

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY: CALL FOR EVIDENCE

Introduction

- 1 The International Committee of the Royal Society of Edinburgh (RSE), Scotland's National Academy welcomes the opportunity to respond to the UK Government Call for Evidence on the International Development Strategy (The Strategy).

The following paper outlines the responses given by the RSE International Committee (hereafter, "the Committee") to the consultation questions.

Impact

Question 1. How might progress on International Development to 2030 be impacted by the trends identified in the Integrated Review? How should the UK respond?

The Strategy outlines four strategic objectives as follows:

- 1 Sustaining strategic advantages through science and technology
- 2 Shaping the open international order of the future
- 3 Strengthening security and defence at home and overseas
- 4 Building resilience at home and overseas

2 *Sustaining strategic advantages through science and technology*

With regards to the first objective of sustaining strategic advantages through science and technology, the Committee notes the necessity for the UK to retain the capacity to shape multilateral projects on the global stage, especially through the development of equitable partnerships involving Low- and Middle-Income Countries

(LMICs). The ability to fulfil this goal has been negatively impacted by the 2021 cuts to the Official Development Assistance (ODA) funding, particularly for projects relying on the Global Challenges Research fund (GCRF) and Newton fund. These cuts have ramifications for the careers of partners involved in International Development work, both in the UK and in the LMICs. This in turn greatly impacts the strategic advantages of the UK in the field.

3 *Shaping the open international order of the future*

On the second objective, the Committee notes the adverse consequences of the loss of strategic advantage on the UK's capacity to shape a forward-looking international order. Once again, ODA cuts are identified as having worked to reduce the UK's influence in the global knowledge environment. This trend is clearly reflected in the reputational costs resulting from the breaching of partner contracts incurred by the withdrawal of funding. UK-based and LMIC-based societies alike have lamented the loss of knowledge creation and sharing, and loss of influence and their consequences for the dissemination of the UK soft power as a global partner and leader on issues of international development. The Committee also highlights the necessity to renew the national focus on tackling climate change through societal and economic reforms, in order for the UK to lead the response to challenges posed by climate change at the global level.

4 *Strengthening security and defence at home and overseas*

Looking at the third objective, the Committee emphasises the necessity to resume funding dedicated to peace-building efforts. The precarity of the current situation is evidenced by the emerging concerns surrounding mounting hostility from former LMICs partners who, due to the nature of their work as UK partners, are experiencing threats to their personal security. A recent example of the loss of security for overseas partner can be found in the Home Office policy regarding the immigration status of Afghan partners. This direct consequence stemming from ODA cuts is fuelling the externalisation problems intrinsic to the weakening of security and defence overall.

5 *Building resilience at home and overseas*

Finally, looking at the issues of resilience-building, the Committee highlights the impact of UK withdrawal from global scholarships on the capacity to encourage resilience in the UK and abroad. The Committee further advises that the ability to build resilience is directly dependent on investment in intercultural communications. To ensure these issues are appropriately addressed, the Committee encourages a renewed commitment to multilateral global schemes to encourage the creation and maintenance of networks bringing together governmental, industrial and higher education actors. Such endeavours would allow for a stronger coordination of global responses to emerging crises, thus improving the UK's role in shaping the international order.

Question 2. What would 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?

6 The Committee notes the necessity for trusted functional institutions at all levels of society – including the governmental level – in meeting the needs of the poorest and most marginalised. Self-sustainability for the identified categories is dependent on the ability of trusted institutions to maintain long-term presence at the regional and state level. With these parameters in mind, the Committee posits that success in 2030 would

encompass functional networks of communities able to respond to the challenges highlighted by the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), along with offering continuous opportunities for education at all levels of society. One possible avenue to achieve these objectives would be to increase capacity-building to enable local scientists to address local issues. The latter include, but are not limited to, clean water supply, food security and national health. To carry these aims to fruition, the Committee recommends an increase in funding and the provision of regular opportunities for interaction and knowledge exchange, particularly in the context of international fora. The Committee further emphasises the urgency of returning to the pre-2021 level of 0.7% GDP level of ODA funding.

Question 3. How and where can wider UK Government international policies and activities best support long-term international development outcomes?

7 To lend impactful support to long-term international development outcomes, the Committee recommends that the UK Government renew their commitment to the following:

- The Paris Agreement on Climate Change and Net Zero
- Biodiversity Targets
- The UNESCO's Mission for Intercultural Dialogue and Peace-Building
- Education for conflict transformation
- The Global Compact for Migration and Global Compact on Refugees

The current Integrated Review policy to divest overseas aid has led to the stalling of progress in the areas of peace education, especially where women and girls are concerned. A functional commitment to peacebuilding further depends on partners' confidence in funding to enable long-term support and monitoring on the ground. On this issue, the Committee draws attention to the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA) 15-year funding timeline.¹ The Committee further raises the need for the UK Government to focus closely on the connections between international development and climate change, highlighting the potential for greater migration movements resulting from negative environmental impacts.

¹ https://www.government.se/4ab8e7/contentassets/338057ee724641cda2e54840688d3e21/pgu_skrivelse_engelska_slutgiltig_181011_nyttomslag-002.pdf

Question 4. *How and where can government work on development best support the UK's wider strategic objectives set out in the Integrated Review?*

- 8 The Committee recommends a greater inclusion of indigenous authorities in an effort to ensure development work responds to the needs of the populations directly impacted. This could take the form of promoting co-leadership on local projects, along with an increase in both time and financial commitments.

UK Leadership

Question 5. *In what areas of international development does the UK have a comparative advantage, particular interest, or is the best placed to deliver?*

- 9 The Committee highlights the following areas of UK strategic strength:
- Medicine and health
 - Environmental policies
 - Migration research
 - Equitable partnerships and Humanities research
 - Commonwealth countries
 - Oceans and Biodiversity

Partnerships

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

- 10 The Committee reiterates the need to foster intercultural dialogue through the support of already established work that has been negatively impacted by ODA cuts. The issue of loss of confidence must also be addressed to encourage partnership-building, both with existing and new actors. This should take the form of reparative work, especially in areas related to conflict and post-conflict situations, along with fostering a greater involvement of women and girls. The UK approach should focus firmly on strengthening capacity in the aforementioned areas, among others. Furthermore, the UK Government should encourage multilateral partnerships based on recent successful endeavours, which would in turn allow for the involvement of new actors as relevant.

Additional Information

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Responses are published on the RSE website (<https://www.rse.org.uk/>)

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