

Bond consultation on the UK white paper on international development

This event took place on the 4th September 2023



On the 4th September 2023, Bond brought together colleagues from across the sector and representatives from the Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO). The event provided an opportunity for Bond members to share their views with FCDO on the UK white paper on international development.

Bond's introductory remarks

The production of a first white paper on international development since 2009 is hugely welcome, and will help to put the flesh on the bones of the UK international development strategy. Members worked hard to influence this strategy and felt that it did not adequately incorporate their views and ideas. There was limited reference to extreme poverty, sectors such as water and agriculture weren't addressed, and there was little attention on the role of civil society.

There is general consensus among our members that the next decade of development will be different. If we are to really make progress we need to address the root causes of poverty, inequality and climate change. Our initial exploration of this through the Future Dialogues project showed that we need to go beyond what is traditionally described as 'aid and development' to consider wider financing, debt and trade, and indeed the economic system that underpins the inequalities that we see. It is therefore welcome that there are representatives from a range of government departments joining the discussion.

We welcome the commitment to use the white paper to strengthen the focus of the FCDO and government on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). We have been concerned that these goals have not received adequate attention across government, and we are desperately behind in the race to deliver them by 2030. This effort must prioritise reaching the most left behind, which should be at the core of the UK's development efforts.

We also welcome the emphasis in the consultation on the 'how of development' and issues such as partnership, better listening to those who are the most marginalised and most in need of support, and rebuilding trust in the international system. A full, open and frank debate on these issues is long overdue. As a sector we are asking the same questions and pursuing ways to make our contribution business models more equitable, inclusive and empowering, and we hope this is the beginning of a collaboration with the FCDO on these issues.

Finally, we can now see the damage that the cuts to the UK aid budget and the UK's retreat from international partnerships is doing to the communities we work with and to global action. This context emphasises the importance of ensuring all policy and resourcing levers across government better support development, and we need this white paper to secure a step-change in these efforts.

Breakout group discussions

GROUP 1: Equitable partnerships, gender equality and leaving no one behind

The key themes that emerged from discussion in this group included:

Making funding more accessible and localised

- The FCDOs need to share lists of funding more widely and accessibly, so that partners don't miss out on funding opportunities. At the moment these opportunities are only open to select organisations.
- The FCDOs need to provide long-term flexible funding to local organisations and to make funding more accessible, including through providing capacity support. It needs to display

more trust in local partners and take an informed approach to the risks and benefits in working with them.

- Aspects of counter terrorism bill make it hard for local organisations to access funding. The FCDO therefore needs to apply these regulations more flexibly and fairly.
- The FCDO needs to be less extractive by ensuring that it is paying for local organisations' time, and is providing issue-based funding and funding movements.
- The FCDO should work with national governments to ensure that more of the funding it provides at the national funding level goes to local to organisations.
- The government needs to make its funding more transparent so there can be scrutiny of who this funding is reaching and whether it is being channelled to local organisations.
- The FCDO could consider introducing Programme Partnership Arrangement funding (PPA) for supporting national/local organisations in low- and middle-income countries. It could also be impactful to scale up and improve local organisations' access to country-based pooled funding.
- The FCDO should only go through intermediaries if there is a real need, not as a default option.
- Funding to civil society needs to be adapted to context and applied in nuanced ways.

Influencing the funding practices of other donors and multilaterals

- Existing commitments, such as [OECD DAC recommendations](#) and the [donor statement on locally led development](#), need to be implemented across the donor community.
- The UK should advocate for the UN to do more to make its funding accessible to local organisations.
- There are concerns that multilateral organisations create added bureaucracy for local organisations and all too often don't want to pay overheads, resulting in local organisations not being able to cover their costs. The FCDO should help to reform these practices and lead analysis on how the multilateral system can more efficiently support local organisations.
- The UK needs to speak out at an international level and engage other donors on better funding local organisations.

Engaging the people who have been the most marginalised

- The FCDO needs to make sure it is working with the people who have been the most marginalised, for example, people with disabilities, ethnic minorities and refugees.
- If the FCDO wants to work with women, the 'how' needs to be in there.
- The government must restate its commitment to the [Agenda 2030 principle to leave no one behind \(LNOB\)](#) in order to put it back on the table. This commitment should set out how it is going to further operationalise the LNOB principle, including through making a step-change in how it is working with civil society.
- The FCDO needs to start talking about disability justice and pursuing a rights-based-approach to support people living with disabilities.
- It would be great to see a stronger approach in UK aid to addressing intersectional exclusion and discrimination, building on the finding of the UK International Development Committee's inquiry on racism in the sector.
- We also need an emphasis on addressing the needs of groups that have been marginalised relating to all protected characteristics, including the presentation of data on the extent of these groups' needs.

