

Why Is International Development So Important Now?

Ending extreme poverty and tackling climate change:
development in a contested world.

November 2023



This is a summary of *International development in a contested world: ending extreme poverty and tackling climate change* (Command Paper 975), designed to communicate the key ideas in a succinct and accessible fashion. Full evidence and sources can be found in the White Paper.

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International development in a contested world: Ending extreme poverty and tackling climate change

It is no longer possible, if it ever was, for a country to determine its future alone. Climate change does not respect national boundaries, nor do pandemics. Conflicts are becoming more numerous, frequent, and longer lasting. War in one country can affect security thousands of miles away. Poverty, conflict, and climate change often go hand in hand and drive flows of refugees.

We are a part of the whole, like it or not.

Our interconnectedness also has many benefits. Global trade and finance lead to growth and jobs. When we collaborate, we can create changes that ripple out across the world. And when, alongside other countries, we spend a small proportion of our income on international development, it is not only the right thing to do; it is also the wise thing to do.

The British people have good reason to feel proud of our country's record in international development. Since 2015, we have helped nearly 20 million children, including 10 million girls, to get a good education. Since 2011, we have supported over 100 million people to cope with climate change.

Our participation is needed now more than ever. International development has become more vital, and at the same time more difficult. The majority of the world's poorest people live in the least developed countries, many of which are fragile or conflict-affected states, which frequently suffer high levels of corruption, and ethnic or political divisions.

The scale of the challenges means we have to go beyond traditional ideas of aid.

When we spend money, we will do so smartly, to unlock more funding both from international institutions and from the private sector. But money is not enough. We need to move away from the old donor-recipient model towards partnerships of mutual respect. Developing countries want and need to participate in international institutions, to step up and take charge of their future. This, too, is both the right thing and the wise thing to do, because faith in these institutions is faltering at exactly the moment when we need to work together more than ever.

We need ideas, knowledge, and technical expertise: new systems, different regulations. We need to harness the power of British creativity and innovation. We need to make the most of technology, including AI.

The White Paper is crammed with detailed ideas and pledges. This summary sets out the main guiding ideas to show what an enormous difference these commitments could make, to all of us.



Helping those most in need

Official Development Assistance (ODA) is chiefly aimed at eradicating poverty.

We will aim to spend at least 50% of direct aid in the least developed countries, making sure it goes to the poorest countries and communities where it is most needed and most effective.

Least developed countries can be fragile, prone to conflict and especially vulnerable to climate change. We will deliver on our commitment to provide £11.6 billion in international climate finance between 2021/22 and 2025/26.

We will continue to tackle hunger, for example through our five-year partnership with UNICEF to prevent and treat child-wasting, the deadliest form of malnutrition.

Where necessary we provide aid; where possible we invest.

We will bring together investment, trade, expertise, technology, science, and diplomacy, generating development and growth so people can take charge of their own destiny and become our future trade and investment partners.

British Investment International, the UK's development investment arm, pioneers creative financing. In 2022, its investments generated \$1.3 billion of funding from elsewhere, and the businesses it backed employed 1 million people and paid \$1.5 billion in taxes. The bulk of its investments are in Africa, and it is committed to making over half of its investments in the poorest and most fragile countries.



Civil society and British expertise

Direct aid is crucial, as is the money we can leverage from other sources, both public and private. But money without new ideas will only go so far.

We need to harness the world-class expertise we have in the UK to innovate new solutions to the complex problems of conflict, climate, and poverty. UK Centres of Expertise will help devise these responses, working on green growth, trade, education, infrastructure and cities, security and rule of law, and technology.

We will draw on the global reach we have through British universities, the NHS, British sports and creative industries and the BBC. This is already a national effort: British people and institutions at their best.

The technical advice we are already providing to business and investors is helping generate over £200 million of investment for manufacturing in Ethiopia, Senegal, Kenya, Rwanda and Nigeria, which will help those countries be strong trading partners for us in the future.

The UK is home to 7,012 international development charities, ranging from kitchen table operations to some of the most globally respected organisations in the field. Their scope is wide, their experience deep. They raise significant sums of money. We will back the efforts of international development charities through Aid Match, amplifying the generosity of the British people.

We will introduce a new volunteering scheme, an opportunity for young people to get involved internationally, to deliver locally led activities and help our development work around the world.

Dirty money – the transfer of illegal funds around the world – enables corrupt regimes and finances wars. We will pilot a new approach to help countries tackle corruption.



Fighting climate change and protecting nature

Unless we take urgent action, children born today can expect to see global warming reach 3° in their lifetime.

