

International Development Committee Inquiry on the Philosophy and Culture of Aid Submission of Written Evidence by Save the Children

Save the Children was founded 100 years ago in London. It is now a global movement operating in 120 countries, fighting to ensure that all children survive, learn, and are protected. As a large international NGO based in the UK, Save the Children holds considerable power and privilege. We are committed to addressing these deeply ingrained attitudes, practices, and power imbalance we have in our partnerships. We recognise we have much to learn and unlearn; this journey is likely to be long and at times difficult. We encourage the Government and the wider sector to undertake similar work to better understand how the department can also shift towards decolonisation and localisation.

TRANSLATING THE GOVERNMENT'S PHILOSOPHY OF AID INTO PRIORITIES

1. The UK Government's philosophy of aid has shifted significantly over the last ten years. Initially under the Conservative-led Government there was some consistency with the Labour Government's philosophy, in as much as the UK's aid spending was based in a moral imperative to assist developing and fragile countries. What changed however was the justification for the UK's aid role, with Ministers conscious that their party did not share their belief in the merits of aid spending, the language used became much more focused on the benefits of aid to the UK's national interest. Subsequent administrations have been less enthusiastic about the UK's international development role and have continued to justify it in these terms and have until now not sought to reduce it due to the broad consensus in support of it in Parliament. This approach has made it challenging to have an honest conversation with the public about the merits of the UK's aid role, which has damaged support for it.
2. The 2015 aid strategy shifted the priorities of aid spending, and not just its narrative, to be more in line with the national interest. This has meant increased funding through the Prosperity Fund and the Conflict, Stability, and Security fund (CSSF), as well as a growing focus on catalytic aid, such as private sector investment through CDC.
3. The Government merged the Department for International Development and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCDO) in June 2020. The newly formed Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office unites development and diplomacy, reshaping the UK's approach to international development from a distinct policy priority pursued (at least to some extent) on its own merits, to bring it under the umbrella of a foreign policy that prioritises the pursuit of the UK's interests.
4. As we move into 2021 the Government looks to be making a further shift in emphasis of UK aid. Alongside the move to reduce aid to 0.5% of GNI the Foreign Secretary has set out a series of priority areas for aid spending including climate change, girls' education, health, and humanitarian crises. These are welcome and broadly laudable. However, early signs suggest that allocations do not match the stated priorities. Alongside the much-publicised cuts to Yemen and other reports of planned cuts fragile states, International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI) submissions show increased allocations to sectors such as banking, communications, industry and mining, and trade policy.¹ This highlights that alongside

¹ <https://www.savethechildren.org.uk/blogs/2020/global-britain-uk-aid-budget-cut>

the reduction in aid there is a reprioritisation towards economic sectors seen to be more in the national interest.

5. Efforts to promote 'open societies' must be at the heart of the Government's philosophy of aid, and they require consistent work to uphold the international rules-based system upon which all of our security depends. For Save the Children, key elements of this work should include:
 - Meaningful action on the localisation agenda so that decision-making power sits closer to the people affected
 - A robust commitment to transparency
 - Redoubled efforts to defend and promote human rights and to support campaigners (including children), even when doing so is difficult or uncomfortable
 - Funding and diplomatic focus on preventing conflict and atrocities and mitigating their impacts on civilians
6. In the past we have seen with the appointment of a new Secretary of State for International Development a new area of priority. With his ranged from a focus on disability under Penny Mordaunt MP, to women and girls under Justine Greening MP, and family planning under Andrew Mitchell MP. These changing approaches to development often mean that previous priority drop off the agenda, having huge implications for the sector and sometimes negatively impacting the people affected by the issue. Value for money has long been a priority for the Government, illustrated by the establishment of Independent Commission for Aid Impact (ICAI), however this relies on making lasting change.
7. Our philosophy of aid is that we believe aid should be transformative, which means it should contribute to long-term systemic national change that prioritises the furthest behind and the sectors they rely on to survive and thrive, and ensures development is environmentally sustainable for future generations.

