

# **UK FCDO International Development White Paper: Call for evidence**

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## **Question 1**

**How do partnerships need to change to restore the credibility of international development and the multilateral system and regain the trust of Global South?**

**What role should the UK play in this and what specifically should we do differently?**

**What should we do to ensure we are listening better to those most in need?**

At International Alert, we believe that violent conflict can only be resolved sustainably by those directly affected by it. This means those working on peacebuilding (as well as humanitarian and development) need to have strong, equitable partnerships with local communities and civil society organisations.

Trust has been damaged with existing partners in the Global South due to the cuts to development aid. People feel let down by the ending of programmes before they have been completed. To restore credibility the UK must restore its development spending. In many places projects were cut mid-way through, leaving participants and implementers in difficult places. For the UK to be credible it should ensure civil society organisations are fairly compensated. The UK should not let geopolitics or internal politics govern its development decisions as this also reduces trust. For example, with the agreements to send asylum seekers to Rwanda, the UK has damaged its credibility in the DRC. The UK must understand the impact of this kind of decision on their ability to deliver on their international development portfolio. Decisions should be taken in a way that does not cause or exacerbate conflict.

Engage with those most in need directly. Our partners and participants views are gradually diluted as they are passed up the chain from partners to INGOs to the FCDO, where they are condensed into a few sentences in a policy paper or report. The FCDO should create spaces to ensure those most in need are heard directly at multiple levels (FCDO HQ, embassies and regional offices). Listen directly to the voices of the marginalised in the way they want them to be articulated and project them to Ministers and other high-level decisionmakers in a way that is organic and grounded.

Ensure localisation as a concept is owned by those who need and will be impacted by it. Local actors have not necessarily been involved in Global North discussions on localisation and have their own ideas about what this concept means. There needs to be an organic process of developing what localisation looks like in different spaces - grounding it in a way that makes it work in local contexts and inclusive of marginalised groups, such as women, girls and LGBTIQ+ communities.

In many situations, civil societies and governments are in tension. The FCDO needs to take into account the difference between partnerships with government and partnerships with civil society. For example, in Tunisia since the attack in Sousse in 2015, the government and the British embassy have stepped up military cooperation and this has left less room for civil cooperation. Everyone began to focus on prevention against violent extremism, forcing this agenda, which was not a priority in the Tunisian national context and has shrunk the space for civil society.

## **Question 2**

**What are the specific innovative proposals that can accelerate progress in international development?**

**What initiatives, policies, partnerships, or technologies could result in accelerated progress?**

**Are there big ideas on which the UK is particularly well placed to play a role?**

The UK's development strategy must focus on fragile and conflict-affected countries. 80% of poverty is found in fragile and conflict-affected countries, and 90% of aid goes to 20 countries, all in conflict. Development approaches over the next 20 years must be different from those of the last 20 years. Development, humanitarian aid, and peacebuilding should not be seen as separate disciplines but ones that are mutually reinforcing and share common objectives. The UK has lost the habit of setting high ambitions on international conflict issues and needs to step up its ambition, especially as a member of the UN Security Council.

To accelerate sustainable and long-term progress, the UK should ensure the financing of international development includes positive impacts on building peace. This involves intentionally integrating peace outcomes into the design of interventions, going beyond safeguarding and doing no harm to positively influencing peace. They should address conflict dynamics, such as socio-economic inequalities, exploitation of weak governance or historic grievances and as a result contribute to a more peaceful society.

The UK should also identify ways to support South-South collaboration and exchange. They should look to create opportunities for strategic partnerships across sectors, such as development, conflict prevention, climate change, that respond to diverse needs. Breaking down siloes and allowing space for holistic approaches is vital to address the complex web of issues that vulnerable populations face.

There are many ideas out there that have been around for a while but aren't happening. These will be different depending on the context they originate in and need to serve. The UK should listen to and trust local peacebuilders and other civil society organisations to carry out smaller innovations that are adapted to their context, especially in contexts affected by conflict which have their own delicate dynamics. This is crucial for interventions led by marginalised groups as they understand their own unique vulnerabilities. The UK should ensure it follows through on its commitment to increase direct funding to women-led organisations in its fifth national action plan on women, peace and security.

A big idea on which the UK is well-placed to play a role is to work with others, including multinational entities, to eliminate competition by changing funding models. So much time and resource go into competing for funds that could be used to deliver impactful work. The UK should consider what they can do to change this to accelerate progress.

