

Leonard Cheshire, Response to the International Development Committee's Inquiry into the future of UK Aid (May 2021)

1. Introduction

- 1.1. Leonard Cheshire is a leading disability charity, with over 70 years' experience in supporting persons with disabilities across the globe. The charity delivers projects through local partners, whilst also contributing to mainstream programmes with technical expertise on disability and inclusion. Leonard Cheshire has four regional offices in India, Kenya, Thailand, and Zambia and hold the Secretariat for the Leonard Cheshire Global Alliance which is one of the world's largest networks wholly dedicated to supporting people with disabilities. Leonard Cheshire is one of three technical partners for disability for the World Bank, and works closely with the International Labour Organization, as well as collaborating with UNESCO, UNICEF, the UN Girls' Education Initiative, and other global actors.
- 1.2. Leonard Cheshire's response to this consultation is shaped by the experience of receiving UK aid as well as engaging with the Foreign, Commonwealth, and Development Office (FCDO) as a leading international development agency supporting persons with disabilities. The charity receives direct funding from UK aid for programmes including the 'Inclusion to Innovation' (i2i) programme, the Girl's Education Challenge Transition Fund to improve the inclusion of girls with disabilities in education in Kenya, and the "Inclusion 100" project to improve the economic inclusion of people with disabilities in India.
- 1.3. Leonard Cheshire receives additional funding as a partner in UK aid funded Consortia programmes on women's sexual health, girls' education and life changing assistive technology. Leonard Cheshire is an active member of the Bond Disability and Development Group which plays a key role in ensuring UK aid reaches persons with disabilities. Leonard Cheshire also collects data on disability and engage with local and national policy makers so that they put in place interventions that support the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD).
- 1.4. In responding to the International Development Committee's Inquiry into the future of UK Aid, Leonard Cheshire believes that only when Government restores the 0.7% target and returns its position as a global leader, can the UK hope to realise the goal of inclusive and equitable development support for people with disabilities. The following section presents research-based evidence addressing the four sections in the terms of reference for this inquiry on the future of UK aid.

2. UK Aid Strategy

- 2.1. The UK's inclusive development strategy, driven previously by the Department for International Development's Disability Inclusion Strategy, enabled the UK to be a global champion for the rights of disabled people, and to play a leadership and agenda setting role amongst global international development actors.
- 2.2. This year, the UK's presidency of the G7 and COP26, and its role as co-host of the Global Education Summit, present the opportunity to reaffirm Britain's place on the world stage as a champion for the most disadvantaged and marginalised groups in the world. Disability inclusion must remain a priority for the UK's aid strategy, and momentum cannot be lost, as the COVID-19 pandemic has made clear.
- 2.3. The UK government has already recognised that "real change for people with disabilities will only come from changing the way the whole international community does business"¹. At the Global Disability Summit in July 2018, over 170 sets of commitments² were made across national governments and other organisations. The UK's continued leadership in delivering lasting change for people with disabilities is crucial to ensure that the commitments made in the Sustainable Development Goals are met and that we 'leave no one behind'.
- 2.4. The UK's contribution to foreign aid has played a key role in the inclusion of persons with disabilities in international development programmes. In 2020, Leonard Cheshire reached 75,844 people and organisations directly through UK and international work, including 61,211 disabled people. The charity also helped 5,135 children with disabilities to get an education in Africa, and globally supported 32,078 people with disabilities to find employment.
- 2.5. The UK Government has announced its intention in 2020 to temporarily drop its legally binding commitment to spend 0.7% GNI on aid. Cutting aid from 0.5 to 0.7 percent of the economy results in a cut of approximately 30 percent to the UK's aid budget. This is occurring at a time when other donor governments are stepping up their aid commitments in recognition of the impact of COVID-19 and the poorest countries' inability to borrow as developed nations have. At least four G7 members plan to increase the absolute amount of aid in 2021 (Germany, France, Italy, Japan)³.
- 2.6. Government must ensure disability inclusion is at the heart of the development strategies and maintain 35% of ODA spend on disability as a minimum. Only by restoring aid spending can the UK provide more equitable and

¹ BOND: <https://www.bond.org.uk/news/2020/12/uk-government-cant-lose-momentum-on-disability-inclusion>

² Gov.uk: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/global-disability-summit-commitments>

³ BOND: <https://www.bond.org.uk/news/2021/03/from-slashing-07-to-yemen-cuts-whats-happening-with-uk-aid>

sustainable development, in line with global commitments such as the UN Convention on the Right of Persons with Disabilities. Now is a time that requires increased, not decreased, aid allocation from the UK Government.

- 2.7. The UK's commitment in the Integrated Review (published on March 16th, 2021) to restoring the 0.7% GNI on Aid target is welcomed. It is urgent that the UK Government restores this GNI percentage commitment as soon as possible. UK aid has yielded many positive outcomes for people with disabilities globally, and the UK's aid strategy must continue to play a leadership and agenda setting role on disability inclusion.

3. UK Aid Administration

- 3.1. In 2018 DFID (now FCDO) set out a clear approach for ensuring transparency in its aid programmes and in the same year was ranked as the third most transparent development actor. The Government's decision to retain both the International Development Committee (IDC) and the Independent Commission for Aid Impact (ICAI) is hugely important for ensuring the accountability and impact of the UK's AID overseas.
- 3.2. Where other government departments are required to take responsibility for delivering the UK's ODA, they must demonstrate how they will adhere to globally agreed principles of aid effectiveness, transparency, and accountability.
- 3.3. The UK Government's Development Tracker⁴, initiated by DFID and now extended to all government departments delivering UK aid, is a useful source of information for top-line data on UK ODA spend. All government departments appear to be contributing relevant information to this resource which is openly available. FCDO must retain the Development Tracker as a critical tool in increasing transparency.

