Department
for International
Development

UKaid
from the British people

Baroness Verma
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State

Lord McConnell
House of Lords
London
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29 June 2015

Dear Lord McConnell,

During the Question for Short Debate on the Sustainable Development Goals on 16 June, a number of points were raised during the debate to which I did not have enough time to respond.

Financing for Development Conference

Lord Rea asked about the UK's approach to July's Financing for Development (FFD) conference in Addis Ababa. I agree with the assessment that the FFD Conference will be vitally important, not only in its own right, but also to provide a good basis for agreeing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in September, and for the Paris climate discussions in December. We hope that the FFD Conference will update the global framework for development finance to reflect the increasingly important role of private investment and domestic resource mobilisation. It is also an opportunity to secure the legacy, on trade, tax and transparency, of the UK's 2013 G8 Presidency. These are the issues that can make a transformational difference to developing countries, in accessing and mobilising the resources needed to eradicate extreme poverty and achieve sustainable development. We also want to widen responsibility for international development financing beyond traditional OECD donors, recognising the important contribution made by for example, the emerging powers and other non-traditional donors.

Domestic resources are the most sustainable form of finance for development. We hope that the FFD Conference will increase support for domestic resource mobilisation, both at the national level through capacity building, and ensuring that developing countries participate in, and benefit from, the new global agenda on tax transparency.

Delivery of the ambitious post-2015 agenda will also require substantial levels of private sector investment. There are huge opportunities for private investment capital to flow to developing countries to finance growth and development. We hope that the FFD Conference will help unlock the development potential of domestic and international private sector flows, through encouraging a better enabling environment for business to flourish.

Alongside all this of course Official Development Assistance (ODA) remains central to development finance, especially for the poorest countries and those least able to access other financial flows. The Government is proud to have met the 0.7 commitment and to have enshrined this in law this year. We will continue to encourage others to follow suit, and I welcome the EU's recommitment to 0.7, and to meeting the Least Developed Countries (LDC) target of 0.15-0.2% GNI in the short term.

To achieve all this, the UK has been fully engaged in all the preparatory discussions for the Financing for Development Conference, through active participation in the negotiations in New York as well as extensive bilateral and small group discussions with many partners, including the co-facilitators. The exact composition of the UK delegation to Addis itself will be confirmed nearer the time, but currently we expect that DFID's Secretary of State will attend.

Cost-benefit analysis of the targets in the post-2015 framework

Viscount Ridley raised the work of Bjorn Lomborg of the Copenhagen Consensus Centre (CCC). The Government is aware of Bjorn Lomborg's work with the CCC and welcomes his rigorous cost-benefit analysis of the targets in the post-2015 framework. This helps demonstrate the truly transformational potential of the SDGs and is a good example of how UK spending can catalyse results for the poorest people that go far beyond the initial investment.

It is important to note, however, that the nineteen targets Bjorn Lomborg has selected do not include a number of major UK priorities for the post-2015 agenda that we will continue to focus on, including good governance and anti-corruption, as well as the principle of leaving no one behind. So while we welcome this work, we do not agree wholeheartedly with its conclusions.

We will continue to engage with the CCC closely, and welcome Lomborg's ongoing contribution to the wider conversation around the post-2015 agenda.

Health

A number of Noble Lords raised the issue of health in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Lord Collins asked whether the Government will support Universal Health Coverage in the language of the health goal in the SDGs. The UK has always been at the forefront of arguing for a strong health goal focused on ensuring quality health outcomes for all at all ages. We recognise Universal Health Coverage as an essential means of ensuring effective health outcomes and are pleased to see its inclusion as a target in the proposal of the Open Working Group for Sustainable Development Goals.

Baroness Tonge asked about the Government's approach to sexual and reproductive health. Championing universal access to comprehensive sexual and reproductive health and rights remains a priority for the Government. The causes of an factors involved in rapid population growth in many of the poorest countries are complex and include: poverty, lack of women's empowerment, poor access to education for girls, cultural norms and child survival as well as poor access to contraceptive information, services and supplies. DFID's policies and programmes are directly targeted at sustaining progress across all of these crucial and inter-connected areas. I want to offer assurance that the Government is working to make sure that sexual and reproductive health and rights remains in the SDGs.

Baroness Barker urged the Government to keep up the focus on research and development on HIV and AIDs. The Government has a long-standing commitment to HIV research and development. DFID research supports improving treatment standards and scaling up prevention efforts to stop the spread. DFID also invests in developing new HIV prevention products such as vaccines and microbicides to protect against infection. The UK remains committed to ending the AIDS epidemic as a public health threat by 2030. We think it is important that any new targets are ambitious but attainable, evidence-based, respect human rights and follow World Health Organisation guidance to promote the best use of resources to prevent and treat HIV and AIDS to ensure 'no-one is left behind'.

The UK's position paper on HIV in the developing world, *Towards Zero Infections-Two Years On*, highlights three areas of UK Government focus for the future: key affected populations, girls and women, and the integration of HIV responses into the wider health system and broader development priorities. This includes tackling structural issues driving the epidemic such as gender inequality, stigma and discrimination. I have attached a copy of the report to this letter.

A recent House of Commons International Development Select Committee inquiry into health systems strengthening recognised the leading role that DFID has played internationally in helping partner governments to improve their health systems so that they are in a better position to meet the health needs of their changing and growing populations.

With regard to measuring the health outcomes of different population groups, the UK has been engaging on a global initiative led by the World Health Organisation and the World Bank to improve health reporting in all countries, including better reporting by age group and gender. A Roadmap for Measurement and Accountability has been produced to progress this initiative and may be found online at http://ma4health.hsaccess.org/roadmap. I have attached a copy to this letter.

DFID's approach to health emphasises the strengthening of health services by improving health worker capacity and quality of services; by increasing health access we are assisting countries to meet the needs of their populations, including those suffering from non-communicable diseases.

Leaving No One Behind

The Right Reverend, the Lord Bishop of St Albans spoke of the important principle of leaving no one behind. This principle is one of the most important aspects of the new post-2015 development framework, whereby no target will be considered met unless met by all economic and social groups. This is a powerful and progressive statement of intent for the new agenda, and one that, ever since the High Level Panel that the Prime Minister chaired, has been a major priority for the UK in UN negotiations.

Human Rights

Lord Collins spoke about the importance of ensuring that human rights remain at the heart of the SDGs. The UK is a strong supporter of human rights in the post-2015 development agenda, and the Prime Minister has always emphasised the importance of the integration on the key issues of peace, good governance, rule of law, and human rights into the Sustainable Development Goals.

The Government is especially pleased that Goal 16, "Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels", is an integral part of the framework, and will advance the promotion and protection on human rights globally.

Climate Change

Lord Collins and the Right Reverend, the Lord Bishop of St Albans raised points on climate change. It is a UK priority to ensure that the post-2015 agenda speaks to the global dangers of climate change, and that the issue is strongly reflected in the agenda. Development and tackling climate change are two sides of the same coin – the poorest and most vulnerable will be hit first and hardest by climate change, and we welcome that it is well reflected in the post-2015 agenda.

Gender Equality

The Right Reverend, the Lord Bishop of St Albans also spoke about the need for a standalone goal on gender inequality. The UK has been at the forefront of arguing for a strong, standalone goal that addresses the causes of gender inequality in the post-2015 framework. The existing goal is good, and we will continue to argue for all aspects of the framework to respond effectively to gender issues through the remaining negotiations

I am copying this letter to Peers who participated in the debate and will also place a copy in the Library of the House.

Kindest regards

BARONESS VERMA