

# **International Development Committee inquiry into the Philosophy and Culture of Aid**

## **Sub-inquiry: The Philosophy of Aid**

**Written evidence submitted by Brian Drummond**

### **Summary**

I briefly note, on this page, responses to three of the questions asked in the sub-inquiry. The following pages give relevant quotes (omitting citations within those quotes) from the literature relating to the second and third of the questions below. Full references for the cited literature are given at the end. Much of my responses in March and April (to the Committee's previous calls for evidence in this inquiry) is also relevant to the questions asked in this sub-inquiry. None of that material is repeated here but I refer to the relevant sections of it in relation to the first and second of the three questions below.

### ***Fundamentals of aid***

#### **1. What do you think international aid should be for?**

- 1.1 Current UK international aid is directed towards countries facing difficulties which are a direct result of other UK actions. Such difficulties cry out for justice in the form of reparation, restitution and fair dealing by the UK. The term "aid" itself is inappropriate in the context of the structural injustice imposed by the powerful north on the south [my April 21 submission, sect. 2.3]. The UK should work: to end the discrimination between north and south on agricultural subsidies; to reform international law so that it effectively governs the right to food; and to reform WTO, IMF and World Bank processes to allow fair and effective southern participation. [my April 21 submission, sect. 2.5; my March 21 submission, sects. 1.2 to 1.6].

### ***Donor countries***

#### **2. What should be included in the UK's international development strategy and what does the economic growth model in the Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy mean for development strategy?**

- 2.1 "Development" is an intrinsically inappropriate concept which ignores the northern source of the south's problems, and denies the south its right to chart its future [my April 21 submission, sect. 2.4].
  - 2.2 UK economic growth is incompatible with economic growth in countries we currently damage. Worldwide we need degrowth to achieve sustainability. In the UK we need degrowth to allow others to have the basic necessities of life.
- #### **3. Should all donors work towards the collective aims set out in the Sustainable Development Goals or should they have flexibility to pursue their own priorities and development strategies outlined by recipient countries?**
- 3.1 The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are misfounded, being based on economic growth for all.
  - 3.2 There is no convincing evidence that absolute decoupling (of economic growth from growth in use of material end energy resources) is possible.
  - 3.3 Alternatives are needed to the growth and development approaches of the SDGs.

## **2.2 UK economic growth is incompatible with economic growth in countries we currently damage. Worldwide we need degrowth to achieve sustainability. In the UK we need degrowth to allow others to have the basic necessities of life.**

“In 2019, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights used the term “climate apartheid” to describe the divide between the affluent (who possess the resources to protect themselves from climate-related heat waves, food shortages, and conflict) and the rest of humankind (who will be left to suffer) (UNHRC 2019, p. 14, para. 50). ... As planetary boundaries continue to be breached (Steffen et al. 2015), racialized populations, including those displaced by climate change, will be exposed to increasing levels of violence and exclusion. Racism is thus not simply a form of bias or discrimination, but an integral part of a world system that subjects growing segments of the world’s population to precarity and premature death.” [Gonzalez 2021]

“Given that human activity has already crossed several planetary boundaries, we may need global degrowth, along with radical redistribution so that countries/regions thus far deprived can gain without further threatening the Earth ... there is a ... need to curb and drastically cut down the present consumption levels of ... the global North ... Without this, the majority of humankind will never have the space needed to become more secure ... ‘sustainable development’ [is] an oxymoron. ... Degrowth ... calls for the ... abolishment of economic growth as a social objective. ... Degrowth signifies a society with a smaller metabolism (the energy and material throughput of the economy), but more importantly, a society with a metabolism which has a different structure and serves new functions. In a degrowth society everything will be different from the current mainstream: activities, forms and uses of energy ... allocations of time between paid and non-paid work ...” [Kothari and others 2014]

“the great acceleration in the demand for limited land, water, and other resources and sinks ... challenges the need for continuous growth with its perverse incentives for a throwaway materialistic society. ... The 2030 Agenda ... focuses strongly on ‘growth’ ... Target 8.4 aims at decoupling growth from environmental degradation. However ... a true decoupling will require drastic redefinition of what constitutes growth ... Business-as-usual growth is justified as necessary for reducing social inequalities and for addressing ecological issues instead of making clear commitments to redefine the development process. This would be to live within ecological constraints for the well-being of society, even if it is at the cost of sustained growth. ... the inclusive approach to the SDGs requires developed countries to give something up.” [Gupta and Vegelin 2016]

