

International Development Strategy: Call for Evidence Submission by the Gender and Development Network

Call for Evidence questions

2. What could success in 2030 look like in terms of meeting the needs of the poorest and most marginalised and increasing opportunities for countries to become self-sustaining?

Successfully meeting the needs of the poorest and most marginalised, as well as increasing opportunities for countries to become self-sustaining by 2030, requires the UK to adopt transformative international development policies that address the structural causes of both poverty and inequality. Such transformative policies must be guided by a recognition of the UK's historic and ongoing role in shaping the world order.

Gender inequality remains one of the most pervasive forms of inequality in the world and accounts for why women are disproportionately amongst the world's poorest people. Therefore, successfully meeting the needs of the poorest and most marginalised by 2030 cannot be achieved without a dedicated commitment to understanding and tackling structural gender inequalities.

The UK's Strategic Vision for Gender Equality¹ lays out a comprehensive and strategic approach to tackling gender inequality, based on widespread consultation, and continues to provide a useful framework for shaping ODA and identifying what success looks like. As such, it should be retained as part of the new International Development Strategy.

In particular we support the Strategic Vision's calls to "Challenge and change unequal power relations between men and women, and negative attitudes and discriminatory practices that hold women and girls back." Success requires removing the structural barriers to gender equality as well as supporting individual girls and women.

Crucial to success is also the recognition that tackling gender equality requires a multi-sectoral approach, going beyond a narrow focus on girls' education to include: the elimination of violence against women and girls, access to sexual and reproductive health and rights, women's economic empowerment and women's political empowerment and leadership - all priorities reflected in the UK's position on gender equality as part of its G7 Presidency and also in the W7 Communique.² This multi-sectoral approach also reflects Goal 5's targets on Gender Equality within Agenda 2030³ which includes addressing key structural issues such as ending all forms of violence as well as discrimination against women and girls, and ensuring women's full and effective participation and leadership in decision-making.

Also significant in envisioning success is the commitment in the Strategic Vision to 'leave no one behind' and focus on areas where progress is slowest and most difficult as girls and women facing multiple intersecting discriminations or disadvantages based for example on race, disability, age, sexuality, class, and geographical location among others.

3. How and where can wider UK government international policy and activity best support long term international development outcomes?

The UK's Strategic Vision for Gender Equality calls for the integration of gender equality across the work of HMG.⁴ To be effective, gender equality must be genuinely main-

streamed across all development and international policy including climate change, finance, trade and foreign policy. In particular, the Gender and Development Network has identified reform of macro-level economic policies as a priority if the structural causes of gender equality are to be addressed and the needs of the poorest and most marginalised met.

i) Recognising and investing in the care economy

The pandemic has exposed the centrality of the care economy in economic life, and the role its underfunding plays in perpetuating gender inequality.⁵ UK international development policy should support the improvement of gender-responsive public health and care services that will benefit the poorest and most marginalised, and reduce women's unpaid care burdens while also helping to create decent work for women in the process.⁶

A further solution lies in the provision of universal social protection schemes that are accessible for women working in the informal sector. At an international level, there have been calls to finance a Global Social Protection Fund to kickstart universal, publicly funded national protection schemes for low-income countries – this is a key area that UK international development policy and aid can support.⁷

ii) Debt cancellation and reforming IFI conditionality

Escalating debt burdens and a return of conditionality by International Financial Institutions (IFIs) undermines governments' abilities to invest in gender equality.⁸ The UK has a considerable amount of influence within the multilateral system, particularly on the Boards of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund. It can use this influence to curb IFI conditionality, thereby allowing governments in the Global South the much-needed policy space to determine how best to allocate vital resources and promote gender equality. Furthermore, the unconditional cancellation of all public external debt across private, bilateral and multilateral creditors would free up much-needed resources and allow governments in the Global South to reallocate these funds from debt reservicing to the fulfilment of human rights obligations. This is also a critical way for the UK to increase opportunities for countries in the Global South to be self-sustaining.

iii) Reforming global tax rules

National government resources for gender equality are also dependant on tax revenue. The UK has a disproportionate influence on financial transparency⁹ and global tax policies, in large part due to its Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies. Action should include full implementation of public registers of beneficial ownership of companies in the Overseas Territories, as required in the Sanctions and Anti-Money Laundering Act, 2018.¹⁰ These transparency reforms must also extend to the UK's Crown Dependencies.