### Question 3

**What new ideas for development cooperation would make the biggest impact in, or for, low income countries?**

**What are the best ideas to accelerate progress for middle income countries which still have large numbers of poor people?**

Centre conflict prevention and peacebuilding in all development programming. Even for middle-income countries the reason for poverty is linked to conflict. Violent conflict gets in the way of development and prevents people from building their own sustainable futures. When approaching development, the UK should conduct conflict analysis to ensure programmes meet peoples' needs on the ground, don't make destabilising conflicts worse and to identify possible opportunities to bring about peace, which is needed to ensure development works in the long term.

Development and peacebuilding programmes do not always go to plan in conflict settings and cannot be completed on short timescales. They need to be given space to adapt and be tailored to individual contexts. The UK should provide flexible, long-term and accessible financing for local organisations for both low- and middle-income countries. Given the specific needs of conflict contexts and their importance to ending poverty, the UK could set up an innovative new fund for peacebuilding and conflict prevention that can address the unique needs of conflict contexts.

Address the sources of inequality directly. Take all actors into account, including the private sector. Work with national governments and multinational entities to ensure land revenues and job creation from private sector activity is being shared in communities and not funnelled outside the country. Strong governance is essential for this to work. The UK should keep working with and supporting countries on governance, looking at what is working already and what needs to change.

Fund facilities to open the door for small and medium enterprises (SMEs) to funding opportunities, especially for those run by vulnerable groups, such as women or LGBTIQ+ persons, who are excluded from mainstream economic opportunities. For example, International Alert works with women cross-border traders in the Great Lakes region to allow them to navigate conflict dynamics and contribute to building cohesion between communities. This facility should include a credit guarantee scheme to enable them to access to loans, provide capacity building for SMEs, enable SMEs to operate in contexts with conflict dynamics (e.g. corruption, military groups controlling borders), and support them to navigate customs and regulations when they are small or operate in informal spaces.

Ensure the green transition is just and conflict sensitive. The rush to net zero is driving massive global investment in renewable energy, but this can [cause or exacerbate conflicts](#) and tensions in the world's most fragile areas if they are not done right. The UK must ensure the risk to conflict is not overlooked for the sake of accelerating the green transition and meeting environmental goals. Conflict and climate are fundamentally interlinked. Conflict impacted by environmental degradation will ultimately undermine the positive effects climate action aims to have.

## Question 4

**How can Official Development Assistance (ODA) be most effectively targeted and built upon?**

**How can non-ODA financing be mobilised to ensure ambitious, innovative, and transformational international development?**

Peace positive outcomes should be integrated into all financing where possible. The UK needs to develop a conflict sensitivity policy to guide all types of financing in all conflict-affected areas. This should have standards for risk mitigation, but also highlight opportunities for peace positive investment. For example, the UK could build an indicator framework for investments that generate positive impact, such as supporting social cohesion, gender equality and other indicators of positive peace. In particular, climate finance in fragile countries should always include development outcomes and take a conflict sensitive approach as these issues are intrinsically interlinked.

Conflicts have long-lasting impacts on welfare and economic stability that are felt around the world. The cost of conflict globally is \$14.4 trillion, equivalent to 10.5% of the global gross domestic product or \$1,895 per person, and the Institute for Economics and Peace has estimated that every \$1 invested in peace building saves \$16 in costs due to conflict. Preventing conflicts before they wreak destruction makes sense. Doubling the proportion of U.K. development aid spent on conflict prevention and peace building from 2% to 4% would enable the scaling up of tried and tested methods that allow communities themselves to counter threats to peace that affect them, such as mis- and disinformation and exploitation of divisions by powerful elites.

We need a return to 0.7% and for this to all be spent overseas. The 2023 Global Peace Index shows for the ninth consecutive year a worsening trend towards conflict and instability. The world is severely off track to meet the UN SDGs. There is a clear case for putting more money into peacebuilding and development, not less.

## Question 5

**How should scientific and technological expertise, private finance and the private sector, trade and investment, civil society networks and diplomacy be engaged to support global development action and accelerate progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)?**

It is widely acknowledged that public funding is not going to be enough to fund the SDGs. Yet the majority of environmental, social and governance investments are in advanced economies. Only 1% of global flows of foreign direct investment is made in fragile and conflict-affected settings, even though they hold 80% of world poverty. We need new models for peace positive investment. Public-private partnership models and DFIs can de-risk investments by providing partial funding, technical facilities and guarantees. These are particularly important in conflict-affected countries, as there is a lack of investment due to high logistical risks and high premiums on loans and financing due to conflict dynamics.