“as Deacon points out, ‘sustained growth on a finite planet is the essence of unsustainability’. ... Low-income economies do need to maintain considerable ... GDP growth rates ... if per capita incomes are to improve. The high-income economies, on the other hand, need to depart on a path of very low or zero GDP growth, since goods are available in abundance, and access to consumption goods is an issue of distribution, not production. Only a combination of post-growth in the “North” and economic growth, albeit low in resource-intensity, in the “South” will be compatible with re-stabilising the planet’s ecosystems.” [Koehler 2016]

“The [SDG] goal of promoting economic growth needs to be seriously qualified for middle and high income countries, if the sustainability objectives ... are to be realized.” [Stewart 2015]

“the impossibility of unlimited economic growth has become increasingly evident ... an economic model based on the unrestrained extraction, trade, and consumption of natural resources ... enriches the affluent, exacerbates the plight of the poor, and accelerates Earth system destruction. ... The primary cause of global environmental degradation is the over-consumption of the planet’s finite resources by global elites located primarily in the global North. ... While global elites reap the benefits of unsustainable economic activity, the South and the planet’s most vulnerable communities bear a disproportionate share of the resulting pollution and resource depletion.” [Gonzalez 2017]

### **3.1 The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs, or Agenda 2030) are misfounded, being based on economic growth for all.**

“an SDG index ... assess[es] countries’ average performance on SDGs. Ranking high on the SDG index strongly correlates with high per person demand on nature (or “Footprints”), and low ranking with low Footprints, making evident that the SDGs as expressed today vastly underperform on sustainability. ... the Ecological Footprint of the index’s top 20 ranking countries is so large that if all other countries consumed at the same rate, it would take the ecological capacity of over three planet Earths to materially support all of humanity. This level of demand on the planet is clearly not sustainable. ... Ignoring physical constraints imposed by planetary limits is anti-poor because with fewer resources to go around, the lowest-income people will lack the financial means to shield themselves from resource constraints, whether it is food-price shocks, weather calamities, or energy and water shortages. All the legitimate and important development gains the SDGs seek to achieve will fall tragically short without the natural capital to power the economy of each nation, region, city, or village.” [Wackernagel and others 2017]

“Key shortcomings include that the SDGs prioritize economic growth and frame it as the solution to poverty ... goal 8 ... aims to “Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth” ... Target 8.4 ... only “endeavors” to decouple economic growth from environmental degradation, leaving sustained growth as the ... misguided objective” [Lim and others 2018]

“[the SDGs do not] recognize the biophysical limits to economic growth: While recognizing ecological limits, the[y] do not see the inherent contradiction between these same limits and unending economic growth.” [Kothari and others 2014]

“‘climate compatible development’ (CCD) ... introduces a framework for aligning climate change and development trajectories in such a way that minimises the harm caused by climate impacts, while maximising the human development opportunities created by low carbon emissions initiatives. ... A more critical engagement with the political economy of CCD, and of whose definitions and values count within the CCD agenda, is required to make sense of CCD, both conceptually and as a policy goal and to assess and guide its impacts on both national policies and development practices” [Ficklin and others 2018]

“massive planetary exploitation ... increases the risk of consigning future generations of humans to the deprived category. ... from a strictly anthropocentric perspective, attempts at SD [Sustainable Development] fail in the intergenerational dimension, without which the term sustainable makes no sense. ... Agenda 2030 ... includes the goal to promote per capita economic growth ... SD ... argues for balance between human endeavours and planetary resources, but refuses to abandon growth as an overarching independent goal ... two relevant options emerge, both of which are challenging dominant interpretations of SD: radical change in behaviour, or the invalidity of the term sustainable in the human context.” [Bonnedaahl and others 2019]

“some SDG targets could paradoxically result in promoting pathways to development that will deepen environmental problems rather than reducing them, such as promoting sustained economic growth (target 8.1) ... Although SDG 8 ‘endeavour[s] to decouple economic growth from environmental degradation’ (target 8.3), this is not a strong enough commitment to ensure that economic growth does not continue at the detriment of the environment.” [Schleicher and others 2018]

“Despite a later sub-clause that includes ‘endeavour to decouple economic growth from environmental degradation’, the objective of economic growth is not questioned but endorsed. ... If sustainability is to be achieved, the goal of achieving economic growth should be seriously amended.” [Stewart 2015]

### **3.2 There is no convincing evidence that absolute decoupling (of economic growth from growth in use of material and energy resources) is possible.**