GROUP 2: Humanitarian response, conflict policy and human rights

The key recommendations that emerged from discussion in this group included:

Conflict prevention, resilience and preparedness

- An increased focus is required globally on preventing conflict and building resilience before crises emerge, including through investing more in peacebuilding, mediation and addressing the root causes of conflict.
- There is an urgent need to develop effective early warning systems for potential political conflicts and instability, which could help with prevention efforts.
- We increasingly need to focus on shifting the agenda from humanitarian support to disaster risk reduction.

Innovations, effectiveness and accountability

- The FCDO needs to increase its use of technology and data analytics to make aid delivery more effective, and to identify needs, improve targeting and track human rights violations. Innovation labs and incubators can be used to develop and test new technologies and approaches.
- The FCDO needs to do more to foster public-private partnerships around new technologies and innovation to support relief efforts.
- The FCDO could create spaces for its partners to share information and ideas on innovations.
- The FCDO could also scale up its support for pilots to test new innovations and approaches.
- The FCDO needs to help promote stronger accountability mechanisms and transparency around humanitarian aid funding, including through using tools like blockchain and open data.
- The FCDO needs to ensure that its programming on conflict and peacebuilding is flexible, so it can adapt to changing contexts.
- The FCDO needs to improve its approaches to measuring impact on peacebuilding and conflict prevention.

Evolving funding partnerships and collaborations

- The FCDO needs to scale up support to local organisations. Empowering communities to lead their own relief and rebuilding efforts is required to promote sustainable solutions. There is a need for a clearer definition of local partners and to measure progress.
- The FCDO needs to promote new forms of partnerships and collaboration between aid groups, the private sector, governments and local stakeholders to develop a systems approach.
- The FCDO needs to deepen its efforts to link business to economic development in fragile states to address the root causes of conflict. This can be done by de-risking and stimulating investment in infrastructure, job creation and skills training.

Human rights

- The government needs to do more to mainstream human rights principles throughout foreign policy and international agreements Applying a human rights-based approach consistently in trade, defence, climate deals, etc.
- The government should be leveraging diplomatic influence to advance human rights and hold violators accountable.

GROUP 3: Beyond aid: tax, trade, debt, financing

The key recommendations that emerged from discussion in this group included:

Promoting policy coherence for development across government

- It is important to ensure that all policy levers across government are utilised effectively to support development. The white paper can play a role in securing more ambitious commitments across trade, investment, finance and other areas.
- There needs to be stronger cross-departmental collaboration, coordination and accountability for pursuing policy coherence on development, with the FCDO playing a central role in driving this forward.

More responsible UK business, trade and investment

- There is an urgent need for the government to deepen its efforts to ensure that major UK companies operating in developing countries act more responsibly in relation to their environmental impact, payment of taxes, respect for human rights and other relevant actions.
- It is vital that UK trade, export and investment strategies and policies embed strong alignment with the SDGs, human rights and Paris climate agreement.

Reforming the global financial system

- The UK has a clear opportunity to use its legislative power to influence private creditors and force them to participate in debt relief efforts and the Common Framework for debt treatment.
- The UK's considerable role in the global tax system provides it with both the opportunity and responsibility to take further significant action to address tax avoidance and offshore secrecy.
- The UK government should support and promote the [UN Model Tax Convention](#), which has been advocated for by many low- and middle-income countries as a key way to build a fairer global financial system.

GROUP 4: Climate, nature and development

The key recommendations that emerged from discussion in this group included:

Climate finance

- The UK needs to provide new and additional finance to help all countries fund and achieve their Nationally Determined Contributions. Climate change and poverty exacerbate each other, necessitating additional finance.
- The UK needs to show leadership in helping to mobilise agreement on establishing and resourcing a loss and damage facility.
- The UK should prioritise supporting UN climate funds, as these are targeted, effective modalities for climate finance and are governed equally by high-income and low/middle-income countries.
- The UK should consider recentralising the management, delivery and oversight of [International Climate Finance](#) funds, rather than spreading these funds thinly across different departments. We should not just repackage existing development programmes as climate-related.
- We need greater transparency and honesty around how climate finance is being used.