De-risking activities can have a positive impact on peace. DFIs or government departments in charge of development should use peacebuilding approaches to design projects that reduce risk premiums and at the same time support local organisations on the ground. This can double the impact of the same investment.

It is not an option for any organisation or institution to stand alone on issues of global development. Civil society, businesses and the state need to collaborate with someone in the middle as a bridge. Generally, this bridging role is played by international organisations using funding for implementing projects. Almost everywhere issues with or the lack of data collection and sharing are holding up progress on development and collaboration between organisations. A scientific approach developed by scientists and academics should be used to collect this data.

To give an example, the impact of climate change and water shortages in Central Asia is an unknown, but internationally scientists agree it is an area of interest. It is also an area of great conflict. The roots of this conflict are the border not being marked properly and high levels of water scarcity. There is a lack of understanding of how much water volume is available and where it flows. Technologies are available to assess and monitor this. Collecting and sharing this data would ensure accountability and build trust between countries, which is currently lacking.

## **Question 6**

**How can progress on tackling ending poverty, economic growth, and the challenges of climate change be best brought together, in the context of Agenda 2030 (including building resilience, adaptation, and sustainable growth)?**

**How can the opportunities be maximised? How can the limits and trade-offs be managed?**

Conflict is increasingly at the root of (caused by and consequence of) poverty and slow economic growth. Without considering conflict, there will be limited success in development and climate action. Conflict sensitivity needs to be paramount when developing strategies. Peacebuilding as an approach draws all these issues together.

The relationship between climate and conflict is complex. Climate extremes and variability are threatening the livelihoods, food security, health and wellbeing of millions of people worldwide, with those living in fragile and conflict-affected states disproportionately affected. Today 70% of the world's most climate-vulnerable countries are at high risk of climate-related conflict, driving the urgent need for action on climate security issues.

These same states are most likely to have weak governance and institutions and high levels of social and economic inequality, leaving them ill-equipped to deal with the impacts of climate change. This can create or exacerbate community tensions and fragility with the potential to lead to violent conflict. Competition over natural resources – including land, forests and water – is a major driver of conflict, particularly in fragile states. Systematic, fair, inclusive and responsive natural resource governance is therefore vital to effective climate change adaptation and mitigation efforts and integral to preventing conflict.

Ensure decarbonisation is conflict and gender sensitive. Green energy projects can cause or exacerbate conflicts and tensions, nowhere more so than in the world's most fragile areas. In designing green energy strategies, governments and climate investors must fully recognise present and potential conflict situations, as well as gender inequalities, and what lies behind them.

Interventions will be much stronger if they are inclusive, equitable and ensure the rights of minorities are taken into account. Different marginalised groups will have additional and unique vulnerabilities so interventions must be intersectional. For example, the UK could

identify a range of locally-based women-led initiatives to lead or be part of climate adaptation activities. Bottom-up actions will be more effective than top down.

One of the major issues of climate finance initiatives, such as carbon credits, is the lack of inclusive consultations by lawmakers, meaning huge portions of the populations, usually marginalised groups, are left out of the law making and implementation process, with indigenous and agricultural communities being impacted the most, leading to internal and external conflicts.

Climate change, ending poverty and economic growth can all be spaces to do peacebuilding and peacebuilding will strengthen all these interventions in turn. The UK could support by providing spaces for NGOs that work on these issues to meet, exchange expertise and cooperate on programmes. For example, the Water, Peace and Security partnership has had success in using water resource management spaces to resolve conflicts over resources.

The UK could also consider how to rethink development and aid in the context of conflict and climate change. International Alert has found that peacebuilding programmes with economic development components are more effective. There is opportunity to explore this for climate programmes too.

## **Question 7**

**What are the top priorities for strengthening multilateral effectiveness in international development?**

**What are the issues and challenges most suited to bilateral cooperation (considering all levers)?**

The UK should identify ways to involve civil society in the debate and implementation of global policies. This means transparency in decision-making. The voices of civil society need to be more involved in multilateral forums.

At multilateral level, the UK should consider where the needs are and where the problems are in the current context. Institutions like the World Bank have not changed the way they work in fragile and conflict-ridden contexts. We need to push for the multilateral development system that was built up in the 1990s and 2000s to refocus on operating in a system of fragility.