

Youth and Development

Speech to the All Party Parliamentary Group on Overseas Development

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Firstly I'd like to say thank you to all the groups involved in organising this event.

I'd like to thank APGOOD, who have done so much to facilitate discussion and debate amongst the many parliamentarians for whom international development is a passion, not just an area of interest.

I'd like to thank David Woollcombe and Peacechild International, who have worked to inspire and empower young people to make a positive difference to the world.

I was fascinated to read about how Peace Child got its name. In Papua New Guinea, when warring tribes of head-hunters made peace, they each exchanged a child. The children would grow up with the others' tribe and if in the future, conflict threatened between the tribes again, those children would be sent to negotiate. Such a child was called a "Peace Child."

This is an apt name for an organisation founded in the belief that young people can play a vital role in fostering peace and development.

I'd like to thank The Chronic Poverty Research Centre, whose dedicated members are undertaking pioneering and important research – and turning that research into concrete policy.

And I'd like to thank the ODI. Whenever I speak to your staff I am always impressed by their sharp, penetrating analysis and their unrivalled depth of knowledge.

The Conservative Party is committed to producing a comprehensive, ambitious policy programme on the complex, interlocking challenge of global poverty.

It's a top priority.

In January 2006 David Cameron established the Globalisation and Global Poverty Policy Group. It is looking at a wide range of issues – aid, trade, conflict, wealth creation, governance and corruption. A central theme will be to examine how poor people and poor countries can take advantage of the opportunities provided by globalisation. If you want to know more about its work, please visit its website at <http://www.globalpovertychallenge.com/>

Today we're going to look at the challenges and the opportunities posed by the world's youthful population.

I think that too often, those in the development business talk in too negative terms.

Yes, there is so much that needs to be done – everyone in this room knows that.

But there is a lot to be positive about.

We've made real progress over the last 50 years.

The world has got freer, fairer, more open, and richer.

Growing wealth has translated into real improvements in the quality of people's lives.

People live much longer: average global life expectancy has increased from 46 in 1960 to 65 in 1998.

Fewer babies die in their first year of life.

Life-saving and pain-reducing technologies have been invented – and people increasingly have the wealth to afford them.

In the poorest countries there has been real progress.

India and China have lifted hundreds of millions of people out of poverty.

Even in Africa, life expectancy and literacy rates have improved to some extent since the end of European empires.

Young people have been the drivers of much of this change. And young people are at the heart of the development challenge.

Today one and a half billion people are aged between 12 and 24. 1.3 billion of them are in the developing world- the greatest number ever.

There are many obvious advantages to this: developing countries can soon expect to have a larger share of people of working age.

We have a brief window of opportunity to harness the talents of this youthful generation and inspire rapid economic growth.

Young people have the energy, the dynamism, the ambition, and the entrepreneurial spirit to create wealth, to better themselves and their families....and in doing to, to help lift their nations out of poverty.

But with this boom also comes new challenges that have to be faced, not only for the developing countries but also for DFID, the NGOs and donors.

It is young people – the fit, the relatively healthy, the energetic – who are migrating to the rich world, getting on makeshift boats and braving stormy seas in a desperate quest to reach the shores of Spain.

For example, young people bear the brunt of the HIV/AIDS epidemic. In 2005 more than 50% of people who contracted HIV worldwide were 15-24.

So as with so many things in this field, a youthful population has implications for all aspects of international development policy.

Firstly, and most obviously, in education.

As Paul Wolfowitz says in the introduction to this report, “there has never been a better time to invest in young people in developing countries....”

As we all know, 100 million kids are missing out on an education.

And many more are missing out on a good education.

In Morocco more than 80% attend primary school - but fewer than 20% have a minimum mastery of the curriculum.

A recent report found that even after 6 years of primary education in Ghana, only 41% of students have functional literacy

And of the children that do then complete primary school very few go on to secondary education.

For instance, in Indonesia where primary school completion is almost universal, the numbers at secondary level drop dramatically. This decrease is naturally most visible amongst the poor.

