

# **1** The United Kingdom's global efforts for sustainable development

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This chapter looks at the United Kingdom's global leadership on issues important to developing countries. It explores the United Kingdom's efforts to ensure that its domestic policies are coherent and in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, as well as its work to raise awareness of global development issues at home.

The chapter first reviews the United Kingdom's efforts to support global sustainable development, assessing its engagement and leadership on global public goods and challenges such as gender equality, poverty, inclusion, global health, violence against women, transparency, corruption and trade for development. It then evaluates whether the United Kingdom's own policies are coherent with sustainable development in developing countries. The chapter concludes by looking at the United Kingdom's promotion of global awareness of development and citizenship at home.

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# In brief

## Sustainable development is at the core of the United Kingdom's international policies

The United Kingdom's commitment to international development is central to its global brand. Using its economic stature, membership of key global fora and expertise, the United Kingdom has remained a resolute champion of tackling vulnerability, fragility, inequality and anti-corruption. The United Kingdom has maintained several consistent policy priorities and where relevant, has entrenched these in legislation. Over recent years, other priorities have been added leaving partners unclear on the United Kingdom's commitment to any one issue. Recent work on safeguards to prevent and address sexual exploitation, abuse and sexual harassment in the aid sector illustrates the United Kingdom's capacity and willingness to address difficult issues. The United Kingdom is a strong supporter of global monitoring frameworks for international commitments such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Grand Bargain.

Enabled by a powerful institutional system, with its own seat in cabinet and on the National Security Council, the Department for International Development (DFID) has brought the development agenda to bear on domestic policies. For instance, the partnership between DFID and the Department for International Trade (DIT) has paved the way for a bilateral trade preferences scheme for developing countries. Structures linked to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and integrated policy delivery through the Fusion Doctrine provide a platform for the United Kingdom to achieve policy coherence for sustainable development. Identifying clear priority issues and using transparent monitoring tools would be consistent with the new OECD Recommendation on Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development and would allow the United Kingdom to manage the impact of its domestic policies on developing countries. Managing both positive and negative impacts will grow in importance as the United Kingdom negotiates new bilateral agreements and relationships following its departure from the European Union (EU).

Faced with inflammatory and hostile elements of the United Kingdom (UK) media, DFID has developed a proactive and evidence-based communications strategy shaped by research, which targets journalists, policy makers and the wider public in order to defend the development co-operation programme. There is, however, little evidence that the current communication strategy is building a broader base of support for development co-operation. Better combining the objectives of defending UK aid and promoting global awareness and citizenship would be more consistent with the United Kingdom's modern vision for international development. In seeking this balance, it can build on lessons learnt from UK Aid Match and the Connecting Classrooms programme.

## Efforts to support global sustainable development

### ***Political weight and technical expertise underpin the United Kingdom's leadership on global development***

The United Kingdom's commitment to international development – backed by cross-party consensus over the review period – is central to its global brand. Using its economic stature and membership of key global

fora, the United Kingdom has remained a resolute champion of tackling vulnerability, fragility, inequality and anti-corruption. It advocates for investment in the poorest and most fragile countries, especially in infrastructure and sustainable economic development. The United Kingdom has thrown its full political weight behind a number of development agendas, with sustained engagement by the Prime Minister in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the London Initiative and Jordan Compact, modern slavery and – more recently – investment in Africa.

In addition to political leadership, the United Kingdom's technical expertise and evidence from its aid programme underpin its intellectual leadership role. Its policies, strategies, research and operational guidance have shaped thinking within the EU, the OECD's Development Assistance Committee (DAC) and other fora. For example, the United Kingdom's experience and analysis helped to shape the DAC Recommendation on the Humanitarian Development Peace Nexus (OECD, 2019<sup>[1]</sup>); and work by DFID Stabilisation Unit on elite bargains and political deals (HM Government, 2018<sup>[2]</sup>) is shaping analysis across the sector.

Credible leadership on the United Kingdom's priorities will require sustained engagement and collaboration and a willingness to support the leadership of other donors where appropriate. There is a risk that a shift away from systematically consulting and communicating with partners on key policies and strategies (Chapter 2) will detract from the United Kingdom's coveted image as an intellectual leader. The United Kingdom has maintained several consistent policy priorities and in areas such as on gender equality and anti-corruption, has entrenched these in legislation. However, with six Secretaries of State since 2014, each identifying a new leadership agenda, partners are becoming less confident in the United Kingdom's commitment to any one agenda and fear that ministers' 'spotlight' issues may draw attention away from more systemic challenges. Leadership on these spotlight issues often goes hand in hand with pledges and spending targets. Systematically setting out where new commitments are additional to existing efforts would be consistent with the DAC Recommendation on Good Pledging Practice (OECD, 2011<sup>[3]</sup>).