LOCALISATION

8. The localisation agenda and debate carry huge implications for the way the international development and humanitarian sectors operate. Save the Children recognises that this debate is increasingly important, and one that the entire sector is grappling with. We welcome open and honest dialogue with the FCDO and other key actors, as we move forward together.
9. There are many definitions of localisation in the humanitarian and development sectors – from a narrow view of partnerships to fundamental shifts in power. Save the Children has, for now, adopted the International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA) definition that "*Localization is the process through which a diverse range of humanitarian actors are attempting, each in their own way, to ensure local and national actors are better engaged in the planning, delivery and accountability of humanitarian action, while still ensuring humanitarian needs can be met swiftly, effectively and in a principled manner.*" Although this definition originated in a humanitarian context, it should be considered across the full spectrum of humanitarian and development work.
10. The UK Government's commitment to localisation and the Grand Bargain are reflected in the FCDO's Humanitarian funding guidelines.² We have worked with DFID and subsequently FCDO over

the last decade on capacity strengthening initiatives and FCDO have been a big supporter of piloting and then taking capacity strengthening programmes to scale. The UK Government provided seed funding for The Start Network and invested directly in capacity strengthening initiatives through the Disasters and Emergencies Preparedness Programme (DEPP), initiatives focused on cross agency collaboration and strengthening local humanitarian preparedness and response capacity. Seed funding for the Humanitarian Leadership Academy (HLA) enabled Save the Children to develop organisational learning programmes which directly supports the localisation agenda.

11. The FCDO has overseen several funding streams that are supportive of localisation, including the Rapid Response Facility (RRF), UK Aid Direct, and is also supportive of the Charter for Change.³ Between 2016 and 2020, local and national NGOs (L/NNGOs) received 31% of Country Based Pooled Funds (CBPF) allocations. This figure was ten times higher than the global humanitarian funding to NNGOs and well over the 25% localisation commitment in the Grand Bargain. As the largest donor to the CBPFs (\$1.2B since 2016), the UK has been instrumental in supporting a mechanism that allows L/NNGOs to have access to direct humanitarian funding. However, in 2020 the UK's contribution to the CBPFs was almost 45% lower than the previous year.
12. The FCDO and its partners have an opportunity to play a key role in advancing the localisation agenda and shifting power to the global South by focusing on the quality of partnerships and participation of local actors in coordination structures. In line with the Grand Bargain Guidance Note on Localisation and Coordination⁴, with support prioritised for capacity strengthening and exchange (including support for local-local learning, coordination, and collective action), as well as for overcoming barriers to participation and leadership of local and national NGOs in coordination structures.
13. There is an understandable tendency for many donor Governments, including the UK Government, to focus on the words and actions of their Ministers, high profile envoys and ambassadors, with local voices being heard far less often. We acknowledge that FCDO officials in London regularly welcome 'voices from the field' or experts from priority countries when they are in the UK – whether through roundtables, meetings, or more formal events.
14. It is important that FCDO and partners support the participation of community-based organisations, local civil society, local authorities, existing networks, and forums, youth-led and women-led organisations able to positively contribute. In 2016 DFID published its "Putting young people at the heart of development: The Department for International Development's Youth Agenda". This agenda requires a stock take and progress review. We encourage FCDO to prioritise the development of a comprehensive strategy on Accountability to Affected Populations, including the meaningful participation of vulnerable groups in its work – and that of its partners - so that that work is informed by and responsive to the wishes, perspectives, and priorities of the intended beneficiaries.
15. To be truly transformative, we also need to disrupt global patriarchal systems and help build feminist movements. Stronger linkages should be drawn with gender equality priorities, including the Call to

² https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/927351/Guidelines-for-NGOs-applying-for-CHASE-Humanitarian-Response-Funding-Oct_2020.pdf

³ <https://charter4change.org/>

⁴ <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/grand-bargain-official-website/guidance-notes-localisation-may-2020>

Action to End Gender Based Violence in Emergencies and the Gender Based Violence Action coalition (led by UK Government), which have both committed to increased support for women's rights organisations (WROs), activists and local movements. Organisations should also learn from women's and feminist funds that support women and youth to design and implement their own solutions to the barriers they face.

