

International Development Committee: “Effectiveness of UK Aid” Inquiry Evidence Submitted by the Mines Advisory Group 1 May 2020

Summary

1. UK aid makes a substantial contribution to the peace and well-being of communities around the world. As the UK Government pursues its Integrated Review, one question posed by this Committee is how the UK’s national interest is to be defined and what role it should play in the delivery of UK aid. The Mines Advisory Group (MAG) believes this question is best answered not by focusing on zero-sum foreign policy aims, but rather by understanding that when British aid serves others well, then Britain too is well served. The UK Government’s Global Mine Action Programme exemplifies a number of practices that should be continued and expanded to ensure UK aid fulfils this purpose, including:
 - a. Supporting aid sectors in which Britain leads and innovates;
 - b. Maximizing the role of UK and global civil society in aid delivery; and
 - c. Delivering aid that bolsters the rules-based international order and the rights of all people.
2. It is commendable that in announcing the Integrated Review, the Prime Minister recommitted the UK to spending 0.7 percent of gross national income on official development assistance (ODA). The June 2019 strategic priorities of the Department for International Development (DfID) provide a useful framework for delivering on this commitment. However, it is important that all activities funded by UK ODA across government departments are aligned with that framework, with the well-being of poor and conflict-affected people as the constant aim. Dedicated political leadership, technical expertise, and civil service capacity for international development within Government, coupled with strong oversight from Parliament and the public, are necessary to achieve this.

Introduction to the Mines Advisory Group

3. MAG is a charitable, non-governmental organisation founded in 1989 and headquartered in Manchester. Our mission is to create safe futures for women, men and children affected by violence, conflict, and insecurity. Our approximately 5,000 staff achieve this by removing and destroying landmines, unexploded ordnance, and surplus weapons in 26 countries around the world. In 2019, MAG personnel removed and/or destroyed more than 100,000 explosive items found in conflict-affected communities, each of which could have destroyed a life or limb. In the process, they made safe more than 93 million square meters of land and property, putting hundreds of communities on the path to post-conflict recovery and sustainable development. Our risk education teams delivered more than 46,000 sessions for vulnerable people, helping them avoid accidents until their land can be made safe. And our arms management specialists worked with authorities in nearly 15 countries to destroy more than 640 metric tonnes of surplus small arms and ammunition.
4. Alongside our field operations, MAG is committed to advocacy that prevents future harm caused by conflict. Our work in support of the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention, for which we were co-recipients of the 1997 Nobel Peace Prize, continues to this day with our campaign to achieve a world free of landmines by 2025.ⁱ We also support governments around the world to meet their obligations under other instruments of international humanitarian law, such as the Convention on Certain

Conventional Weapons, the Convention on Cluster Munitions, and the United Nations Programme of Action on Small Arms and Light Weapons.

5. MAG's work has been generously supported by the UK Government since our earliest field operations. In the 2018-19 fiscal year, this support amounted to more than £18.7 million, the majority of which was provided by DfID as part of its Global Mine Action Programme (GMAP).
6. Now in its seventh year, the GMAP funds a consortium of three non-governmental organisations (MAG, the HALO Trust, and Norwegian People's Aid) to conduct humanitarian mine action in 11 countries, along with activities in a further four countries through the United Nations. A DfID review in 2019 awarded the GMAP a score of 'A+' and described it as providing good value for money.ⁱⁱ

The Global Mine Action Programme: Lessons for UK Aid and the National Interest

7. MAG strongly believes that when British aid serves others well, Britain too is well served. Aid enables Britain to convince others rather than coerce, and to shape others' preferences by appeal and attraction. The GMAP is an important example of this. And in a number of respects, the GMAP demonstrates how future UK aid can be effectively targeted and delivered, and how such aid can support the UK's broader foreign policy and national security goals.
8. Supporting aid sectors in which Britain leads and innovates: Two British organizations, MAG and the HALO Trust, are the largest recipients of GMAP funding. However, the excellence of Britain's humanitarian mine action sector is acknowledged far beyond the UK. Indeed, many of the UK's allies and partners (including the United States, the European Union, Japan, Norway, and Germany) support British mine action organisations as their partners of choice due to our strong track record of reliability, efficiency, and innovation while operating in some of the world's most challenging environments.ⁱⁱⁱ This bolsters the reputations of both the organisations and the UK as responsible global actors, whether among aid recipients or fellow aid donors. That UK diplomats abroad often highlight the work of UK aid organisations is evidence of this.
9. We believe UK aid should provide holistic humanitarian assistance to people in need and we do not suggest that the UK only fund some types of assistance and not others. However, the example of mine action demonstrates that it is prudent for the UK to make additional investments in sectors where UK organisations are recognised leaders, due to the added value and impact this generates.
10. Maximizing the role of UK and global civil society in aid delivery: The GMAP is a clear illustration of the impact UK aid can have when delivered through civil society organisations. From January 2014 through March 2020, GMAP funding to MAG and the HALO Trust enabled the provision of risk education for more than 1.1 million people and the safe release of more than 297 million square metres of land – an area larger than the city of Birmingham. However, aid disbursed directly through civil society partners comprised only 17 percent of all country-specific UK bilateral ODA in 2018.^{iv} By contrast, the UK channelled 41 percent of this ODA through UN agencies, much of which was then sub-granted by the UN to individual charities that delivered the aid. This approach creates additional transaction costs and inefficiencies, reducing the proportion of UK aid that reaches people in need.
11. UN agencies play important roles as global coordinators and advocates for assistance, and UK financial support for those activities is necessary.^v However, channelling more UK funding for aid projects directly through civil society organizations (whether UK organisations or those from aid-recipient states) would improve the efficiency of UK aid. We recognise that this approach challenges civil society organisations to show they can deliver at scale, and many organisations have

demonstrated that capacity in recent years. MAG, for example, has grown to absorb responsibly and efficiently a three-fold rise in income over the past five years, with commensurate impact.

