Written Evidence Submitted by RESULTS UK

Introduction

1. RESULTS UK is a grassroots advocacy organisation that exists to create the public and political will to end extreme poverty. It does this by engaging, educating, and empowering citizen campaigners to call for action by their elected representatives to address neglected global issues that sustain poverty.

2. We believe that the implementation of high quality Government development policies can have a transformative impact on quality of life for citizens in partner countries towards the ultimate goal of ending extreme poverty.

3. We welcome this inquiry and its focus on defining the future UK development approach. We believe that approach must be built on long-term, sustainable levels of financing, and a commitment to pursue ever higher standards in the UK’s aid interventions.

4. Our evidence will be informed by our unique position as a grassroots advocacy organisation with more than 25 years of experience. We will seek to address how the issues raised by the inquiry (policy coherence, non-aid policies, DFID’s role in Whitehall) impact upon the sentiment and commitment of UK citizens towards aid and the impact that this, in turn, will have on the UK’s approach to development.

Making the Case for Aid

5. The election of governments who have stated their commitment to development objectives gives the UK Government a mandate to carry out such work. Further, UK citizens have elected successive governments who have steadily increased the proportion of UK Gross National Income spent on ODA to its current level.

6. Public polls have looked further into the support of the UK public for international development. Research funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation shows that among the 32% of citizens who consider themselves ‘actively engaged’ with development issues, more define as being ‘pro-aid’ (41%) than as ‘aid sceptics’ (12%). Other research has demonstrated that a majority of UK citizens support the objective of ending extreme poverty, and support the UK government’s ODA targets.

7. Despite these figures, the UK’s development agenda remains a topic for debate among the public, the media, and in parliament. Thus far, the UK Government has contributed to maintaining a steady support for development. However, should the balance of the debate turn in favour of the aid sceptics, the UK Government’s commitment could be eroded, undermining any future UK approach to development. For example, although 68% of the public do not consider themselves ‘actively engaged’ in development issues, this could change given the election campaign focuses of the various Parties, and it is not assured that any newly engaged citizens would be ‘pro-aid’.

8. Pro-aid voices are crucial to maintaining (or even swinging) the balance of the debate in favour of a UK commitment to development and ODA. Such favourable voices include citizen campaigners and the MPs they engage. Pro-aid sections of the UK Government have identified the importance of the ‘pro-aid’ camp, as a loud voice in support of UK Government

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1 http://www.comres.co.uk/poll/760/one-campaign-overseas-aid-poll.htm
interventions, to counteract the sceptics and galvanise public and political will for continued action.

9. These positive voices are especially important given the actions of a significant proportion of the UK print-media which is perceived to be strongly ‘aid sceptic’. This vocal and influential section of the media clearly has an impact on both decision-makers’ perception of levels of public support, and public support itself, by highlighting negative aid outcomes. This section of the media has sufficiently skewed perceptions of public ‘aid scepticism’ so that that engaged ‘pro-aid’ citizens such as RESULTS UK’s campaigners now perceive themselves to be in a minority, despite research showing otherwise.

**Sustaining Public Support and the Importance of Policy Coherence:**

i) The coherence of policies that affect development (including aid, security, prosperity, and climate)

ii) The impact of the UK’s non-aid policies on developing countries

10. Whilst members of the public may support international development in the abstract, the battleground for the aid debate is not fought in the abstract, but rather over existing government development policy. Aid-sceptics, particularly in the media, question the validity of development objectives by exposing perceived weaknesses in current government policy. To balance the debate, therefore, there is an expectation that civil society organisations should highlight the successes of the current government’s policy and ask their supporters to present the UK as a ‘leader on aid.’

11. Policies that address UK problems but maintain a broader development perspective make it easier to represent the UK government as a leader on aid because of the perceived adoption of a ‘whole government approach’.

12. For example, the investment of the Department of Health in the development of improved TB regimens to improve TB care and control in the UK has clear synergies with development priorities. RESULTS UK grassroots supporters responded positively to this more ‘holistic’ approach to TB, tackling it in the UK and abroad.

13. Similarly, the Prime Minister’s Commission on Anti-Microbial Resistance, designed to overcome market failures in the development of new antibiotics, simultaneously speaks to the UK and international health agendas, and raises the possibility of a ‘whole government’ approach to certain development challenges.