### ***The United Kingdom's global engagement is comprehensive***

Within a broad global agenda, the United Kingdom has been a leader in the following areas:

- **Gender equality:** the United Kingdom has championed sexual reproductive health and rights at a time when global co-operation on the issue has been challenged by other donors. It helped to ensure that tackling violence against women and girls was included in the SDGs, mobilised political leadership and built international momentum (ICAI, 2016<sup>[4]</sup>). The United Kingdom has advocated for girls' education and ending early and forced marriage. While almost half of the ODA budget is reported as addressing gender equality, this level has not increased since the last peer review (OECD, 2014<sup>[5]</sup>) (Chapter 3).
- **Inclusion:** the United Kingdom, together with the Government of Kenya and the International Disability Alliance, co-hosted the first Global Disability Summit in 2018 and mobilised new commitments on disability inclusion linked to the Charter for Change (HM Government, 2018<sup>[6]</sup>).
- **Illicit finance:** the United Kingdom has developed a whole-of-government approach to fighting illicit financial flows and corruption, mobilising its international co-operation, aligning its domestic policies and building multilateral consensus (Box 1.1).
- **Development finance:** the United Kingdom is a leader in supporting developing countries to raise revenues both domestically and internationally and promoting aid for trade (Chapter 3). The United Kingdom also launched a Business Integrity Initiative to help British companies to respond with integrity to trade and investment opportunities in developing countries.
- **Security and instability:** the United Kingdom fully endorses the United Nations (UN) Secretary General's Sustaining Peace reforms to improve the UN's ability to prevent conflict and contribute

to stability. Over 2014-17, the United Kingdom launched two National Action Plans for Women, Peace and Security (Chapter 7).

- **Reform of the humanitarian system:** the United Kingdom has successfully campaigned for greater use of household cash payments as a form of humanitarian assistance (Chapter 7).
- **Ending sexual exploitation, abuse and sexual harassment (SEAH):** the United Kingdom hosted two summits (in March and October 2018) to galvanise national and international action to prevent and address SEAH in the aid sector and has remained active on this difficult agenda (Chapter 4).
- **Global health:** the United Kingdom's quick action during the 2014-16 Ebola crisis – identifying weaknesses in the international system in preparing for and responding to global pandemics and epidemics, as well as its rapid cross-government response – was praised by partners. The United Kingdom is also recognised for its work to prevent and treat malaria and neglected tropical diseases, support sexual and reproductive health and reduce antimicrobial resistance.

In recent years, the United Kingdom has signalled its ambition to lead in the fight against climate change. Its substantial international climate finance<sup>1</sup> and a recent Green Finance Strategy (HM Government, 2019<sup>[7]</sup>) give it an influential voice in arguing for more and better investment in climate adaptation and mitigation in developing countries. Its recent pledge to align all UK ODA with the Paris Agreement on Climate Change and to bring the United Kingdom's greenhouse gas emissions to net zero by 2050 provide a strong basis for coherent policies in this area.

### ***The United Kingdom shapes and supports global frameworks for sustainable development***

The United Kingdom uses its position and influence in multilateral fora to support monitoring of international commitments and to strengthen the rules-based international order and its institutions:

- The United Kingdom was instrumental in defining and approving the SDGs, and submitted its first Voluntary National Review (VNR) in 2019 (HM Government<sup>[8]</sup>). Preparing for the VNR raised awareness of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development across government departments and the Office for National Statistics reports regularly on domestic data related to SDG targets.
- The United Kingdom co-founded the Addis Tax Initiative to champion implementation of the Addis Ababa Action Agenda (Chapter 3) and is active on the Financial Stability Board, a key international grouping of finance and central bank officials.
- In line with its commitment to transparency, the United Kingdom played a key role on the governing board and technical working group of the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI) 2016-18 and is a member of the Open Government Partnership.
- The United Kingdom has received international backing to co-preside over the next United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change conference (COP26), together with Italy, where it is hoped to make further progress on monitoring the Paris Agreement.
- Through the Index for Risk Management and the Centre for Disaster Protection, the United Kingdom actively supports implementation of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction. It supports the full implementation of the Grand Bargain and has championed the role of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (Chapter 7).

