

## Benn says young must help shape development

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### Summary

Hilary Benn, the International Development Secretary, said today that young people should have a greater say in how development aid is delivered.

Speaking to a seminar in London on youth and development, Mr Benn said policymakers must 'increase the voice of youth'.

'What makes the biggest difference to the quality of governance is the involvement of citizens - and that includes young people,' he said.

'We need to build awareness of young people's rights and help to make those rights a reality. And we need to enable governments to fulfil their obligations to their citizens, including young people.'

The International Development Secretary also used his speech to lament the plight of children dying in the developing world and the number of children worldwide affected by unemployment and facing an uncertain future.

However, he also stressed the extra funding the international community was providing for education, healthcare, fighting AIDS, water and sanitation in the developing world.

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Thanks.

I'm very pleased to have been invited to speak on Youth and to contribute to all of us learning lessons from the 2007 World Development Report (WDR).

In my travels I meet many young people who face a world far different from our own. I'll never forget visiting Rumbek, in southern Sudan, where I met a group of villagers who had walked all the way from Khartoum; it had taken them more than two months. As the war ended, they wanted to go home.

And I remember talking to two children. For Stephen, his greatest hope was to go to school, for his older sister Josephina, her gravest worry was the cost. She had no money to pay his fees.

Or meeting a young girl at a well in the heat of the midday sun in the Nema slums of Accra. She told me that she came there every day to collect her family's water, while her brothers went to school. That day, she had had to wait several hours. The well was closed and it was slow in refilling, as it was every day. I asked her about her school - she always got there late, she said, if at all.

Or in Somalia where I visited a UNICEF-organised school in a camp in Wajid - 300 children - brimming with energy - an equal number of boys and girls - enjoying very basic primary education for the first time in their lives.

All of these children are full of hope for a better future, but are unsure how they'll get there.

Now, our small and fragile planet is shared by over 6 billion people - a human family that is more interdependent than at any time in its history - and a family that has, for the first time, the capacity to make sure that every one of them is lifted out of poverty.

But the truth is this. Here we are at the beginning of the 21st century. Yet in poor countries, pregnancy and childbirth kill a woman every minute - so three women have died since I started speaking - they die with no trained midwife or doctor to help.

A world where four million children die each year in the first month of their short life. And half of all child deaths are the result of malnutrition.

Where dirty water and inadequate sanitation kill 5,000 children each and every day.

And where each year, every year, malaria kills one million people, tuberculosis two million people, AIDS three million people. Every one of them a soul extinguished.

And all of this is taking place in a world that is rapidly changing. A generation of teenagers is entering the workforce in developing countries. By 2010, over 700 million young people in developing countries will be of working age, compared to 50 million in the rich world. And many of them will migrate, internally and abroad, in search of a better life.

As the WDR shows us, there are 1.3 billion young people in developing countries - the most in human history. Over half of the world's unemployed are young people, with a uncertain future. And 130 million young people between the age of fifteen and twenty four can't read or write - making it harder to improve their lives, and the lives of their children.

Here at home, I think many people feel ambivalent about the changes they see taking place in our world, including the results of globalisation.

They know that it means that you can buy a pair of jeans for a fiver. They know that someone who came from abroad is picking the potatoes in East Anglia, or delivering the lectures in Leeds University. They feel the benefits.

But they also feel uneasy about the pace of change. Communities altering before their very eyes. The shape of families changing. And they feel that no-one asked them whether they wanted this to happen.

For our young people it will mean competing for jobs not just within the UK, but globally too.

For poor countries its even harder, and more urgent. Because unless young people are able to get the opportunities and skills they need, our common goal - to halve extreme poverty - will prove impossible.

We should take hope from the fact that last year the whole world came together to make a difference - Make Poverty History - Live8 - the promises that we made - including an additional \$50 billion in aid by 2010 - and many of which are now being delivered. This is going to help get the schools and clinics and water that people need, and help build the economies that will provide future employment.

First, education - next to the love and care of your family, it is the foundation on which our lives are built. But there are 77 million children - the majority girls - who aren't where they should be - in school.

It's why we have committed £8.5 billion to support 10 year education plans. So that countries can plan to end the school fees, recruit and train the teachers, and build the classrooms - and help young people get the skills they need for a better start in life.