14. On the other hand policies that seem to conflict with the UK’s stated development objectives can have the impact of discrediting the government’s claims to be a leader on development. Policies such as the roll-back of subsidies for renewable energy generation whilst DFID simultaneously provides funding to mitigate the impact of climate change bring the UK’s commitment to climate change as a whole into question. This effect extends further, to undermine commitment to other development objectives, such as improved food security, which is made more challenging under unpredictable and extreme weather patterns.

15. Government-approved sales of arms to countries or regions where UK aid is then involved in humanitarian interventions have a similar impact undermining the government’s credibility as a ‘leader on aid’ and reduce the will of pro-aid citizens to vocally support the government.

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2 For example, in the build up to the UK’s pledge to the Global Fund, it was made apparent that the government would be closely monitoring civil society’s response and expected vocal and positive support.
16. Likewise, a failure to address international tax avoidance by firms based or operating in the UK, particularly by using havens located in the UK’s overseas territories, undermines developing country governments’ commitments to tackling capital losses. This weakens their national budgets and undermines efforts to achieve UK Government stated objectives of developing countries becoming aid independent.

17. Intellectual property laws can create conflicts with development objectives, ranging from achieving access to affordable medicines for those affected by diseases of poverty to incentivising the research and development of new medicines for such diseases. These laws maintain the dominant pharmaceutical development model that is based on market returns rather than public health needs. The UK simultaneously champions strong IP and funds organisations like the International AIDS Vaccine Initiative (IAVI) whose work is made more difficult in developing a new HIV vaccine by these very same IP laws.

18. In a final example, it is very likely that new legislation under the Lobbying Act will force many civil society organisation to avoid carrying out legitimate, non-partisan public awareness work, lest they incur an insupportable financial burden from extra reporting requirements, and have to bear the title of ‘third party in an election’ undermining genuine attempts to keep development on the agenda of the major political parties. This has a potentially worrying effect on our democracy, in contrast with the UK Government’s evidenced commitment to supporting overseas civil society via UK development policies and spending.

19. In such instances of policy conflict, we do not believe that citizens’ support for development in the abstract sense is undermined, rather that it is harder to generate a vocal support for a government and present it as a ‘leader on aid’ when the same government is enacting policies which are widely perceived to be contrary to clearly stated development objectives.

20. A future UK approach to development, then, should make greater efforts to align stated development objectives with other departmental policies – or, in the face of political realities, not appear to directly contradict them. As policy incoherence undermines the ability to generate vocal public support, and public support is critical to maintaining the long-term future of the UK approach to development, governments (both this and future) must push for greater policy coherence and not adopt non-aid policies in relation to developing countries with negative development impact.

Creating Policy Coherence and the Role of DFID:

   i) The role of DFID in facilitating other UK Government departments and other UK organisations to assist developing countries
   iv) The role of DFID in influencing the policies of other Whitehall departments
   v) Whether a stand-alone Department for International Development has a long-term future

21. The pursuit of greater policy coherence and ensuring that non-aid policies do not negatively impact on developing countries is central to securing the long-term public support for aid. The immediately relevant question, then, is how to ensure that policy coherence?

22. A strategic approach, examining the policies and potential policies of other government departments through a development lens would help to ensure that government policies in one department don’t undermine progress in another. This approach is essential, for example, to deliver on any Post-2015 commitments, which will encompass trade, health, human rights or
security. The UK Government’s DfID recognises the importance of cross-sector integration in the development it supports in partner countries, in encouraging education planning that targets health needs, or health interventions that address gender equality outcomes. We therefore hope the UK Government also values the importance of ensuring their work across all of their own departments is coherent and able to on the benefits of integration.

23. There may also be conflicts between the policies and work of external organisations or partnerships which DfID funds – and this may become more likely as their support of multilateral approaches increases. A standalone department would be much better placed to identify and address such instances. Further, policy coherence and integration is much more effective when underpinned by a theory of change for development, and when based on the latest and best quality research and evidence available. Such an analysis would be more possible when carried out and advanced by a single body, given ownership and accountability of implementation.

24. This strategic approach would most effectively be implemented by a stand-alone department. DFID has already shown the ability to influence the policies of other Whitehall departments. Some successful examples include:

1. The Joint Trade Policy Unit with BIS is an example of trade-related decisions being addressed with a consideration for development concerns (although, perhaps, not always successfully).