The United Kingdom engages actively with emerging powers and non-traditional donors, helping to build a shared understanding and collective agenda for international development. For instance, DFID secondees are currently working in the King Salman Humanitarian Aid and Relief Centre in Saudi Arabia and were assigned to the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank when it was being set up.

### Box 1.1. The United Kingdom's global efforts to fight corruption, bribery and illicit finance

The United Kingdom has developed a whole-of-government approach to tackle illicit financial flows and corruption, which includes mobilising its international co-operation, aligning its domestic policies and building multilateral consensus. Co-ordination and implementation of the United Kingdom's 2017 Anti-corruption Strategy is led by a Joint Anti-Corruption Unit (JACU). The Anti-Corruption Summit of 2016 galvanised the United Kingdom's leadership and commitment in this field and concluded with a strong global declaration against corruption, coupled with specific action plans and commitments by participants. The International Anti-Corruption Coordination Centre was subsequently launched, enabling investigation into cases of corruption across countries.

The United Kingdom champions global efforts to tackle illicit financial flows, driving progress on international beneficial ownership transparency, including through its own commitment to introduce mandatory public beneficial ownership registers across its overseas foreign territories by 2021 and through its adoption of innovative legal and regulatory approaches. This is seen, for example, in the United Kingdom's new regime of Unexplained Wealth Orders, which was adopted in early 2018. The International Corruption Unit in the National Crime Agency is committed to recovering funds stolen from developing countries and prosecuting those responsible. Several high-profile asset recovery and return cases have been enforced, both at home and abroad, together with partner countries.

Finally, building on the work of the Joint Money Laundering Intelligence Taskforce, the United Kingdom is trying to make it easier for migrants from developing countries to send remittances home through small transfer facilities without increasing the risk of money laundering.

Source: Authors' compilation drawing on HM Government (2017<sup>[9]</sup>), United Kingdom Anti-Corruption Strategy 2017-22, [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/667221/6\\_3323\\_Anti-Corruption\\_Strategy\\_WEB.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/667221/6_3323_Anti-Corruption_Strategy_WEB.pdf).

## Policy coherence for sustainable development

### ***Policy coherence is supported by a commitment to the Sustainable Development Goals, the National Security Strategy and a powerful institutional system***

The United Kingdom has endorsed international pledges on policy coherence for development and the new recommendation on policy coherence for sustainable development through its membership of the OECD. In the 2006 International Development (Reporting and Transparency) Act, DFID committed to “report annually on the effects of policies and programmes pursued by Government departments on the promotion of sustainable development in countries outside the United Kingdom and the reduction of poverty in such countries” (UK Parliament, 2006<sup>[10]</sup>). However, the latest strategies and policies dealing with international development, including the National Security Strategy, the Aid Strategy, the Bilateral Aid Review and DFID's Single Departmental Plans, do not commit to policy coherence. In addition, the United Kingdom has not clearly communicated a single set of priorities for policy coherence as recommended in the 2014 DAC peer review (OECD, 2014<sup>[5]</sup>) and the 2019 OECD Recommendation on Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development (OECD, 2019<sup>[11]</sup>), although development objectives are included in specific policies such as trade. There is nonetheless significant evidence of policy coherence in practice: the SDGs and the National Security Strategy (HM Government, 2015<sup>[12]</sup>) provide the policy framework and institutional setting to discuss policy coherence – both a coherent cross-government approach to implementing the aid strategy (Chapter 4) and the impact of other UK domestic policies on partner countries' development aspirations. In particular:

- The government's programme of work directly reflects the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, with all Single Departmental Plans making reference to the relevant SDGs. The Secretary of State for International Development takes overall leadership and policy oversight for the goals, while the Minister for Implementation in Cabinet Office is responsible for supporting domestic implementation. DFID and the Cabinet Office co-chair a cross-government group whose remit includes integrating the goals into all relevant departments' activities. As anticipated in the VNR, the format and focus of the Inter-Departmental Group is under review.
- The National Security Strategy provides additional guidance on policy coherence for sustainable development. It states that international development is at the heart of the United Kingdom's national security and foreign policy, and is clear that the United Kingdom's national interests depend on global stability and prosperity as well as an international system that reflects British values.<sup>2</sup> The strategy commits the government to using its national security, economic and influencing levers in a co-ordinated way in pursuing stability and prosperity. An integrated foreign policy review was launched in February 2020.