16. FCDO and partners should also foster responsible partnership and enable local leadership, influence and participation of partner organisations in the Global South alongside broader localisation efforts seeking to change systems. Collaborative initiatives like the Collaborative Cash Delivery network have the explicit aim of strengthening local participation but presently suffer from lack of investment. There is an opportunity for FCDO to make more of the collaborative initiatives already in existence to better support the work that is needed.
17. Longer term funding is needed to allow local organisations to invest in their own capacity strengthening, and models true co-creation and accountability. Budget flexibility allows local and national actors to respond to emerging needs, pilot new approaches and allocate funds to organisational needs, such as strategy development, staff salaries and equipment. This is particularly important when (as Oxfam reports) 25% of projects self-reported by donors on gender equality are 'mismarked', and only 1% of gender equality funding (only 4% of global ODA) reaches local WROs. Learning collated through the Gender & Development Network highlights that Global South organisations want feminist partnerships that support wellbeing of partner staff, relationships based on trust and inclusive decision-making.
18. Partnering with local and national actors at times means taking more risks in terms of compliance. We recognise that the proposed updates to the FCDO AGA template shift the requirements for risk management, emphasising the accountability of the lead organisation for risk management of the programme while allowing lead organisations to manage risks according to their own processes, rather than passing down the full contractual requirements to local partners. We welcome this flexibility and hope this will be supportive of the localisation agenda and allow more flexibility in downstream risk management practices. We encourage FCDO to increasingly look to increase appetite for sharing risks. The 2019 ICAI report provides a thorough assessment and strong recommendations for the UK Government's approach, which we strongly endorse.⁵
19. We urge the FCDO to agree a vision and framework for advancing the localisation agenda and measuring and reporting back on progress; and to bring the Grand Bargain and localisation closer to countries where it is supposed to happen while also remaining committed to growing direct and quality funding.

THE CULTURE OF AID AND RACISM IN THE SECTOR

20. To address racism in the sector we must acknowledge that our sector is dominated by middle-class white people, that we've historically had a problem with bullying and that we are not inclusive enough, nor are we immune to racism as a sector.

⁵ <https://icai.independent.gov.uk/html-report/csos/>

21. Diversity matters for any industry, but particularly for a sector which is international facing. Save the Children works in 120 countries around the world, the bulk of our programming is based in Africa and Asia. However, historically we have not had enough staff from the countries in which we're working, or from diaspora communities, which has distorted our view of the work we're doing.
22. This is one of the factors contributing to a 'white saviour' approach to our work. Where we have promoted outdated and two-dimensional portrayals of the communities we work with. This in turn entrenches stereotypes about people living in poorer countries – mostly people of colour and has created a dynamic in which racism has been able to exist. We are seeking to address this by changing our communications and marketing images and language.
23. There is an assumption that the people within our sector understand the complexities of race, diversity, and inclusion. This coupled with most staff coming from white middle-class backgrounds particularly in senior positions has created a situation in which our actions and behaviours around the world are misaligned with the very values of why the sector was set up in the first place. This has recently been highlighted by the #charitysowhite campaign in which so many NGOs have been highlighted for their practice which reinforces stereotypes and, in some cases, disempowers local communities.
24. We acknowledge our debt to the #charitysowhite, in encouraging conversations which the sector might otherwise ignore. We are aware that too often we rely on people of colour to 'do the work' and educate white members of staff. At Save the Children conversations regarding racism in the sector have been encouraged by our BAME Network, who raised concerns about our Diversity and Inclusion long before the tragic killing of George Floyd. It is undeniable that the Black Lives Matter Protest in the summer of 2020 forced organisations like our own to confront their history, culture, practices, and leadership.
25. Following the events of summer 2020 the Save the Children UK's Executive Leadership Team published a statement of solidarity, including five commitments, on which quarterly public updates are provided on progress and mistakes, to supplement the monthly internal updates given to staff.^{6 7} Staff. These commitments include:
 - Review our external impact, testing whether our programming and influencing work is actively dismantling white supremacy and other forms of oppression and putting the most deprived and marginalised children at its heart.
 - Reconstruct our storytelling, testing whether our fundraising, communications and campaigning work stereotypes, 'others' or strips agency and dignity from children.
 - Test our supporter engagement programmes, looking at whether they build power in diaspora and Black communities and communities of colour, and whether our volunteering offer is inclusive.
 - Ensure our people and culture work dramatically improves our diversity and inclusion at all levels of the organisation but particularly at our Executive Director and Director levels, where decision-making power is concentrated.