2. The DFID/Medical Research Council Concordat is perhaps the sole global example of a research agency partnering with an aid agency to ensure maximum return on investment.

3. Finally DFID’s work with the Foreign Office on supporting LGBT rights overseas, and tackling FGM and EFCM in the UK and abroad has been widely regarded a success.

25. Such a strategy would require resourcing. Despite the ever increasing budget, DFID has barely any scope to increase its headcount due to broader government initiatives. This reduces the department’s effectiveness to facilitate other government departments to assist developing countries, and to influence the policies of those departments.

26. Accordingly, we consider an increase in DFID’s capacity to recruit new staff a critical aspect of maximising and leveraging the UK aid budget.

27. Further, the impact of ‘absorbing’ DfID into another department on citizens’ willingness to support any UK Government may well be strongly negative, as such a move could be seen as a reduction of the UK’s commitment to development, or a suggestion of ‘job done’. This could therefore embolden the ‘aid sceptic’ lobby, with potentially long term consequences for the balance of public support for development.

28. Such a move risks having a similar effect on Ministerial decisions, priorities and budgeting regarding development across Government, and on other world leaders. Both consequences would weaken the UK’s ability to deliver development outcomes, and our role as a global leader. In the context of RESULTS UK’s work, both the decision to dismantle DfID and the likely consequences for the UK’s capacity, would certainly weaken the perception of being able to ‘make a difference’ among our engaged citizen campaigners.

Sustaining Public Support and the Importance of Accountability and Transparency
29. In our experience working to empower citizens to become active advocates for UK development spending, a positive perception of the decision-making process is critical to encouraging them to show their support, either to MPs, Ministers, or to the public more generally. As explained above, their doing so has a significant and crucial effect on both political and public support for development.

30. It is also of crucial importance to make the channels for influencing public policy as clear as possible for civil society. The democratic process relies on openness and responsiveness to public opinion – having a standalone DfID allows our and others’ supporters to play a clear role in the policy making process.

31. A transparent and accountable process for decision-making also has an effect on the quality of decisions made. This in turn produces higher quality development outcomes which also help encourage pro-aid sections of the UK public to engage in the broader debate. Strong outcomes also act as evidence which citizen campaigners can present to politicians and other citizens in support of development and ODA commitments.

32. A standalone Department for International Development creates figureheads for development policy (the Secretary of State and Ministers) who citizens can, either directly or through their MP, contact to raise their concerns or express their support. Whilst this may, at times, be uncomfortable for the Ministers concerned, the fact that such a clear line of engagement exists is critical to the perceived and actual transparency and accountability of UK development policy to its public.

33. From our experience of engaging and educating UK citizens on development issues, and empowering them to speak to their elected representatives and relevant government departments, the continuation of an independent DFID is critical to the continued vocal support for development.

34. RESULTS UK is part of the global network of RESULTS organisations, including Canada where the Canadian International Development Agency was recently folded into the Department for Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development, and Australia where AusAid has been folded into the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. Whilst it is, perhaps, too soon to make a judgement of the impact of this change on the development policies of the Canadian and Australian governments, the experience of our colleagues suggests that it has blurred the lines of transparency and accountability, and given the impression to the public of a ‘de-prioritisation’ of development objectives, both of which are critical to citizen engagement and the development of stronger policies. These recent decisions concern us, and underline the timeliness of the opportunity to represent the need for a standalone DfID to this inquiry.

**Conclusion**

35. A strong and vocal pro-aid lobby galvanises political support and commitment for development. Therefore, the maintenance of this pro-aid lobby is critical to the continuation of the UK’s international development programmes.

36. The willingness of pro-aid citizens to vocally and visibly support government development priorities is encouraged by greater policy coherence, and by the perceived prioritisation of aid objectives within government policy as demonstrated by non-aid policies. Transparency and accountability also play a role maintaining that strong support, in facilitating the scrutiny of aid policies – an end of itself which is also critical to the continued development of better policies.
37. We consider an independent, fully-staffed DFID, with an expressed mandate to drive policy coherence across UK government departments, with an empowered Secretary of State who is clearly accountable for said policy, and with whom UK citizens can engage to support and hold accountable UK development policy, the best way of delivering policy coherence, prioritisation of aid objectives and ensuring transparency. For these reasons, we consider an independent, fully-staffed DFID critical to the long-term quality, and even long-term existence, of the UK’s approach to development.