Enabled by its own seat in Cabinet, on the National Security Council and in all National Security Implementation Groups as well as close collaboration with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) in partner countries, DFID has brought the development agenda to bear on domestic policies. Similar to the experience of other DAC members, participation of senior staff in implementation groups is not always possible – where this happens, it may undermine influence and decision making. Secondments of DFID staff to other departments and joint units such as trade, environment, energy, the Joint North Africa Unit and the Sahel Unit have proven effective in integrating the development agenda into other departments' policies and programmes.<sup>3</sup> For instance, a joint team comprising DFID and DIT staff has built a shared understanding of how the United Kingdom's trade policies can affect developing countries. It also contributed to the Taxation (Cross-Border Trade) Act 2018, enabling the United Kingdom to put in place a bilateral trade preferences scheme for developing countries (HM Government, 2019<sup>[8]</sup>).

### ***The United Kingdom could better communicate how it ensures policy coherence for development***

While the United Kingdom reports on domestic progress towards achieving the SDGs, it has not established monitoring mechanisms to assess the impact of its domestic policies on developing countries (EU, 2019<sup>[13]</sup>). Monitoring positive and negative impacts of domestic policy, and being aware of the concerns of developing countries, will become even more important as the United Kingdom starts to formulate new domestic policies in areas formerly covered by EU directives.

Moreover, an indirect consequence of embedding development into the National Security Council is that departments have communicated less systematically than before with civil society and external partners on their analysis of how domestic policies impact, both positively and negatively, developing countries. Joint work with civil society on countering violent extremism and inviting a civil society representative onto the Steering Group overseeing design of the new illicit finance platform are positive examples of engagement that could be more widely adopted. As external stakeholders do not participate in National Security Implementation Groups, and proceedings are not published for sensitivity reasons, it is difficult for external observers to assess how the United Kingdom identifies and addresses policy coherence priorities.

### ***Development is considered in domestic policies but some incoherence remains***

While development co-operation is central to the United Kingdom's international policies, a number of domestic policies could be more coherent with partner countries' development aspirations. For instance, the United Kingdom could significantly improve its performance on technology and on migration (CGDev, 2018<sup>[14]</sup>). The United Kingdom provides relatively low government support to research and development<sup>4</sup> and intellectual property regulations constrain its role in diffusing technology to developing countries.

Compared to other DAC members, the United Kingdom accepts a smaller share of applications from asylum seekers and migrants and could do more to lead on migrants' integration policies at a global level – particularly on international conventions related to employment and work conditions.

Partners also question the coherence of the United Kingdom policies on tax and peace:

- Four British Overseas Territories are among the top ten places that “proliferate corporate tax avoidance”, according to the corporate tax haven index published by the Tax Justice Network (2019<sup>[15]</sup>). This appears inconsistent with the United Kingdom's support for domestic resource mobilisation (Chapter 3). Nevertheless, an amendment to the Sanctions and Anti-Money Laundering Act 2018, commits the government to introduce mandatory public beneficial ownership registers across its overseas foreign territories by 2021 (Box 1.1). The Independent Commission for Aid Impact (ICAI) questioned DFID's decision not to assess the impact of UK tax policies and practices on developing countries (2017<sup>[16]</sup>). Doing so could inform future work by the United Kingdom in this priority area.
- Concerns about the United Kingdom's arms exports are regularly raised by civil society and highlighted by elected representatives (UK Parliament, 2019<sup>[17]</sup>). Using the structures and resources available under the National Security Council, it will be important for the United Kingdom to continue to ensure that decisions related to its significant arms industry are consistent with the United Kingdom's stabilisation objectives and its commitments under the UN Arms Trade Treaty (United Nations, 2014<sup>[18]</sup>).

## Global awareness

### ***The United Kingdom's public communication is evidence-based, strategic and proactive***

Faced with inflammatory and hostile elements of the UK media, and despite lacking an operational budget for communications, DFID has developed a proactive communications strategy that targets journalists, policy makers, other government departments and the wider public in order to defend the development co-operation programme. For each of these groups, DFID has set up different communication objectives and instruments drawing on research and data on public attitudes.

