

Aid and International Development



BACKGROUND

The commitment to spend 0.7% of national income on overseas aid has been enshrined in law since 2015. Despite this commitment, the Government recently slashed the aid budget meaning only 0.5% of national income is now spent on overseas aid.

What's more, this diminishing aid pot is increasingly being spent in the UK rather than going overseas to tackle global poverty. As a result, there has been a whopping 40% reduction in aid spending overseas since 2020.

It is not only the reduction in the amount spent that is a concern. There has also been worrying cuts to aid spending on projects that support healthcare, education and supporting women and girls, which has happened alongside the closure of the dedicated Department for International Development (DFID).

Aid is increasingly spent in ways that prioritises the UK's national interest over tackling the causes of global poverty, injustice or the climate crisis.

For example, between 2015 -2022, over £4 billion went to the UK's development finance initiative, British International Investment (BII), formerly known as CDC. BII has come under intense criticism¹ from CAFOD and other development agencies for its ongoing investments in fossil fuel projects, and its other spurious investments that struggle to show meaningful impact on reducing poverty. These include supporting the development of shopping malls and investing in for-profit private healthcare.

We know that aid is not the solution to all the world's problems, but it is an important tool in the fight against poverty, injustice and the climate crisis. When spent well, it can transform, or even save, lives. It is vital, therefore, that it is spent intentionally.

Although the Government has recently released a new White Paper² on international development, which demonstrates a renewed commitment in this area, it sadly did not commit to restoring the aid budget to 0.7%. And while there were some welcome promises made, including ensuring more aid reaches the poorest countries in future, the paper ultimately lacked the scale of ambition needed to address some of the world's great challenges.

WHAT CAN WE DO?

During this year's general election, we know that domestic issues will dominate the agenda, but it is nonetheless a vital time for us to remind our candidates of the UK's duty on the global stage. As one of the world's wealthiest countries, we must play a role in eradicating global poverty and suffering.

It is vital candidates know that their constituents will hold them accountable for their approach to overseas development.

We need candidates up and down the country to hear the calls for the UK to restore the UK aid budget to 0.7%, and commit to spending all aid money in ways that tackle the root causes of global poverty, injustice and climate change. That includes an end to any new funds going to BII and other aid programmes that can't demonstrate a tangible impact on poverty reduction.

CASE STUDY

When the then Prime Minister, Boris Johnson, announced a reduction in the aid budget in 2021, the Zambian bishop the Rev George Cosmas Zumaire Lungu, wrote a letter to Boris Johnson³, reminding him that Britain became wealthy thanks to the extraction of resources from countries such as his own. In pointing out the historical and unequal relationship between the two nations, he urged Johnson not to slash the UK's overseas aid spending.

Mr Lungu's message highlights that our approach to aid must be informed by an awareness of the colonial roots of today's world order and should be seen not as a favour or a charitable gift, but one part of the duty that Britain owes to the world.

QUESTIONS FOR YOUR CANDIDATES

1. The UK has slashed its aid budget, turning its back on the fight against global poverty. Will you, if elected, agree to restore the aid budget to 0.7% of national income, as agreed in the International Development Act, and show that we are a country committed to making the world a better place for all?
2. Our overseas aid budget has not only been cut, but the department for international development has been shut down, and much of the remaining aid money has been redirected to domestic spending. Can you let me know what you will do to ensure Britain restores its aid budget and supports people across the world who are living in poverty?

MORE INFORMATION

- In 2022, almost one third of UK aid was spent in the UK on things such as housing refugees, instead of being spent overseas on tackling poverty.⁴
- Aid cuts have resulted in a 76% decline in aid to Afghanistan, and 45% decline to Yemen.⁵ NGOs have warned that this will have a particularly negative impact on women and girls who will be left without vital services.
- The World Health Organisation (WHO) lost 95% of the UK's contribution to the Global Polio Eradication Initiative when the budget was cut, which could have helped vaccinate 380 million children.⁶

1 <https://cafod.org.uk/about-us/policy-and-research/parliamentary-submissions/cafod-response-to-uk-s-investment-for-development>

2 <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-unveils-white-paper-to-set-approach-to-global-development>

3 <https://bit.ly/483TtJ>

4 <https://www.devex.com/news/nearly-one-third-of-2022-uk-aid-spent-on-refugees-at-home-says-watchdog-105230>

5 <https://committees.parliament.uk/committee/98/international-development-committee/news/196820/international-development-committee-reveals-real-world-impact-of-cuts-to-uk-aid/>

6 <https://www.bond.org.uk/news/2021/05/uk-aid-cuts-little-information-but-devastating-consequences/>