And our support has helped double the number of children in school in Mozambique; increase the number of children enrolled in primary school in Ethiopia by nearly four million, and in Tanzania help abolish school fees, where now nine out of ten children go to school, instead of only six. Where now a textbook is shared between three children, rather than ten. That's aid making a difference.

And in Swaziland, two thirds of girls who are in school are free of HIV compared to two thirds of girls who are out of school who have HIV. In other words, education is like a social vaccine against AIDS.

Ill health blights the lives of those who survive diseases which rarely kill people in this country. Poor people can't get health care if they can't afford it. So we are supporting poor countries to abolish health fees. In Uganda, for instance, where 3,000 health workers have been recruited and trained and where attendance at clinics nearly doubled as a result, or in Zambia where debt relief has helped the government abolish health fees in rural areas.

Last Friday was World Aids Day. It's been over twenty five years since AIDS was first discovered. Since that time, twenty five million people have lost their lives to this disease, most of them in Africa. The number of infections are growing, with young people making up 40% of

those, and now three quarters of young people with HIV in Africa are girls.

Fifteen million children have lost a parent to AIDS. What does that mean? It means they lost the person they depended on more than anyone else in the world. It means they lost the squeeze of a hand, the whisper of encouragement, the words of experience that our parents give us.

So we have committed £1.5 billion in the fight against AIDS, money which is helping to get over a million people in Africa on treatment, as part of our commitment to make sure everyone is by 2010. It's money which will help research better drugs for children. Why? Because AIDS did not emerge in the west as a disease affecting children. So, surprise, surprise, no paediatric treatment became available.

And collecting water should not force girls to miss school, so we have doubled our support to water and sanitation in Africa to £95 million by 2008 and agreed to double it again to £200 million by 2011. And, alongside the UN, I have called for a Global Action Plan on water to make sure we all meet our promises.

And we are also helping the very poorest families with social security payments. It is in families such as these - those too poor to care for their children, or those where the mother or father have died - where small cash payments can make the difference between life and death. In Zambia for instance, we are helping the government try out different ways of doing this.

In one district, just £3 a month is given to the poorest 10% of people - allowing them to buy some food, or a hoe, or some pots for cooking. It makes all the difference. Two thirds of the beneficiaries are children, and of those, most are orphans. These programmes work, and we will expand them in at least ten countries.

Youth unemployment is a serious problem. I spoke to one young man in the Mabella slum in Freetown, Sierra Leone, earlier this year, who said how frustrated he was at the lack of jobs. We're supporting young people across the country with vocational training and helping them set up their own businesses.

There are many ways we can provide the opportunities needed - investing in education and health and water - and getting the conditions right for economic growth. But we must also help increase the voice of youth, so that their rights are respected, their needs better heard, better understood - and acted on.

Our white paper this year put governance at the heart of development - and what makes the biggest difference to the quality of governance is the involvement of citizens - and that includes young people.

We need to build awareness of young people's rights and help to make those rights a reality. And we need to enable governments to fulfil their obligations to their citizens, including young people.

In doing so, we support a wide range of efforts. In Sierra Leone we've supported the participation of young people as voters and candidates in elections, and we've supported radio programmes for young people. In Columbia we're supporting efforts to make the Youth Law work on the ground - including youth-led efforts to bring peace.

And in the Democratic Republic of Congo - which has just held its first democratic elections - and where half the population is under the age of twenty-five - we have supported Save the Children Fund to help bring the views of young people into the national plans to reduce poverty.

We must also change the policies and perceptions which exclude young people, as well as others on the grounds of race or caste or sex or disability.

Shockingly, only 1-2% of children with disabilities in developing countries ever get an education. So in Vietnam we support the government's "Primary Education Disadvantaged Children Programme", which helps get more disabled children into school, or in Uganda where the government has passed a law stating that children with disabilities take priority for free education.

These and other efforts are making a difference.

It shows that politics can change things, and getting more young people into politics and influencing politics will help change things too. I was pleased that David and Peace Child International asked me to this event - I'm very happy to have this chance to meet with him and with young people and organisations working on youth issues to see how we can do more to help.