- The UK should lead the world in mobilising additional finance by applying the ‘polluter pays principle’ and introducing additional taxes on fossil fuel companies, high emitters etc.

Making climate partnerships more effective

- The UK should introduce measurable targets and ambition in supporting climate and nature, including further strategies as appropriate (e.g. on water).
- Ensuring that UK climate partnerships are locally-led cannot just be a buzzword. We need to be taking this concept seriously and look at what needs to change internally for this to be possible. The International Institute for Environment and Development’s principles for locally-led adaptation provide a useful starting point for policy and practice.
- The FCDO should integrate climate and nature across all development work, but also take a separate and targeted strategic approach to climate mitigation, adaptation, and loss and damage.
- A key challenge is how donors consult and are guided by partners. Too often, consultation processes are inaccessible or too short, especially for local organisations and those supporting people with disabilities and other groups that have been marginalised.

The UK should build on, and amplify, the good it is already doing, e.g. on supply chains and implementing the [Glasgow Declaration](#). The key recommendations that emerged from discussion in this group included:

Reform of international institutions

- We need to bring the public with us on the conversation about reforming the UN and international financial institutions.
- As regards to the World Bank, the UK needs to show leadership and leverage its considerable influence in ensuring the institution achieves more impact with its current resources, alongside discussions on increasing its capital.
- The UK should champion the proposal for establishing a borrowers club, which will provide representation for low- and middle-income countries in debt discussions. Such a caucus can be housed within International Monetary Fund processes.
- The UK needs to ambitiously support the [Bridgetown Agenda](#) and ensure it is backed globally.
- The UK needs to do more to provide core funding for international organisations to respond to crisis situations, so they can act quickly and flexibly.
- The UK showed initial leadership on promoting initiatives for private creditors to be included in debt relief processes, but this leadership has receded. The UK can support US proposals for taking this agenda forward.
- The UK can only influence reform if it provides adequate financing and attends key global moments. Cuts in aid and the PM’s non-attendance at the UN General Assembly do not help.
- The UK needs to do more to explore innovations in mobilising finance. Are there more opportunities? For example, new types of guarantees and recycling special drawing rights through the African banks.

Tax and domestic resource mobilisation

- The UK can lead on reforming the global tax system. We would like to see the UK more actively support the UN Model Tax Convention so that we are supporting rules established by all countries and not just the OECD or G20.

- It is vital that a systems view to address tax challenges is applied. Technical assistance to improve partner country tax systems and engagement with foreign companies will be of limited impact if ambitious reform to the international system is not also pursued.

Corruption and illicit finance

- There is tension in the system on how corruption and illicit finance are treated in ‘aligned’ or ‘favourable’ countries and those that are non-aligned. Tougher action needs to be taken across all countries.
- The FCDO needs to find a better balance between getting assistance into countries at speed and the risks of corruption. Ukraine was cited as an example where finance was fast-tracked, but possibly at the expense of some due diligence on corruption.
- The UK needs to take more action on the banks that facilitate the movement of illicit finance. Improved transparency through information sharing, open ledger approaches or a global assets register could help address these challenges.

Basic systems/ technical assistance/ partnership

- Many of the solutions to the systems change we need rely on countries having civic and company registration systems in place and capacity for basic data collection etc. These things take time, and the UK needs to provide sustained support to building these systems.
- The technical assistance provided to countries needs to allow them flexibility and freedom to support their priorities and approaches.

GROUP 5: Reforms to multilateral institutions and system change

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GROUP 6: Health, nutrition and food

The key recommendations that emerged from discussion in this group included:

- The FCDO needs to do more to promote partnerships and collaborative working between the public and private sectors and philanthropic funders. We need to incentivise collaboration and break down silos.
- The FCDO can act to further scale up the use of digital solutions to improve impact.
- The FCDO needs to use aid modalities that change the balance of power, match country need and avoid creating parallel systems
- The FCDO should ensure that promoting equity is central to everything it is doing on health. It also needs to remove the focus on just outcomes that can be counted.

- The FCDO needs to revive its previous work to better integrate its work on health and water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH).
- The FCDO needs to focus attention on promoting local manufacturing and the production of health and nutrition products, which will help to improve sustainability and the speed of responses.
- The FCDO needs to provide more funding for building local systems and technical assistance.
- The UK needs to do more to help promote the UN's role in responding to global health, nutrition and food security challenges.
- More work needs to be done to develop effective approaches and mechanisms to work in countries where governments can't deliver or are undermining human rights.

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