

**Bond Child Rights Working Group Written Submission to the IDC on Effectiveness of UK Aid and the work of the Department for International Development (DFID)**

1. We welcome the opportunity to provide evidence to the International Development Select Committee. The Bond Child Rights Working Group (CRWG) is a network of 50+ UK-based INGOs working to promote and uphold children rights in the UK and overseas. This submission draws on the breadth of our members' expertise on issues facing children generally and in humanitarian and development contexts.
2. The CRWG praises the UK Government's commitment to spending 0.7% of GDP on Overseas Development Assistance (ODA). To maintain leadership on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and fulfil the commitment to leave no one behind, administration of UK Aid must principally remain with the experts in DFID, with cross-government focus on targeting aid according to human rights principles.
3. Children make up the majority population of the least developed countries and, even before COVID-19, one quarter of the world's children live in areas affected by conflict, natural disaster and epidemic. Children comprise a significant element of the 'world's most vulnerable' targeted in the UK Government's 2015 strategy on overseas aid – particularly in relation to violence and exploitation – the eradication of which is an SDG commitment. Achieving the SDGs requires targeted ODA, with sustained, cross-government, coordinated investment in the world's most vulnerable children.

**The definition and administration of UK Aid**

4. The Development Assistance Committee of the OECD requires assistance to have the "promotion of the economic development and welfare of developing countries as its main objective" in order to be considered ODA. In order to ensure sustainable development, 'economic development' and 'welfare' must ensure that no one is left behind and be determined using a human rights lens.
5. DFID has the expertise, experience and purchasing power to make responsible decisions on targeting and spending ODA to support achievement of the SDGs most effectively for those most likely to be left behind. ODA spending must stay primarily within its remit to achieve this.
6. As child rights organisations, we understand the contribution made by DFID to global UK commitments on behalf of children. Recent examples include the Disability Inclusion Strategy (including the commitment to deinstitutionalisation); leadership on the Call to Action to end forced labour, modern slavery and human trafficking; Secretary of State representation on the Board of the Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children; and the Strategic Vision for Gender Equality; leadership in achieving the government's commitment to 12 years of education for all girls; and establishment of a Protecting Children Hub within the department.

7. DFID must be the strategic lead for overseas development; the progress made in these areas risks being stalled or, worse, will have been in vain if responsibility, political decision-making and accountability is shifted. We strongly believe DFID must remain an independent and fully supported government department with permanent cabinet representation.
8. Nonetheless, we recognise that no department can achieve the government's commitments alone – cross-government cooperation and investment are required. Positive examples of cross-government work include: the cross-government Modern Slavery Strategy; and the National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security. However, frequent changes in leadership at DFID and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) and resulting development of different initiatives (e.g. on girls' education, sexual violence, and violence against women and girls) has resulted in competing and faulty strategic framing. The lack of cross-government approach to protecting children overseas creates inefficiencies and means more children are likely to be left behind.

### **Effectiveness and transparency in UK aid spent by DFID compared to other Government departments and to cross-Government funds**

9. DFID have strong measures for ensuring transparency of UK aid spend. We would specifically like to highlight the good examples of accountability frameworks and mechanisms included in DFID's Disability Inclusion Strategy and its delivery plan.<sup>1</sup>
10. However, further accountability frameworks and mechanisms are needed, for example, relating to UK aid spend supporting children. A 2017 review of ODA to end violence against children, commissioned by leading child rights organisations<sup>2</sup> recommended individual donors systematically track spending to end violence against children as a separate category. The UK's high-ranking position of its investment in children globally gives it a key opportunity to use a child well-being marker for its internal databases – such as was developed by Canada – to track spending on children's rights.
11. Ensuring transparency and effectiveness in UK aid spent by DFID is especially important given the increasing trend to disburse ODA funds via the private sector. For example, the UK is rightly recognised as a global champion for girls' education. However, an evaluation of the Strategic Partnerships Window for the Girls Education Challenge Fund found that the corporate implementers were often unable to reach marginalised girls – the primary target beneficiaries.<sup>3</sup> This raises concerns about the role of the private sector in education and the ineffectiveness of allowing profit-making to supersede a child rights approach.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/760999/Disability-Inclusion-Strategy-delivery-plan.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/760999/Disability-Inclusion-Strategy-delivery-plan.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> ChildFund Alliance, Save the Children, SOS Children's Villages International, World Vision International, and Development Initiatives, 2017, Counting Pennies: A review of official development assistance to end violence against children, available at [https://www.wvi.org/sites/default/files/Counting\\_Pennies\\_WEB\\_FINAL.pdf](https://www.wvi.org/sites/default/files/Counting_Pennies_WEB_FINAL.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

