

# Where is Overseas Aid when you need it?

The decision of the UK to guarantee it would spend 0.7% of its National Income every year on Overseas Aid has been contentious. Some dislike the idea of committing to spend without assessing need and capacity to spend wisely. Some dislike the way the UK is one of the few countries to honour this international obligation whilst rich countries like Germany (0.5%), Italy (0.2%) and France (0.37%) do not bother. Some just think we have more pressing priorities at home and should confine overseas aid spending to crises and humanitarian disasters.

Most people in the UK probably agree with the government -as I do – that the UK should send immediate relief to British territories in the Caribbean to provide food, shelter, clothing, and medical assistance to those caught up in the disaster. Most probably also think the UK should help those countries rebuild their shattered towns and homes by offering practical and financial help. Surely this would be a cause for overseas aid that would unite more people than it would divide? What better use of part of our large overseas aid budget?

However, the spending of overseas aid is subject to rules and guidance from an international body. Apparently the Caribbean islands concerned did not have a low enough national income when the hurricane struck to qualify for overseas aid. I fear the hurricane has taken care of this in the short term, but international accounting definitions and data seem to be getting in the way of commonsense. I hope our Overseas Aid Secretary gets them to think again. I would like us to be generous to help these islands, and think it should be paid for out of our substantial Overseas Aid budget.

I expect the government to lobby for a change of definitions. As one of the few countries that hits the international target we should have some leverage on this matter.

While we are about it, they also need to review definitions of which military expenditure counts as Overseas Aid. When we commit our forces to peace keeping or peace making in a civil war torn country, that too should count. Peace keeping is often a crucial step to restoring or crating prosperity in a poor country. Without a peace businesses cannot flourish and people find it difficult to go about earning their living.