

Christian Aid is the official relief, development and advocacy agency of 41 sponsoring churches in Britain and Ireland, we work as part of a worldwide church community.

We carry out our relief, development and advocacy work through more than 500 local organisations, which are close to the people and communities we seek to help and so best understand their needs.

Summary:

For more than a decade a broad consensus has existed amongst political parties in favour of overseas aid. This inquiry comes at moment where the political settlement around development and poverty reduction spending is under immense strain – and against the backdrop of calls to decolonise aid. But an advocacy focus on the size of the aid budget has sometimes crowded out a discussion on how aid is spent, by whom, and why.

Christian Aid’s interest in the philosophy aid arises from our understanding that debates in the UK about the purpose of aid come at a critical point for the world’s most vulnerable communities. The need for a strong, coherent international develop approach has never been greater.

Christian Aid welcomes the IDC inviting insights into shaping the Terms of Reference on the Inquiry into the Philosophy of Aid. Should you have any questions, please contact Jennifer Larbie, UK Advocacy and Policy Lead, jlrbie@christian-aid.org

We have organised our submission to:

- Address why the UK gives foreign aid, and some of the problematic underpinnings
- Assess development aid in the context of race, power, and knowledge in aid delivery
- Set out some of the problems and challenges that the aid sector faces

Why the UK gives aid?

The formation the Department for International Development (DfID) and the increased policy making /strategic development of aid was significant for the UK and globally – as there was a focus on the quality of aid, and what aid can achieve and much good work was done to increase attention on what aid was given for, how, and whether it promoted the impact intended. Arguably in the early 2000s the UK was a global leader in terms of how we aligned aid behind a poverty reduction agenda, untied aid, and put in systems and structures to ensure aid quality. However, this does not detract from the bigger questions of how aid reinforces and extends existing power relations, and in whose interest aid is given.

The UK government’s stated aim of giving aid has expanded since the International Development Act 2002, from the single focus of reducing poverty to include governance issues and limiting migration. Tackling these issues also, it is often argued, advances UK interests, as articulated in the UK’s 2015 aid strategy ‘UK Aid: Tackling Global Challenges in the National Interest’. There are also more distinct, often unspoken, national interests served by UK aid, including trade, investment, and an extended labour market.

Aid also provides an entry point for the UK military services to provide training programmes in several recipient countries, particularly across Africa, including Nigeria and Kenya¹. Indeed, it was the UK government that lobbied the OECD to redefine foreign aid to include military spending in fragile

¹ <https://leftfootforward.org/2019/10/money-down-the-drain-uk-military-training-overseas-is-unfit-for-purpose/>

countries². For example, in Afghanistan, the way NATO operated, and in some places continues to operate, blurs the distinction between foreign military intervention and development and humanitarian assistance, and in the process has often jeopardised humanitarian space and increased the security threat to Afghan and foreign aid workers.

There is an important distinction between indirect benefits – the UK’s standing may benefit from giving aid in country x – with the instrumentalization of aid, where donor self-interest becomes a large, or the driving consideration. For donors like the UK, aid does advance its economic, political, and cultural reach. For example, whilst aid in South Sudan has helped shape the country’s transition towards a fragile peace, the observable reality is this also aligns with Britain’s economic interests, including those of British companies like BP operating in the Upper Nile region³. For British business to thrive outside of the UK, aid can be used to create favourable context for UK investment⁴, sometimes at the expense of the internal stability of recipient countries – as mining conflicts in parts of the African continent sadly demonstrates⁵.

The question of why the UK gives humanitarian aid deserves a more distinct reflection. Humanitarian aid is intended to save lives, alleviate the suffering and restore the power and dignity of people whose lives have been blighted or destroyed by conflict or natural disaster. Research illustrates that the reduction of aid in fragile contexts can breed violence and insecurity⁶. There has been a sharp rise in global humanitarian need over this decade, driven by large-scale conflicts in Syria, Yemen, South Sudan and the mass expulsion of Rohingya people from Myanmar. The UK is a major funder of humanitarian responses, providing £1.56 billion of bilateral aid in 2017-18. Around half of this goes through UN humanitarian agencies.

However, UK humanitarian aid is not separate from other aspects of UK foreign policy. Whilst the volume and efficiency of UK humanitarian aid is widely recognised, undermining these efforts are areas of incoherence in trade and investment policy. Nowhere is this more apparent than in Yemen. The UK government’s approach simultaneously provides humanitarian aid and sells arms to countries fighting there, including Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. This incoherence was examined extensively in Christian Aid’s 2018 ‘Resourcing war and peace’ report.