For instance, when engaging with the British public, DFID focuses on demonstrating that UK aid (a public brand) can be everyone's business, using communication featuring “hometown heroes” and “people like us”. The UK Aid Match programme matches private donations for development projects with government allocations. DFID has developed digital content under the slogan “Aidworks” to target those who are sceptical about the effectiveness of aid. Indeed, research suggests that a positive story about what can be achieved through development co-operation has more resonance with the majority of the UK public than the argument that giving aid is in the national interest. There is, however, little evidence that the current strategy is changing the minds of those who could support ODA but question whether it is effective.

DFID engages in the daily news, tackling the critics directly, providing fact checking and refuting claims in a timely manner as recommended by Parliament (UK Parliament, 2017<sup>[19]</sup>). This proactive approach has helped to forge strong connections with the press and DFID staff feel defended by their organisation.

DFID also works across government to help other departments communicate their ODA impact and how development co-operation contributes to wider government objectives. For instance, the International Communication Unit and the Africa Campaigns Hub liaise with staff across departments, especially FCO and DIT, to ensure co-ordinated communication on what the United Kingdom is doing in partner countries to support their development.

### **Efforts to promote global awareness and citizenship promotion are limited**

In addition to building support for its aid programme, the United Kingdom has some specific initiatives to raise global awareness and citizenship at home. In spite of pockets of strong hostility, public support for development co-operation remains high: almost nine in ten (89%) British people think that helping people in developing countries is important, and the majority (61%) think that tackling poverty in developing countries should be one of the priorities of the UK government (EC, 2019<sup>[20]</sup>).<sup>5</sup>

However, partly a reflection of the United Kingdom's strong charity sector, the government's communication on development tends to be quite aid-centric. Combining defence of UK aid with promoting global citizenship would be more consistent with the United Kingdom's modern narrative of development, which recognises that many of today's challenges are global and shared (Chapter 2). To do so, it can build on lessons learnt from its Connecting Classrooms programme<sup>6</sup> – a programme that brings development issues into school curricula – and the Investing in a Better World Initiative (DFID, 2019<sup>[21]</sup>).<sup>7</sup> DFID could continue to exchange with other donors on how to communicate a modern vision of development within the OECD Development Communications Network.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> At the 2019 UN Climate Summit, the Prime Minister committed to increase the United Kingdom's international climate finance to at least USD 14.8 billion (GBP 11.6 billion) over the next five years, between 2021-22 and 2025-26. This represents a doubling of the United Kingdom's commitment to spend at least USD 7.8 billion (GBP 5.8 billion) on tackling climate change over five years, including at least USD 2.3 billion (GBP 1.7 billion) in 2020, announced ahead of the landmark Paris meeting, COP21, in 2015.

<sup>2</sup> The National Security Strategy identifies as core values: democracy; the rule of law; open, accountable governments and institutions; human rights; freedom of speech; property rights; and equality of opportunity, including the empowerment of women and girls – see the National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review 2015 at [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/555607/2015\\_Strategic\\_Defence\\_and\\_Security\\_Review.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/555607/2015_Strategic_Defence_and_Security_Review.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> DFID has sent 160 staff on secondments to other departments – including to work on the Conflict, Stability and Security Fund and Prosperity Fund – since 2015.

<sup>4</sup> According to the Office for National Statistics, the United Kingdom spent 1.69% of its gross domestic product on research and development, up from 1.67% in 2016, but remaining below the European Union provisional estimate of 2.07%. See <http://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/governmentpublicsectorandtaxes/researchanddevelopmentexpenditure/bulletins/ukgrossdomesticexpenditureonresearchanddevelopment/2017> (accessed on 23 March 2020).

<sup>5</sup> A majority of the UK public (65%) agrees that providing financial assistance to developing countries is an effective way to reduce inequalities in these countries. However, only 43% think it should remain at the same level, while 26% think it should be increased and 22% think that it should be reduced.

<sup>6</sup> Connecting Classrooms through Global Learning is an international programme supporting teaching and learning about global issues, running from 2018 to 2021. It is funded by the UK Government and delivered by the British Council and partners. The programme supports schools internationally, and in the United Kingdom, to learn about and collaborate on the big issues that face the world. It helps teachers to bring global learning themes, centred on the Sustainable Development Goals, into their classrooms, and encourages children to interact and learn with their peers in other countries. See <https://connecting-classrooms.britishcouncil.org> (accessed on 23 March 2020).

<sup>7</sup> The Investing in a Better World initiative was established by DFID to understand whether people in the United Kingdom want to invest their money in ways that help to achieve the SDGs.



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