So as well as getting more kids into school, we desperately need to improve the quality of education in poor countries.

How to do this?

Above all, it's about political choice.

Developing countries should make the right choice – to invest in their young people.

This is intrinsically good, expanding minds and allowing children to realize their talent and potential.

And it boosts growth and development.

Governments in developing countries have a responsibility to guarantee that all children have a chance to go to school.

Let us be frank.

At the moment this responsibility is being shockingly abdicated.

In many countries, governments spend more on guns than on schools.

And in others, the public education system has been captured by the privileged.

In India, for example, we see world-class universities producing tens of thousands of graduates each year, often at public expense....whilst the poor have to make do with a primary school system that is decaying, riven by corruption and poor performance.

We in Britain understandably want to help get more kids into school.

I believe that we should keep an open mind about how to do so.

Just because the state funds education, it should not necessarily be the sole provider.

I congratulate DfID for what it has achieved in countries which have abolished school fees, and made primary education compulsory.

But in the many cases where Government lacks the will or the capacity to act, we must also recognise the role that the private sector can play.

For too long, people have assumed that achieving 'education for all' is solely a matter for governments and aid agencies.

The assumption is that private schools serve the upper classes and so are irrelevant to debates about the poor.

Professor James Tooley of Newcastle University has challenged this assumption with some fascinating research into private schooling in India.

He found independent schools serving low-income families in Hyderabad, helping the children of landless labourers and illiterate mothers to get an education that was better than that offered by the struggling state system.

Where parents can exercise real power – where they are free to choose – they demand better results and drive up standards.

Many of us here will have seen the tiny private schools in the back-alleys of urban slums in Africa and South Asia - run on a shoestring budget, but delivering results that are often better than those in the public sector.

So as we work to expand access to education we should work with these schools – perhaps by helping to expand their capacity, or by offering to subsidise their fees for the poorest.

And there is more we can do.

We must monitor and improve the standards of teaching at every level, so that children come out of school with the skills necessary to gain meaningful employment.

Once within the schooling system it is also crucial that children are taught a curriculum that is relevant to their life. Lessons that will give them the basic skills for further learning and practical living.

We should also explore innovative methods of teaching. As the World Development Report notes, peer-to-peer teaching has shown impressive results in combating HIV, especially in Jamaica.

In many ways the key issue for young people – as it is for everyone – is economic growth and employment.

The recent ILO report on global employment trends for youth found that of the 1.1 billion young people aged 15 to 24 worldwide, one out of three is either seeking but unable to find work, has given up the job search entirely or is working but living on less than US\$2 a day.

The way to create jobs is through growth, underpinned by property rights, the rule of law, sober fiscal and monetary policy, and investment in health and education.

Many young people will wish to be self-employed.

Young people are often restricted by the inability to secure loans or acquire investment.

So we should look at how microfinance can help young people, particularly women

As I saw in Bangladesh recently, young women and even girls can prosper where they are given the funds to start a small business.

Finally I want to say a few words about the role that young people here in the UK can play in development.

So many young British people are passionate about international development.

I remember that in my day young graduates fresh out of university all wanted to join the FCO or the Treasury- now it's DfID.

More teenagers from the UK take gap years than any other country.

Indeed, in a few weeks my daughter is traveling to Bolivia for her gap year.

Young people in Britain have so much to offer young people in the developing world – and so much to learn from them.

I'm keen that we work with the organisers of gap year projects to ensure that participants make a real contribution to the communities that they work in; that they leave behind a real footprint upon which others, too, can build.

Our youthful world offers us both challenges and opportunities.

That's why it's so important – as the excellent World Development Report argues – that policymakers in both rich and poor countries grapple with the implications of a youthful population.

To do this properly and to make effective policy in this area, we need better information.

We need to see more research into youth as a specific demographic sector.

And we need more information on the effectiveness of the small NGOs that work with young people.

If we get our policy in this area wrong, we risk wasting the potential of yet another generation.

Get it right, and this young generation can drive growth and development and truly help to make poverty history.