Another problem is that UK counter-terrorism and sanction regimes make it illegal or high-risk for humanitarian organisations to engage with local groups who control certain territories where humanitarian need is extreme. This makes it very difficult for humanitarian actors to deliver in some of the most fragile and insecure contexts, and creates a conflict between one-size-fits-all counter-terrorist policy and the humanitarian aid which helps to save lives in a crisis context.

In summary, beyond its original purpose of poverty reduction:

- Aid has been given in national self-interest – to promote and open up ability to trade/tied aid/UK expertise etc.
- Aid that is given badly and can reinforce /strengthen/deepen existing conflict.

² <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2016/feb/20/oecd-redefines-foreign-aid-to-include-some-military-spending>

³ <https://www.devex.com/news/aid-challenges-mount-in-south-sudan-s-upper-nile-unity-states-78572>

⁴ https://www.globaljustice.org.uk/sites/default/files/files/resources/the_privatisation_of_uk_aid.pdf

⁵ <https://waronwant.org/sites/default/files/Feronia%20report%20Nov2016.pdf>

⁶ <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/content/fragility-what-s-minds-policy-makers-aid-workers-and-donors>

- Aid that has become integrated with security agenda, so that the purpose of aid has become confused and potentially delivering long term problems for the UK in terms of our reputation and relationships.

This leads us to identify the following priorities for the inquiry's terms of reference:

- What do the different stated purposes of aid mean for the UK's contribution to reducing global poverty?
- Does the UK have a coherent, cross-government approach to promoting peace with transparent and joined objectives across trade, development and foreign policy?
- What impact has aid in the national interests had on determining aid policy and delivery?

Aid in the context of race and power

As an International NGO, Christian Aid, is a beneficiary of the UK's longstanding commitment to give development aid, which contributes to delivering some of our programmes around the world. We recognise that we exist in a global society premised on the racial inferiority of black and brown communities. This racism is sustained by institutions and systems, including those within the development aid sector. More specifically, our working assumption is that global poverty and inequality is shaped by assumptions, biases and structures that are racist, and dehumanise some people on the grounds of race, ethnicity, and colour.

The giving of aid in and of itself does often little to address these structures, or worst still can perpetuate them. Understanding aid in its historical context, as a form of soft power in former British colonies, will be critical. We understand that the challenge to decolonise aid requires an introspection of different histories and contexts, including the unequal power relations between the UK and global South countries (whose citizens are predominately people of colour) cemented through slavery and colonialism.

There are two dimensions of coloniality worth exploring. Colonialism denotes a political and economic relation in which sovereignty of a nation or a people rests on the power of another nation, which makes such a nation an empire. Coloniality instead, refers to long-standing patterns of power that emerged as a result of colonialism, which defines culture, labour, intersubjectivity relations, and knowledge production well beyond the strict limits of colonial administrations⁷. Current global power dynamics mean that former colonial powers, like the UK, play a lead role defining what is development and determine who needs it.

The way aid is delivered is not ethically neutral, technical, or a background issue. By delivering aid through this system, with a distinct lack of knowledge from people with lived experiences and by excluding these people from the systems of monitoring and evaluation, INGOs aid delivery can contribute to creating imbalances of power. There are really good examples of INGO practice that challenges this and is strongly built from people's knowledge, analysis and aspirations, it is that the aid system should support and enable more of this.

Relatedly, the humanitarian aid modus operandi presents international actors as those who know best what people in communities devastated by crisis need. There is a white saviour paradigm of heroic European and American humanitarian actors coming to the rescue of hapless communities in distress. This in turn drives the marketing of aid beneficiaries, reinforcing notions of inferiority of black and brown communities in the Global South.

⁷ https://www.dukeupress.edu/Assets/PubMaterials/978-0-8223-7109-0_601.pdf

This leads us to identify the following priorities for the terms of reference:

- The evaluation of UK government's response, bilaterally and with the international community, to race, power and the colonial legacy of western aid and development policy.
- Whether the UK government's Global Britain agenda will address power imbalances and unequal relationship post-colonial relationships between the UK and the global South?
- How can we learn from positive examples of current practice to design a system that does shift power, and what would be the key elements of such a system?
- The funding and delivery mechanisms within the international aid ecosystem that sustain harmful dynamics of race, power, knowledge.
- To explore is how to avoid the white saviour and hapless communities paradigm approach/frame, while getting people to support the UK government giving significant aid

The challenges of aid and how delivery can be improved

UK international development aid has helped save millions of lives, delivered emergency humanitarian aid, helped to eliminate disease, stopped violence against women and girls, put millions of children in school and strengthened the ability of some of the world's poorest people to access free public healthcare. If aid is to continue to fulfil this mission, the aid architecture needs to be thought through properly to enable this, including understanding asking the question around the impact of aid and how it lands in any given context.

