that UK government departments work in a collaborative way to ensure that UK aid has the greatest chance of being used for poverty alleviation and economic development before other priorities. This is particularly important for those people in the most marginalised groups such as people with disabilities who are regularly excluded from economic participation, because of discrimination and lack of accessibility.

ii. How effective and transparent is the UK aid spent by the Department for International Development (DFID) compared to aid allocated to other Government departments and to the cross-Government funds?

7. DfID has one of the best records in the world for transparency, according to the Aid Transparency Index, whilst OGDs such as FCO perform poorly⁴. It is essential that DfID's standards are maintained and OGDs spending ODA should follow examples of good practice from DfID.
8. DfID also performs well on inclusion and has laid good foundations for ongoing commitment to disability inclusion through the Global Disability Summit and its Strategy for Disability Inclusive Development. The Department is also more advanced than cross-Government funds, such as the Prosperity Fund, which was consulting on its inclusion policy last year but, despite very positive initial engagement, appears to have put progress on hold. We would encourage the IDC to follow up with senior leadership at the Prosperity Fund on the status of its Gender and Inclusion Policy.
9. However, CBM UK is concerned about recent practice whereby a DfID tender (for a disability inclusion focused project) was converted to an award without warning or consultation, and awarded to a favoured, existing consortia lead. CBM UK had participated in early market engagement and other consultation opportunities, yet despite being a leader in this field and in discussion with a number of regional and international partners, were not approached to compete for this project. We hope that this sort of practice will not become the norm as it has the potential to erode trust between DfID and its stakeholders.
10. CBM Country Office staff in several countries across the world connect with both DfID and FCO staff, due to offices being located together at High Commissions – which provides greater opportunities for collaboration than it perhaps would in the UK. We would also reiterate the importance of accessibility at these buildings to ensure that partners with disabilities delivering UK aid are included in meetings and other relevant events, thus helping to ensure UK aid is inclusive its approach.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/official-development-assistance-oda-allocations-aid-policy>

³ <https://devtracker.dfid.gov.uk/department/DEFRA>

⁴ Aid Transparency Index 2018. <https://www.publishwhatyoufund.org/the-index/2018/>

iii. How should the national interest be defined, and what weight should it be given, in relation to targeting UK aid?

- 11.** There is a risk that the Government's Integrated Review will prioritise national self-interest at the expense of the UK's commitment to overseas aid, development and humanitarian work, which is recognised as a significant part of the UK's global standing. Now more than ever, we cannot fail to realise how interdependent our world is and how closely national interest is aligned to international cooperation, for example in working together to curb disease and preserve life. Therefore, UK national interest cannot be defined in narrow terms; and neither should an insular definition of national interest be given weight in relation to targeting UK aid.
- 12.** CBM UK believes that there needs to be a holistic, transparent overview of the UK's foreign policy priorities and decision-making and a consensus reached on what a world that benefits everyone would look like - and how the UK can shape that. This must include consideration of marginalised groups, such as people with disabilities and mental health conditions, who may be impacted by UK foreign policy decision-making – not only aid allocation but other decisions that present or mitigate risks to inclusion and wellbeing, such as economic and political stability.⁵
- 13.** There is also an opportunity to analyse where greater effectiveness in some areas of foreign policy decision-making can alleviate pressure on other areas and where government departments can work together better towards a peaceful, healthy and stable world. For example, effective diplomatic interventions and trade policies can help create an environment that reduces the need for aid interventions.
- 14.** Whilst it may be tempting to adopt an 'aid is in the national interest' narrative in order to gain public support for aid, research shows that the most effective driver of support is the perception of the reduction of poverty in poorer countries as a moral cause⁶ – therefore the Government should be discouraged from using national interest as a justification for the aid budget.

iv. Accountability of the 'Government systems and structures' recommended by the Integrated Review (including arrangements for parliamentary scrutiny)

- 15.** It is important that the machinery of government is flexible enough to deliver effective aid that reaches those in need, under any new foreign affairs strategy. However, CBM UK would have concerns if the 'necessary reforms', referred to by the Prime Minister in setting out the terms of the Integrated Review, included removing independent, Cabinet level decision making power from DfID. Each of the ODA spending departments has a unique and essential role to play in the new integrated strategy for foreign affairs, which require specific skills, experience and modalities – and these are best maintained by each department having an independent seat at Cabinet level.

⁵ For examples of further considerations on people with mental health conditions and psychosocial disabilities, see *Creating a global enabling environment for mental health to flourish*, CBM UK, 2019 https://www.cbmuk.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/CBMUK-mental-health-policy-paper_Creating-a-global-enabling-environment.pdf

⁶ Aid Attitudes Tracker. <https://devcommslab.org/attitudes/#1488626931056-aac8c63a-4ce1>

- 16.** CBM UK is concerned that any merger of DfID with another department would risk diluting UK aid's focus on reaching the world's poorest and most marginalised, including people with disabilities, potentially weakening the UK's overall aid transparency ratings and consequently public and trust in UK aid.
- 17.** Parliamentary scrutiny of any new integrated foreign policy review will be essential and will need to include scrutiny of development, diplomacy, defence and security elements in equal measure. There would be benefit in a more joined up approach to scrutiny of a new policy than may have been the case so far within the Review, but we recognise the very limited information that has been available to Parliament and the public, and welcome the proactive approach taken by the relevant Committee Chairs in holding the Prime Minister to account on the Review thus far.
- 18.** It is also important for the UK Government to consult with and be accountable to those in receipt of UK aid and their representative organisations, for example Disabled Persons Organisations (DPOs). DfID has highlighted this as a current challenge, and CBM UK suggests that the IDC could probe this area further.