We must help them cope with a world that is getting hotter. Climate change damages food production and affects health through extreme weather events, nature loss, malnutrition, diarrhoea, heat stress, disease, and antimicrobial resistance.

We will invest in early-warning systems and disaster risk-reduction. We have committed at least £3 billion to protecting nature. We will focus on prevention – ending emissions and the erosion of habitats – as well as on helping people to adapt.

The UK's green finance expertise can support the global green energy transition. It is in everyone's interest that developing countries also benefit from the money that will be flowing into clean technologies and new industries.

An average of 21.5 million people are forcibly displaced each year by sudden onset weather-related hazards. Many others are propelled by slower but still lethal climate change. Even when climate and environmental degradation are not the primary factors, they can exacerbate reasons for wanting to leave.

Women and girls face the worst impacts from climate change. The UK's Climate Action Partnership for Education will scale up solutions to climate change through education, with a focus on girls to lead the change for their generation.



Education, women and girls - working with forces for change

There is overwhelming evidence that breaking down barriers for women and girls accelerates development and progress across the board.

If women had the same role in labour markets as men, an estimated \$28 trillion (26%) would be added to global GDP in 2025. We will work to achieve gender equality of all women and girls by 2030, spearheading a 'Rights, Freedom, Potential' campaign to build on our successes and counter rollback.

We will partner with women's rights groups, increasing their autonomy and using their voice and agency to change and improve societies.

We are working to get 40 million more children into school. The International Finance Facility for Education will unlock \$7 for every \$1 invested by donors in lower middle-income countries, home to half the children who are not in school.

We will deepen our work with Education Cannot Wait to ensure the world's most vulnerable children, including refugees and displaced girls, can access quality education.



Conflict, migration and humanitarian assistance

Conflict is development in reverse. It puts much of the progress we have already made in danger.

Approximately 90% of humanitarian aid is driven by conflict. The numbers needing aid in 2023 - approximately 380 million people - are more than double those five years ago. Fragile states and those recovering from conflict are being held back. They need development not that is done to them, but with them. We will respect our partners' visions of the future, helping countries recovering from conflict to rebuild so they can represent and protect their citizens.

We will look to cutting-edge technology – AI and data management – to help with international efforts to predict conflict and take early action.

And we will work with civil society to find inclusive and sustainable resolutions. Women's participation is once again vital. Women's groups are often the first to respond to humanitarian emergencies, and women are uniquely placed to act as peacebuilders, powerbrokers, and mediators.

We will continue the leading work we are already doing to champion the prevention of sexual violence in conflict, including pioneering work with survivors to restore their dignity and establish accountability.

The forced displacement of people is at its highest level since 1945, with almost 110 million refugees worldwide. Our international development can reduce the drivers of migration by helping to build stronger, safer, and more prosperous communities abroad. The UK will continue to help countries become more stable, abide by the rule of law, and respect the human rights of all citizens.

We need a more concerted approach to refugees. The Global Compact on Refugees has set out a vision for coherent global action on forced displacement.

We also need initiatives that help refugees become an asset to their host countries. The UK-backed Jordan Compact, for example, has helped integrate Syrian refugee children into Jordan's education system, moving from a humanitarian to a development response in an arrangement that benefits hosts and refugees alike.



Hunger and food systems

Global food systems are struggling to feed the world in the face of conflict, economic turmoil, climate change and biodiversity loss.

In 2022, nearly 1 billion people weren't sure whether they would be able to get enough food.

In 2022/23, the UK directly reached 13.8 million people with food aid, cash and vouchers to meet their needs and sustain their livelihoods. We work with those in most need: women, children and young people, people with disability, LGBT+, forcibly displaced people and ethnic and religious minorities, putting the people most affected in the driving seat to end life-threatening hunger.

At the same time, we need a transformation in food systems. We will invest in new farming technologies and innovation. British scientists are using AI and genomics to develop new crops and ways of making farming easier in a changing climate.

More sustainable ways to farm will create jobs, provide food for local people, and spread growth more evenly, tackling poverty in the long term.

UK Government support for the agribusiness investor AgDevCo has helped it to generate direct benefits for over 1 million smallholders growing nutritious food in Africa at the same time as increasing women's economic participation.



Health and social protection

We will take a 'One Health' approach to our work, understanding that human health is inextricable from that of animals and ecosystems.

We are investing in research and development to fight against infectious diseases and tackle dangerous anti-microbial resistance.

