

A new approach to overseas aid

Now the government has decided to unite our foreign policy with our overseas aid policy, there is a great opportunity to rethink what we do and what it achieves.

41% of our aid is currently routed through multinational bodies where we have little control over how well it is spent or who receives it. The Department has worked closely with the EU all the time we were a member, allowing them to spend some of our money as well. Surely now we need to unite our efforts behind policies that work and give to countries where we wish to help.

Given the big pressures on public spending brought on by the CV 19 crisis, the government should announce the new budget figure for spending this year, as 0.7% of GDP will now be a lower figure than the Treasury thought a few months ago. We should begin winding down our indirect commitments of aid, and work up a great UK programme which achieves more.

The UK has done some good work on clean water, on medical services and economic development. It should concentrate its efforts in areas where we have special expertise, whilst always being ready to be generous with disaster relief. We have the ships and manpower to make an important contribution when disaster strikes a country.

We know that many countries on our aid list have been poor for any decades, and know that past aid programmes have not succeeded in breaking the evil spell of poverty. We also know that trade is more powerful than aid at raising living standards, and know it is better to teach a person to fish than to send them fish when we remember to.

Over the days ahead I am going to sketch out some ideas on how we can achieve more for countries crying out for help with development with new approaches to the support and the investments we make. I invite your comments as I do this work. One of the ways forward could be to help finance economic development projects and business development that generates sustainable jobs whilst providing returns for investors.