⁶ <https://www.savethechildren.org.uk/blogs/2020/blm-solidarity-statement-charity-leadership-team>

⁷ <https://www.savethechildren.org.uk/blogs/2021/update-leadership-team-anti-racism-commitments-february-2021>

- Challenge ourselves and disrupt our thinking and actions to learn (and unlearn) more and to fulfil the commitments above without depending on the labour of Black colleagues and colleagues of colour.

26. Save the Children has taken steps to improve our Diversity and Inclusion and progress our anti-racist agenda. We formed a Diversity and Inclusion Steering Group. This group was made up of senior leaders in the organisation and reported directly to the CEO. With the help of external consultants, the group drafted a Diversity and Inclusion Strategy. The Strategy focused on three pillars: 1) Building a more inclusive workplace; 2) Tackling marginalisation; 3) Decolonising our work and the way we work.
27. Under each pillar we have an action plan, key performance indicators and an internal lead. We recognised that to undertake the amount of work needed to deliver a transformative agenda we needed to dedicated resource and capacity – something we had failed to do in the past. In December we hired a Director of Diversity and Inclusion, as well as two Advisers.
28. NGOs must start by transforming their culture to become inclusive which, if done correctly, will be reflected externally and will contribute to more inclusive decision making and meaningful outcomes. Ensuring that colleagues from underrepresented backgrounds feel included and are represented at all levels of the organisation is key, particularly at senior levels where there is significant under-representation of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic colleagues. There also needs to be an emphasis on reviewing policy, process and practices which can hold hidden and/or unconscious bias. Carrying out equality analysis on our processes can help highlight negative impacts on underrepresented groups.
29. NGOs work with some of the most vulnerable communities around the world. Is critical that we work in partnership and alongside people in a way which is not demeaning or undermining. Almost all charities are undertaking important conversations about racism and decolonisation. It is widely understood that we cannot address one without looking at the other.
30. It is not clear that the Government are considering what their role is in dismantling racist structures in international development or whether they consider the history and role of colonisation and our aid budget. The Government has worked very hard to tackle sexual exploitation and abuse in the aid sector and has made this a public priority. Sadly, we have not seen this same energy in seeking to understand racism and address its role in aid, and we hope to work with Government to remedy this.
31. As a first step we encourage the Government to acknowledge racism and colonisation in international development and hope they will consider the impact of this on their work, priorities and achievements.

SAFEGUARDING

32. The prevalence of sexual exploitation in humanitarian contexts is exacerbated by the power imbalance and vulnerability of the people involved and as a result is inextricably linked to the philosophy and culture of aid. We know that the children we work with in areas of conflict, poverty and disaster are especially vulnerable to abuse.

33. This places a special duty on the aid sector to embed robust safeguarding standards at every level and to root out perpetrators of abuse. This includes greater accountability to the people we serve, and to the Governments and donors that make our work possible. Tackling underreporting and identifying perpetrators – including any among the staff of NGOs – is a critical step to ensuring we can best protect the children we work to support.
34. In recent years we have worked extensively to improve safeguarding for our organisation and for the sector at large. We have funded new posts to provide specialist safeguarding support, introduced new safeguarding policies and training for staff and worked with colleagues across the sector and in Government to pursue global policy and regulatory changes to stamp out abuse in the aid sector.
35. Save the Children welcomes the Committee's report on Sexual Exploitation and Abuse in the Aid Sector and notes the relevance of our submission of written evidence to that inquiry in considering the philosophy and culture of aid.⁸

⁸ <https://committees.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/9960/pdf/>