12. It is difficult to provide evidence for the effectiveness of other government departments' spending on UK Aid as there is little information available – 7 out of 10 government departments are failing to meet aid transparency targets.<sup>4</sup> For instance, the Ministry of Defence and FCO publish limited information about their aid spending, which means they are not held to external account by higher level forums such as the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development.

### **Definition and weight of “national interest” in relation to targeting UK aid**

13. Economic, political and military interests currently play a significant role in shaping what is seen as “national interest”. But the definition of “national interest” should also include the role the UK plays in the global community. The UK government has shown its commitment to reducing poverty, tackling inequality and promoting human rights, by ratifying a range of UN human rights treaties as well as playing a leading role in championing the SDGs on the global stage.

14. Definitions of the national interest should take into account the importance of the UK's soft power and the interconnection between maintaining stability and security in the UK and reducing levels of poverty, inequality and injustice around the world.

### Addressing inequality, focusing on children and others most vulnerable

15. Achievement of the SDGs and the commitment to leave no one behind must be a national interest priority. The UK has committed to being at the forefront of delivering the SDGs.<sup>5</sup> This commitment must not be outweighed by other interests if the UK is to maintain its global standing, as well promoting stability and security at home.

16. Realisation of the SDGs and our commitment to leave no one behind can only be achieved through sustained investment in children. The protection of children is now, for the first time, a global development priority through the SDGs. The world's governments have set ambitious targets to end violence against girls and boys by 2030 and have committed to investing in children through the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, which recognizes that “investing in children and youth is critical to achieving inclusive, equitable and sustainable development for present and future generations.”<sup>6</sup>

17. We commend the UK as a leading donor in ending violence against children, both in terms of total ending violence against children spending (circa \$20 million, 4th overall) and funding for ending violence against children-specific projects (circa \$30 million, 3rd overall).<sup>7</sup> This commitment to the SDGs, and leading investment in children as a major

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<sup>4</sup> How Transparent is UK Aid, A review of ODA spending departments , Publish What You Fund, January 2020, [https://www.publishwhatyoufund.org/wp-content/uploads/dlm\\_uploads/2020/01/How-Transparent-is-UK-Aid\\_Digital.pdf](https://www.publishwhatyoufund.org/wp-content/uploads/dlm_uploads/2020/01/How-Transparent-is-UK-Aid_Digital.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/implementing-the-sustainable-development-goals/implementing-the-sustainable-development-goals--2>

<sup>6</sup> Addis Ababa Action Agenda of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development, endorsed by General Assembly Resolution 69/313 of 27 July 2015, [https://www.un.org/esa/ffd/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/AAAA\\_Outcome.pdf](https://www.un.org/esa/ffd/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/AAAA_Outcome.pdf)

constituent within this, must therefore continue in the UK's national and global interests.

18. Using ODA to reduce levels of violence and exploitation and invest in children's survival, health and education, is often promoted as an economic imperative. ODA investments are intended to maximise human capital and unlock the economic potential of low- and middle-income contexts, where children comprise a considerable proportion of the population.<sup>8</sup> In humanitarian contexts, the imperative is even greater, with significant numbers of children experiencing distinct vulnerabilities – for example, children in institutions, with disabilities, living on the streets, or separated from family. DFID has already recognised that adolescent girls face particular risks.
19. The COVID19 pandemic has highlighted the urgent need for investment in child protection systems as well as child and family resilience. Current reports from BOND CRWG members indicate that COVID-19 will result in wide-ranging physical, emotional and health harms to girls and boys (including an increase in domestic child abuse). In countries like Kenya, childcare institutions are being closed, forcing already vulnerable children (many with disabilities and healthcare problems) onto the streets where they are unable to self-isolate, are arrested and have significantly less access to food or hygiene.