“decoupling[’s] main objective [is] to promote ‘non-material economic growth’ that minimizes physical growth based in material resources, thereby increasing the gap between economic value, resource use, and environmental impact—a dynamic termed ‘dematerialization’. ... the 2014 [UNEP] report admits, ‘breaking the link between human well-being and resource consumption is necessary and possible but in reality is hardly happening’ ... While asserting the necessity of dramatic decoupling for any hope of genuine sustainable development, in short, UNEP simultaneously admits that: (1) there is virtually no evidence that (absolute) decoupling works; (2) the conceptual basis for even imagining its possibility is weak; and (3) even if it were possible, it would be politically infeasible. ... Even so-called non-material economic activity has material consequences in terms of both inputs and outputs.” [Fletcher and Rammelt 2016]

“The argument that human society can decouple economic growth—defined as growth in Gross Domestic Product (GDP)—from growth in environmental impacts is appealing ... growth in GDP ultimately cannot be decoupled from growth in material and energy use. ... In the context of reaching planetary boundaries and global environmental limits, [t]he only way to achieve truly sustainable growth would be via permanent absolute decoupling. ... there is little evidence that GDP growth can be decoupled in the long-term (i.e. it is not sustainable). If GDP growth as a societal goal is unsustainable, then it is ultimately necessary ... to transition to a steady or declining GDP scenario. ... it will be easier to start this transition now ... rather than ... post 2050 ... now is the time to recognize the biophysical limits, and to begin ... re-orienting society around a more achievable and satisfying set of goals

than simply growing forever” [Ward and others 2016]

“global warming ... and the latent poisoning of oceans and landmasses have tarnished the belief that developed nations are at the head of social evolution. On the contrary, progress has often turned out to be regression, since the economic system of the Global North cannot do without systematic exploitation of nature. Analyses, from ‘Limits to Growth’ in 1972 to ‘Planetary Boundaries’ in 2009, are crystal clear: Development-as-Growth is leading to a planet that is inhospitable to human life. ... the development in SDGs is a semantic delusion. ... On the one hand, the Agenda 2030 recognises the decline of ocean-ecosystems and the increasing social inequality, but on the other hand, it calls for economic growth ... Although the decarbonisation of the global economy was unanimously proposed in 2015, nobody seems to know how it would work without further depleting biodiversity. ... absolute decoupling (increasing growth while decreasing environmental degradation) has never been achieved in history.” [Sachs 2017]

“The green economy/green growth discourse is ... based on obfuscating contradictions between economic and ecological sustainability. This paper highlights the inherent conflicts and contradictions of green growth strategies, critiquing as myth the central tenet of decoupling growth from environmental resources and degradation ... the idea [of] a green economy based on economic growth is grounded in the false belief that there are no ecological limits to growth.” [Wanner 2015]

### **3.3 Alternatives are needed to the growth and development approaches of the SDGs**

“The SDGs offer important new opportunities for addressing environment–poverty linkages in a more holistic and integrated manner. ... achieving these ambitious goals will need to stay clear of maintaining the status quo and to result in more radical transformations.” [Schleicher and others 2018]

“the SDG Agenda ... is ultimately affirmative of the current economic, social and ecological status quo, rather than offering a genuinely transformative agenda. ... One strand of ... alternative thinking can be gleaned from green and ecological movements and sufficiency economics. ... Despite their diverse philosophical orientations and divergent analytical roots, such alternative theories tend to agree that ... ever accelerating accumulation ... is ... the cause of cumulative degradation of the planet. These approaches ... argue that economic decisions must be made subordinate to the overarching ethics of rights to ecological and social justice. ... the 2030 Agenda is affirmative of the current economic and political system. ... While appearing progressive, the Agenda ... may reinforce and stabilise the inherently ... ecologically destructive economic and political dynamics.” [Koehler 2016]

“Defined as a holistic, de-economized view of social life, Buen Vivir ‘constitutes an alternative to development’ ... BV makes possible the subordination of economic objectives to ecological criteria, human dignity, and social justice. ... growth and the economy should be subordinated to BV ... not the other way around” [Escobar 2015]

“Two approaches are possible. One is to modify the objective such that for all countries with per capita income above the global average, economic growth should only be pursued as long as environmental objectives – including climate change – are realized. Another is to revise national accounts and measures of economic growth to include the negatives of environmental damage, so non-sustainable elements will detract from growth. That is to replace current measures of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) by ‘Green GDP’. ... The years ... to ... 2030 are critical ones for climate change. This is not an issue which can be postponed to next set of goals, but must be faced now.” [Stewart 2015]

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**My background and my reason for submitting evidence:** Since 2011 I been independently researching international law, international relations and climate change. Several findings from my research are directly relevant to this inquiry.