Furthermore, in addition to acknowledging and redressing the wider impacts of its tax havens on gender equality, the UK must also Commission an independent and holistic analysis of how its network of Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies violate women's human rights and impair the development opportunities that more diverse economies can generate. Additionally, while consensus was reached at this year's G7 about the introduction of a global minimum corporate tax rate¹¹ the establishment of an intergovernmental tax body – under the auspices of the United Nations – is still vital. Such a body would help create a coherent and level playing field where global tax rules are determined multilaterally instead of by a small handful of high-income countries.¹²

iv) Reparations

European imperial ambitions created many of the global challenges we are witnessing which undermine ambitions to promote gender equality. Reparations are one way for former colonisers to recognise and provide redress for these historic harms.¹³ GADN has proposed¹⁴ that the UK Government establish an independent commission to interrogate the true impact of Britain's colonial legacy and its continuing manifestation – including through the aid sector – and propose recommendations. In addition, the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) should commit to decolonising relations between the UK and the Global South and take the first step towards refocusing the objective of UK aid towards the achievement of justice and equity. This requires acknowledging the historical legacy of colonialism, recognising and redressing embedded and ongoing historical power imbalances in both development aid and assistance and international trade and investment rules.

5. In what area of international development does the UK have comparative advantage, particular interests, or is best placed to deliver?

Over the last decade, the UK has developed a strong and well-deserved global reputation in the promotion of gender equality and women's human rights, created by years of sustained political commitments and concrete actions. This has included its key role in establishing a standalone Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) on Gender Equality, convening the UN High-Level Panel on Women's Economic Empowerment and being a co-lead on the Gender Based Violence Action Coalition as part of UN Women's Generation Equality Forum. This has been especially important in light of the growing global backlash against women's rights – from the rolling back of hard won gains in areas like sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) to the work of anti-rights groups, including the former US administration.¹⁵ It has also gained an international reputation for its commitment knowledge and work on violence against women/gender based violence, reflected in its selection as a co-lead on the UN's Generation Equality Forum's Action Coalition on Gender Based Violence.

Building on this wealth of experience and influence will be an important way to retain the UK's international standing moving forward. GADN, like others, was concerned that this strategic comparative advantage was not reflected in the Government's new Strategic Framework for ODA.¹⁶

6. How should the UK's approach evolve to build partnerships with new actors and strengthen existing ones?

As part of Global Britain, it is critical for the UK to build new and equitable partnerships and relationships with countries across the Global South through a shared commitment to the advancement of gender equality and women's rights. Therefore, it will be important for the UK to maintain an approach to international relations and development assistance that is rooted in Agenda 2030¹⁷ as well as the Beijing Platform for Action¹⁸, and use its leadership in key global fora such as the G7, COP26 and the UN Generation Equality Forum's Action Coalition to advance this priority.

Additionally, continued financial support for multilateral agencies including UN Women but also to the likes of the United National Population Fund (UNFPA) and UNAIDS which provide critical life-saving services to millions of women and girls globally. However, these agencies have recently seen a dramatic cut in the funding provided to them by the UK government.¹⁹

The UK's approach to building new partnerships and strengthening existing ones is also inextricably linked to its foreign aid policy. The Government's recent decision to drastically cut the foreign aid budget from 0.7% to 0.5% of Gross National Income (GNI) is likely to have long-lasting and wide-reaching consequences - especially for women and girls²⁰ - and impact the UK's ability to both build and strengthen partnerships. Therefore, it is critical that the UK government reverse its decision to cut the foreign aid budget and reinstate its commitment to 0.5% of GNI.