#### Eliminating poverty and addressing its impacts: a rights-based approach

20. Whilst the economic case for investment is important, ODA should also be driven by rights-based approaches and a commitment to promoting and upholding fundamental human rights.<sup>9</sup> The COVID-19 pandemic has made clear that the UK's national interest should not be restricted to economic benefit, and that investing in the rights and development of people (eg, the healthcare, child protection and social protection systems) in all countries is in the UK's best interests.
21. A human rights based approach - in line with the UK's human rights treaty commitments (including to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities) must hold greater weight than economic or political interests when determining ODA spend.
22. A child rights based approach would:
  - Enable more rigorous analysis of children's circumstances in diverse contexts;
  - Recognise that 'childhood' is a unique period of rapid physical and psychological development and is understood and constructed differently across diverse contexts; and
  - Recognise the active role that children can and should play as rights-holders and stakeholders.

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Counting Pennies, supra note 2.

<sup>9</sup> The Impact of Rights-based Approaches to Development - Evaluation / Learning Process, Bangladesh, Malawi and Peru (Inter-Agency Group on Rights Based Approaches) 2007

23. When initiatives engage children to solicit their views and opinions and enable them to play a role in defining and implementing solutions, they build agency, empower children and actively develop children's capacities for pro-social and citizenship behaviour. These are the competences required to build democracies, tackle injustice and eliminate cross-generational poverty.<sup>10</sup>

#### Addressing the impacts of poverty

24. As a government that has invested heavily in efforts to end modern slavery and the worst forms of child labour, girls education and deinstitutionalisation, the UK's progress on these issues will be in vain if it ignores the learning from the current health crisis and the work on safeguarding to date.

25. As the economic shock of COVID-19 impacts families and reduces their abilities meet basic needs there is a heightened risk that children and families will turn to negative coping mechanisms, with the possibility of millions of children being driven into child marriage, hazardous labour, trafficking and survival sex. For families already living in poverty, routine health crises such as an ill parent can lead to children being forced into slavery.<sup>11</sup> Although unconditional cash transfers to families living in poverty can help,<sup>12</sup> the COVID-19 and Ebola pandemics have highlighted the need for healthcare and social protection systems that can, at the very least, manage the peak demands of health crises.

26. It is in the UK's national interest to invest in systems strengthening to mitigate the risks and reduce the impacts of pandemics such as COVID-19 and, increasingly, other global crises such as conflict and climate change. Failing to invest in strengthening the resilience of weak national and international systems risks global instability and contributes to increased irregular migration flows. This has the potential to undo the last 30 years of ODA investments.<sup>13</sup>

#### Safeguarding

27. The progress made since the UK government hosted the Safeguarding Summit in 2018 must be recognised and not be lost in weighing the "national interests" for the purposes of targeting ODA. It is a fundamental part of the national interest to ensure that ODA investments 'do no harm' and efforts must be sustained to ensure that the most vulnerable are effectively safeguarded.

28. However, more must be done. The current safeguarding framework which focuses on Preventing Sexual Abuse, Exploitation and Harassment, potentially excludes more children than it protects. This framework is ineffective in the absence of broader, contextually relevant child protection systems which understand, identify and respond

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<sup>10</sup> See The Missing Peace: Independent Progress Study on Youth, Peace and Security, UNFPA and PBSO, 2018, available at <https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/youth/youth-web-english.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> Burns, D., Oosterhoff, P., Raj, A., Nanda, R. (2015) Patterns and dynamics of slavery and bonded labour in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh: Findings from life story analysis, Institute of Development Studies

<sup>12</sup> Danmert, A.C., de Hoop, J., Mvukiyeh, E., Furio, C.R. (2017) Effects of Public Policy on Child Labour, World Bank Policy Research Paper 7999.