We will also continue to work on the basics. Clean water and safe health systems are crucial. They save lives and enable people to live well. They are also vital when we need to respond to outbreaks of disease. They must be part of our pandemic-preparedness.

We are, for example, working with the African Development Bank to provide access to safe water and sanitation in Senegal, reaching 1.45 million people. In an example of creative financing, this is being achieved through UK guarantees, without actually spending our precious development money.

We will continue our efforts to stop children suffering preventable illnesses by reaching them with vaccination. We will deliver on our campaign to end preventable deaths among mothers, babies, and children, with programmes on sexual and reproductive rights, and by supporting health systems, nutrition, water and sanitation in 11 priority countries.

Social protection (maternity benefits, paid sick leave, health insurance and support for vulnerable children, people with disability and the old) can decisively reduce poverty and hunger, increase access to education and health services, and support decent work.

A social safety net makes people more resilient to climate and other shocks and enables them to seize economic opportunities.

In Ethiopia, we support the Productive Safety Net Programme, which has lifted more than 1 million people out of poverty and reduced hunger, as well as improving girls' ability to stay at school and reducing the pressures to marry at a young age. **Our money is saving lives, giving people choices about their future, and helping change societies for the better.**



Innovation and digital transformation

Science has been responsible for huge strides in international development, bringing new vaccines and medicines as well as innovations in education, agriculture, and social protection.

Technology that we now take for granted has ushered in radical transformations around the world. Low-cost solar power has enabled millions of children to study and businesses to improve productivity. Mobile telephones and internet access have brought gains across all areas of development. Even so, 2.6 billion people are still offline.

To solve the problem of 'last-mile connectivity' will require an international approach and private sector involvement in which we will play a key part.

We will build on the ingenuity of our science and tech sector to find radical new solutions and support long-term science and research partnerships led by low- and middle-income countries.

We will look for ways to help countries leapfrog the carbon-intensive phases of industrial development. We want to see them benefitting directly from their natural resources, especially critical minerals.

We will invest in data partnerships and look to satellite technology, statistical modelling and AI to help us to pre-empt crises. All this can help us be better prepared and to respond more coherently and cost-effectively to humanitarian need.



Making money go further

Development still requires direct aid. But we need to look beyond ODA, including to the private sector. And we need collaboration on a global scale to find innovative solutions to once intractable problems.

We will spend aid smartly to mobilise further money. For example, every £1 million the UK provides to the World Bank's International Bank of Reconstruction and Development releases more than £5 million of additional finance.

We will find money beyond aid, unlocking the full range of private, as well as public, capital. Through guarantees and other financial instruments, we can help countries to raise their own finance, for example from pension funds and insurance. A fraction of the money held in pension funds would dwarf the public money currently being spent on development.

Today, 3.3 billion people live in countries where their repayment of debts exceeds their spending on education and health.

We will support debt-management strategies, including pauses in repayment following shocks caused by conflict and climate change. This debt restructuring can be used to build resistance to future shocks.

We will push for new global tax rules. Low- and middle-income countries are disproportionately affected by tax avoidance by corporations. They should be able to collect what they are owed. We will tackle illicit finance.

And we will drive down the cost of remittances from migrants back to their countries of origin. These payments have a direct impact on the lives of 1 billion people, with 75% of the money used to cover food, schooling, health, and housing. Currently between 6% and 35% of each remittance is lost in transaction costs.



Conclusion – Clear Priorities, Value for Money, Benefits for All

The White Paper is published in the aftermath of a pandemic, at a time of increased extreme weather events and conflicts around the world. It is clear that our fate as a nation is enmeshed with the fates of others.

We are committed to spending 0.7% of our national income on international development when the fiscal situation allows. A small fraction of our wealth can help to prevent crises. It can make a life-or-death difference when they happen.

When we develop educational opportunities and help women to take a leading role, when we help create stable conditions for business and bolster human rights, when we support people to combat climate change, we are helping to create a more peaceful, stable, more resilient world.

We have a highly respected record of leading and shaping international development. Now we also need a radical rethink.

Many of the systems that govern and shape our world – the food system, trade, finance, our approaches to refugees and climate change – need overhauling. We will take a 21st-century approach to development. Harnessing the power of science, technology, data, and AI, we will engage with developing countries as equal partners.

We can, and will, do development more effectively.

The stakes are very high. We are the first generation with the opportunity to end extreme poverty in our lifetimes, and the last able to tackle the worst effects of climate change.

We must act because it is the wise thing to do and also because it is the right thing to do. Good for Britain, good for the planet, and good for the people of our world.