Furthermore, the UK has also led the way in recognising local women and girls' rights organisations and movements as central to promoting positive change and acting as key interlocutors between the UK government and some of the world's poorest and most marginalised women. However, these organisations have continued to face challenges in accessing funding that would suit the long-term and challenging nature of their work. Good practice in this area has been developed by DFID historically, including the UK's contribution to critical funding instruments such as Amplify Change, the Jo Cox Memorial Grants, the UN Trust Fund to End Violence against Women, leadership and funding for work to end child marriage and Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting as well as the increased funding for the FCDO's programming on Violence against Women and Girls. These initiatives are part of a growing trend towards funding mechanisms for Southern women's rights organisations which are also supported by the governments of Sweden and Canada and large philanthropic organisations like the Ford Foundation and the Open Society Foundation. The UK must continue its approach in this regard.

¹ DFID. 2018. 'Strategic Vision for Gender Equality: A Call to Action for Her Potential, Our Future'. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/708116/Strategic-vision-gender-equality1.pdf

² Women 7. 2021. 'W7 Communique'. <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/536c4ee8e4b0b60bc6ca7c74/t/608ab9e93926032d9f774742/1619704298199/W7+Communique+29.04.2021.pdf>

³ United Nations. 2015. 'Transforming our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development'. <https://sdgs.un.org/2030agenda>

⁴ See Note 1

⁵ UN Women. 2020. Press release: 'COVID-19 will widen poverty gap between women and men, new UN Women and UNDP data shows'. <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2020/8/press-release-covid-19-will-widen-poverty-gap-between-women-and-men>

⁶ International Trade Union Confederation. 2016. 'Investing in the care economy: a pathway to growth'. Brussels: ITUC. <https://www.ituc-csi.org/investing-in-the-care-economy>

⁷ ITUC. 2020. *A global social protection fund is possible*. Brussels: ITUC. <https://www.ituc-csi.org/global-social-protection-fund>

⁸ GADN. 2021. 'Warning: May Contain Austerity'. <https://gadnetwork.org/gadn-resources/warning-may-contain-austerity>

⁹ Tax Justice Network. 2020. 'Financial Secrecy Index 2020: Narrative report on the United Kingdom'. <https://www.financialsecrecyindex.com/PDF/UnitedKingdom.pdf>

¹⁰ UK Sanctions and Anti-Money Laundering Act. 2018. <https://services.parliament.uk/bills/2017-19/sanctionsandantimoneylaundering.html>

¹¹ UK G7. 2021. 'G7 Finance Ministers agree historic global tax agreement'. Press Release, 5 June 2021. <https://www.g7uk.org/g7-finance-ministers-agree-historic-global-tax-agreement/>

¹² Ryding, T. 2020. 'An intergovernmental UN tax commission – why we need it and how we can get it'. https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/eurodad/pages/529/attachments/original/1590691263/An_intergovernmental_UN_tax_commission_%E2%80%93_why_we_need_it_and_how_we_can_get_it.pdf?1590691263

¹³ Lukka, P. 2020. 'Can reparations help us re-envision international development?'. <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/transformation/can-reparations-help-us-re-envision-international-development/>

¹⁴ GADN. 2021. 'Decolonising Aid'. <https://gadnetwork.org/gadn-resources/decolonising-aid>

¹⁵ Observatory on the Universality of Rights. 2021. 'Rights at Risk: The Observatory on the Universality of Rights Trends Report 2021'. <https://www.awid.org/ours-2021>

¹⁶ Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office. 2021. 'UK Official Development Assistance (ODA) allocations 2021 to 2022: written ministerial statement'. <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/uk-official-development-assistance-oda-allocations-2021-to-2022-written-ministerial-statement>

¹⁷ See Note 3

¹⁸ United Nations. 1995. 'Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action'.

https://www.un.org/en/events/pastevents/pdfs/Beijing_Declaration_and_Platform_for_Action.pdf

¹⁹ UNFPA. 2021. 'Statement on UK government funding cuts'. <https://www.unfpa.org/press/statement-uk-government-funding-cuts> and UNAIDS. 2021. 'UNAIDS statement on UK's proposed reduction in financial support'. <https://www.unfpa.org/press/statement-uk-government-funding-cuts>

²⁰ Care International UK et al. 2021. 'UK Government decisions to cut UK Aid are disproportionately falling on women and girls'. <https://gadnetwork.org/gadn-resources/uk-aid-cuts-women-and-girls>