The challenges of aid for development, aid for humanitarianism and aid for peace are different. But focusing on aid for humanitarianism here, there is a concern that that localisation is practiced in name only. Localisation of aid is a collective process by the different stakeholders of the humanitarian system (donors, United Nations agencies, NGOs) which aims to return local actors (local authorities or civil society) to the centre of the response with a greater, more central role⁸. Localisation requires a shift in power relations between actors, both in terms of strategic decision making and control of resources.

The benefits of localisation are clear. When aid is delivered through local organisations its much quicker, and in cost, the value added is well evidenced. But more importantly, locating decision making power in the hands of those who know what is needed, it enables sustainable development – moving from humanitarian response to laying the foundations for longer recovery and development, and a stronger and more capable national/local civil society, with a shifting role for global actors – as facilitators and supporters of nationally led response.

Currently much of the decision making and expenditure in the humanitarian sector remains with global actors who do not have the knowledge of the local context and may make poor decisions in spending that aid – reinforcing and extending the challenges specific to that context. This situation appears to be the case in part because of a skewed understanding of risk – risk that money is not spent on planned activities, rather than risk in term of how might these planned activities relate to the needs of the context – which leads to questions of whose risk and how this is defined and whether the current architecture is aligned to this.

In a humanitarian context, local faith groups, for example, are often the first responders and stay with communities when others pull out of a context. In the context of COVID, where it is increasingly

⁸ https://www.grandbargain4ngos.org/upload/more-than-the-money-full-report_5b28deb171df6.pdf

challenging for traditional international donors and actors to intervene, it is local humanitarian actors, with community participation, who are best positioned to deliver aid. Yet aid and humanitarian resources remain overwhelmingly concentrated amongst a handful of multilateral agencies like the World Bank, the UN and INGOs. To enable a more contextualised approach, the FCDO needs to scale up funding to country-level, locally-led partnerships, and funding instruments that promote leadership by local actors.

Moreover, the trend towards localisation is in danger of being deemed as just rhetoric. And conditionalities attached to localisation raise questions about whether the UK government's approach understands what it means to genuinely shift power to local groups and communities. So a problem with the aid system and with FCDO policy and practice is the minimalist share of overall resources it is willing to hand to local actors, including because of its overly risk-averse obsession with compliance.

This is not just a challenge for donors, but aid intermediaries, like INGOS, who in some sense remain power brokers. There is a history as to why INGOs are intermediaries. This goes back, for example, to the era of structural adjustment programmes mandated by international financial institutions in post-independence countries who set the political parameters of economic and political development. Countries were forced to cut public spending in health, education etc and INGOs were considered more efficient and effective in spending donor funds for development initiatives at a local level. The number of international NGOs operating in Kenya, for example, increased almost three-fold to 134 during the period 1978-1988⁹.

Previously, DfID's focus on big governance programmes and service contracts, and the shifting expectation in the sector for results based management etc. has reinforced the move of INGOs from promoting alternatives in terms of development to becoming the technical experts that the UK govt delegates to deliver their development vision.

In this era of localisation, some experiences suggests that the INGOs maintain their privileged status, acting as brokers for local organisations in accessing FCDO funding, and this may compromise their originality and local knowledge to fit the bill. On the other hand, brokering relationships is not necessarily a bad thing if that is part of the process that finally leads to true localisation – a shifting of power and transformational change for communities most in need.

Promisingly, a number of INGOs have reached and surpassed the goal of 25% directly to local organisations. [CAFOD, ActionAid, and Christian Aid which have allocated 65%, 62%, and 55%](#) respectively directly provided to local and national responders.

Therefore, an assessment is necessary into whether the localisation agenda is truly shifting power to local organisations and community.

This leads us to identify the following priorities for the terms of reference:

- What needs to sit alongside the localisation agenda in order that aid as a whole engages with these structural issues?
- Is there an issue of aid bureaucracy, which means that the decisions making power is always rooted in the Global North? Whose values do we represent and are the values of the countries and communities we work with reflected? Does the language of aid i.e. failure/success- reflect the values and the outcomes of the communities we work with?

⁹ <https://newafricanmagazine.com/16536/>

- Whether there are aspects of the localisation agenda which perpetuates power imbalances? What is the role of INGOs in addressing these issues?