4. UK Aid Process

- 4.1. UK Government departments coordinating and delivering aid should also demonstrate as a minimum how they will support the implementation of FCDO's disability inclusion strategy. In addition, departments must work collaboratively with FCDO to put in place plans for transparent, accountable, and inclusive development programmes, ensuring that vulnerable populations are not left behind.
- 4.2. It is crucial that any decision-making process around UK aid and FCDO's funding takes place through an open and transparent process which emphasises meaningful consultation with stakeholder groups, including persons with disabilities and Disabled People's Organisations, and which includes robust

⁴ Gov.uk: <https://devtracker.dfid.gov.uk/department>

accountability mechanisms in which those stakeholders can engage.

- 4.3. The Disability Unit in the Cabinet Office is working with government colleagues, disabled people, disabled people's organisations, charities, and businesses to develop and deliver a National Strategy for Disabled People, to be published in Spring 2021⁵. FCDO should work with the Cabinet Office and other departments, to ensure its UK aid work on disability and its domestic disability policies are aligned and are both in line with the UNCRPD.
- 4.4. People with disabilities are still routinely excluded from educational, economic, social, and cultural opportunities and have been amongst the hardest hit by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. The FCDO should therefore be ambitious in its ODA spending and ensure that, as disabled people have been disproportionately affected by COVID-19, they are prioritised in future ODA spending.

5. Impact of the changes to UK Aid

- 5.1. The global pandemic has had a significant impact on the lives and livelihoods of persons with disabilities, whom are often already one of the most disadvantaged and isolated groups in society. Many people with disabilities are poor, out-of-school, or in vulnerable employment, and this has only been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, especially for those with existing health conditions.
- 5.2. Given the additional barriers faced by people with disabilities in relation to securing and retaining employment, it is also likely that they will be amongst the hardest hit by the long-term economic impacts of the pandemic. People with disabilities are especially vulnerable because many work in vulnerable employment (short-term, part-time, informal), and may be first to go when businesses lay off; and, secondly, many work as self-employed and will struggle, as business slows down or indeed halts altogether due to government restrictions.
- 5.3. There is also a risk that diversity and inclusion will take a backseat, as businesses focus on survival, and set aside other priorities or commitments from 'before' COVID-19. This could result in limiting employment opportunities for people with disabilities in the immediate future as well as in the long run and reducing or removing targeted support to existing employees. It is therefore critical that people with disabilities are not left behind in new job markets opportunities and future employment policies.
- 5.4. FCDO communication on this matter needs to address the underlying and ongoing barriers persons with disabilities face as well as the additional barriers

⁵ GOV.UK: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/citizen-space-survey-national-strategy-for-disabled-people>

created by COVID-19, and how this pandemic is disproportionately affecting persons with disabilities and programmes aiming to lift them out of poverty.

- 5.5. The UK previously made an important contribution to improving global effectiveness of ODA, ensuring that UK aid decisions are made with the aim of leaving no-one behind, and lead the way among international development agencies supporting disability inclusion in both operations and funding decisions.
- 5.6. In 2021, the FCDO is now responsible for 81% of the aid budget, more than the combined total for DFID and FCO in 2019⁶. As the government department with lead responsibility for the coordination and delivery of UK aid, the FCDO should show leadership in demonstrating how UK aid will continue to ensure disability inclusion throughout UK aid commitments.

6. Key Recommendations

- 6.1. UK Aid Strategy: Government must ensure disability inclusion is at the heart of the development strategies and maintain 35% of ODA spend on disability as a minimum. Only by restoring aid spending can the UK provide more equitable and sustainable development, in line with global commitments such as the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Now is a time that requires increased, not decreased, aid allocation from the UK Government to ensure that the commitments made in the Sustainable Development Goals are met and that we 'leave no one behind'.
- 6.2. UK Aid Administration: As the government department with lead responsibility for the coordination and delivery of UK aid, FCDO should show leadership in demonstrating how UK aid is adhering to globally agreed principles of aid effectiveness, transparency, and accountability. All other departments disbursing ODA must also adhere to these principles.
- 6.3. UK Aid Process: FCDO and other funders must collect data on the impact of COVID-19 that is disability inclusive and use best practice methodologies to ensure comparable, accurate, quality disability data collection. Policy makers, governments, and funders, including FCDO, must work closely with people with disabilities and their communities to understand the issues and risk of harm and effectively promote awareness and appropriate safeguarding responses.
- 6.4. Impact of the changes to UK aid: During the COVID-19 pandemic many initiatives supporting distance learning platforms during school closures were not accessible to children with disabilities. There is a particular risk that girls with disabilities will be unlikely to go back to school post COVID-19. UK ODA must

⁶ BOND: <https://www.bond.org.uk/news/2021/03/from-slashing-07-to-yemen-cuts-whats-happening-with-uk-aid>

therefore prioritise supporting the most marginalized children, including girls with disabilities, to go back to school.

- 6.5. FCDO must also ensure that short-term and long-term employment generation policies are disability inclusive. Given the additional barriers faced by people with disabilities in relation to securing and retaining employment, a sustainable and resilient recovery from COVID-19 requires that UK ODA prioritises supporting employment generation schemes for people with disabilities.