12. Delivering more UK aid in this way would likely require additional capacity within DfID and other grant-making departments, but this can be mitigated by channelling UK aid through consortia such as that contracted under the current GMAP, or through rapid response mechanisms such as the Start Fund. By doing so, the UK will be able to deploy large amounts of aid through multiple civil society partners at reduced administrative cost, while also maintaining oversight. At a time when needs are great but resources are limited, the UK should maximize its use of these mechanisms and strengthen its relationships with trusted civil society partners.
13. Delivering aid that bolsters the rules-based international order and the rights of all people: The UK has benefitted greatly from the system of international law and institutions created after the Second World War. That system now faces its most difficult test in decades, with great power competition rising, the UN Security Council nearly paralysed, and the laws of war being violated on a daily basis. As a medium power, the UK faces a stark choice: either defend and strengthen the laws and institutions of today, or be forced to accept those which the great powers devise tomorrow. Mine action organisations like MAG cannot realise their vision of a safe world for all if the laws of war fall away. Similarly, our peer organisations fighting for human rights, development, and environmental protection will also fail if international cooperation in those areas stagnates or diminishes.
14. Preserving the rules-based international order will require the UK to invest strategically across all departments covered by the Integrated Review. And while it is critical that UK aid not be directed toward zero-sum political aims, UK aid should be used to bolster norms and institutions that benefit all people and all nations. Consider one example from the mine action community: The UK routinely encourages other states to join the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention (APMBC) because it believes the use of such indiscriminate weapons anywhere in the world is unacceptable. When the UK also uses aid to help states meet their APMBC obligations, the UK further strengthens the convention and its norms, encouraging those countries that abide by them and stigmatising those that do not. We can see evidence of this in countries such as Sri Lanka, where a combination of UK aid and diplomacy has brought a mine-free future into view – and in so doing, illuminated a path that other mine-affected states can follow. UK aid that is deployed in support of other international instruments, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights or the Paris Agreement on climate change, would likely have similar norm-reinforcing effects.

Ensuring UK Aid Remains Robust, Principled, and Accountable

15. We are grateful that in announcing the Integrated Review, the Prime Minister recommitted the UK to spending 0.7 percent of gross national income on ODA. We also believe that DfID's strategic priorities (as set out in the June 2019 Single Departmental Plan) provide a useful framework for delivering UK aid that meets the ODA standards set by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development. However, we agree with the Independent Commission for Aid Impact (ICAI) that recent moves to allocate UK ODA to non-traditional sectors create "both value for money risks and dangers of noncompliance with the international ODA definition and the UK's International Development Act."^{vi} The solution, as the ICAI wrote, is not for the UK to treat the ODA definition as a "compliance hurdle" to be cleared in pursuit of other aims;^{vii} rather, it is to ensure that the well-being of poor and conflict-affected people is the ultimate aim of each ODA programme.
16. To ensure this is the case, the UK Government must have dedicated civil service capacity, technical expertise, and political leadership for international development, coupled with strong oversight from Parliament and the public. A multi-country study by the Overseas Development Institute showed

that ODA is most effective when it is overseen by dedicated, senior political leaders.^{viii} By contrast, attempting to make development “everyone’s responsibility” by integrating it across multiple government agencies is more likely to dilute expertise and reduce accountability.

17. The Mines Advisory Group thanks the Committee for considering this evidence and welcomes further questions.

ⁱ For more information, please visit <https://www.landminefree2025.org/>.

ⁱⁱ Department for International Development, “Project Completion Review: Global Mine Action Programme (GMAP),” 2019, http://iati.dfid.gov.uk/iati_documents/38092964.odt, accessed 20 April 2020.

ⁱⁱⁱ Direct funding in 2018-19 received from governments other than the UK included: United States of America (£44.5 million), Norway (£16 million), European Union (£13.8 million), Germany (£10.5 million), the Netherlands (£8.1 million), Canada (£4.5 million), Sweden (£4.3 million), France (£3.4 million), Japan (£3 million), and less than £1 million each from Ireland, Finland, and Belgium.

^{iv} Department for International Development, “Statistics on International Development: Final UK Aid Spend 2018,” <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/statistics-on-international-development-final-uk-aid-spend-2018>, accessed 20 April 2020.

^v We note that in December 2018, the Independent Commission for Aid Impact found that the UK had insufficiently invested in UN agencies’ “normative or standard-setting roles.” Independent Commission for Aid Impact, “The UK’s approach to funding the UN humanitarian system,” 18 December 2018.

^{vi} Independent Commission for Aid Impact, “The current state of UK aid: A synthesis of ICAI findings from 2015 to 2019,” 20 June 2019, p. 22.

^{vii} Ibid.

^{viii} Raphaëlle Faure, Cathal Long, and Annalisa Prizzon, “Do organisational and political models for development cooperation matter for development effectiveness?” Overseas Development Institute, April 2015.