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2020/apr/29/coronavirus-could-undo-30-years-of-uks-international-development-work>

to the complex risks and vulnerabilities faced by children. There is an urgent need to invest in longer term in strengthening of protective systems for children. Strong systems are holistic and intersectoral, requiring effective co-ordination between health, education and social welfare.

### **Definition, administration and targeting of ODA elsewhere in the world**

29. Several countries provide examples from which the UK could take lessons in the administration and targeting of ODA, including:

- Ensuring coordination across ministries and departments;
- Focusing on children as among those most likely to be left behind, rather than seeing them as a ‘special interest group’; and
- Perceiving the welfare and sustainable development of people in other countries as in the national interest.

30. A salient recent example of cross-departmental cooperation that guides ODA to children is the United States adoption of the development aid strategy ‘Advancing Protection and Care for Children in Adversity.’<sup>14</sup> This programme is based on legislative measures and development funding is distributed and overseen by USAID. The strategy was created with the help of several governmental agencies, including the Centers for Disease Control, National Institutes of Health, Bureau of International Labor Affairs, the U.S. State Department, and the Global AIDS Coordinator.<sup>15</sup> While these agencies are part of the Executive Branch, Congress adopted the legislation and funded the programme and continues to provide budgeting oversight as mandated in the Constitution. Cross-departmental cooperation on ODA by the US Government is mirrored by civil society where INGOs collaborate to inform implementation and provide technical expertise.

31. Foreign aid in the United States is statutorily mandated under the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961. From the beginning, the goal has been nurturing collaborative efforts to lift up those most in need while strengthening the government’s ability to care for its own citizens. While the language used by the U.S. is not rights-based, it does provide a robust model of a centralized agency controlling the distribution of funds and programmes receiving aid.

32. In contrast, Germany does not have a statutory basis for distributing foreign aid, however there is a great deal of inter-departmental cooperation in its administration.<sup>16</sup> The Coalition government, through parliament, has oversight of the executive branch and therefore provides a check on the budgeting process.<sup>17</sup> The Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (Bundesministerium für wirtschaftliche Zusammenarbeit und Entwicklung, BMZ) shapes developmental policy for approval by

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<sup>14</sup> *Advancing Protection and Care for Children in Adversity: A U.S. Government Strategy for International Assistance*, 2019-2023

<sup>15</sup> Ibid

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.loc.gov/law/help/foreign-aid/germany.php>, last visited 27 April 2020

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

the Federal Cabinet, and also determines which bilateral development projects will be undertaken.<sup>18</sup> Additionally, the Federal Ministry of Finance is involved in budgeting and oversight, along with other ministries such as the Federal Ministry for Environment, Nature Conservation, and Nuclear Safety, the Federal Foreign Office, and the Federal Ministry of Defense (for providing humanitarian aid).<sup>19</sup>

33. In Sweden, foreign aid is administered by separate agencies with specific thematic areas; however, those areas tend to overlap, such as peace and security and development cooperation.<sup>20</sup> To help with coordination, the Swedish government adopted a Politics for Global Development (PGD) approach.<sup>21</sup> The aim of this policy is not only coordinating efforts among the aid agencies, but also across government as a whole, to ensure efficiency in efforts to foster development.<sup>22</sup>

## Conclusion

34. We recognise the important role that the UK plays in delivering the SDGs – with commitments to eradicate extreme poverty, fight inequality and injustice and leave no one behind.

35. To maintain UK leadership and fulfil these commitments, the Bond Child Rights Working Group recommends the following:

- Continue DFID as an independent department, with primary administration of UK Aid.
- Create a blueprint for cross departmental collaboration and policy coordination across ministries and departments.
- Ensure the definition of “national interest” takes into account, not only the economic and political interests in the UK, but also the UK’s commitments to human rights and the interconnection between maintaining stability and security in the UK and achievement of the SDGs.
- Develop better monitoring frameworks and mechanisms for internal and external accountability, including to systematically track spending for children, as they most likely to be left behind.

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid

<sup>19</sup> Ibid

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.loc.gov/law/help/foreign-aid/sweden.php>, last visited 27 April, 2020.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid

<sup>22</sup> Ibid