

Delivering the Development Message: Why it Matters

Thank you Simon and everybody for the warm welcome, I'm very glad to be here and in fact I've been looking forward to this - I'd like to thank ODI for inviting me here to speak in front of you - and many of you are leading minds in development – and I'm very keen to hear your thoughts because actually on this area of discussion what I need is to know what you're thinking and how you think I should be moving forward.

So today I want to talk about how do we deliver the development message which is something I feel particularly strongly about having as Simon mentioned just returned yesterday from Northern Nigeria, where the people that I met – and I stayed for 24 hours through Action Aid in a remote village – the people I spoke lived in considerable poverty. Poverty not because of their own endeavours, and in fact in the areas in which they had control which was a well for water, growing their food, food to eat, shelter - there they were doing alright – it was in the other areas that they were relying on their government for – that's where the desperate poverty came from. So having working hard to provide food and shelter for themselves I feel and felt that it is not unreasonably that they should expect the state to play its role in providing what are really basics of health, of education and the chance to get a job - things that here we take for granted is the role of the state.

And I was asked by one man in the village, because part of it wasn't just me asking questions but saying have you got any questions for me? And the question I was asked was 'would your

leaders in the UK allow people to live in poverty like we do' and I thought that question brought it all together. Because the answer is no – the leaders, as he called them, wouldn't allow that - why? - because the people of this country would not allow that – and it's about that voice and about that power that we seek to develop in communities like the one I was in. And we need to demand more for poor people around the world, and we need to push international organisations and we need to push governments alike to deliver, and we need to enable people who have a voice when they speak to be heard – that I believe is firmly our job.

So today I want to focus on two particular things:

1. Firstly, that we in the development community, and especially in the Department for International Development, where I am a Minister, need to do a better job of explaining why we do development, and raising public awareness about the role of the UK government in reducing global poverty.
2. Secondly, that we've seen what could be described a golden thread of British support for development over the last past years, but now we are in a bit of a different world, as we face new economic challenges, that I think does risk that support being eroded. So we need to be more accountable and answerable to the British taxpayer, telling them exactly why we're spending their money on poverty reduction overseas, and – crucially – what they are getting for that money – in other words why it's in their interest.

But before I continue I'd like to thank Simon for all his work at ODI. It will be a big loss to all of us when he leaves next year. I don't know where he's going to go yet, he won't reveal that, but wherever it is I wish him well – and I know he'll continue to use his knowledge and passion to challenge and inspire. So I want to take the opportunity today to thank you Simon – I hope you'll still allow us to benefit from your wealth of experience in the future. And whilst you'll be missed to us here - I know you won't be lost to the development world.

How much do people in the UK care about development? How much do they support the government in spending their taxes on health and education in other countries? As a Minister, those are questions I'm deeply interested in knowing the answer to.

Since I became an MP in 1997, letters, emails, postcard from my constituents and meeting with my constituents on international development have represented the biggest single campaigning issue and that has been consistent over the last 11 years.

And we all saw the impact of public support for development - from Live Aid through Jubilee 2000 to Make Poverty History. People coming together en masse to demand action on Africa at the G8 Gleneagles summit in 2005 – we all saw the white bands, the vast number of people who took to the streets in Edinburgh and indeed many of you will be here today.

And I was completely blown away as I'm sure you were that whenever there is a natural disaster like the Tsunami, the earthquake in Pakistan - people respond generously, without limit and quickly.

But despite all of this and despite that feeling we have most people actually know very little about what UK aid is spent on. To understand better what the public is thinking, DFID has recently undertaken a programme of audience research – we will be consulting more widely on that and I hope today can be part of that process – and we will be letting people know the results. But what I can tell you already nearly 80% of adults in the UK agree it's our obligation to help those in the poorest countries, the same proportion think that most financial aid is wasted through corruption, and many know very little about the Government's role in global development issues.

And even in we are on our own turf I would say I wonder how many civil servants who work for HM Revenue and Customs, for example, would know about the work we're doing in Ghana to build a revenue service to collect taxes more efficiently that they can then spend on public services within Ghana? I think I can say with confidence it would be a very rare number - a very few people even in their own world would know anything about the work that we are doing in their world, across the world.

I was recently visiting Cleveleys in Blackpool and as part of the visit with the local MP – we went to her Oxfam shop, and the people I spoke to - managers, volunteers and customers and there

were plenty of those - were completely surprised - and delighted I might add - to hear that DFID on behalf of the UK Government on behalf of the UK people provides £8 million a year to Oxfam.

So if these are the good times for development in the UK – even if it doesn't always feel that way - then we have to pay some tributes I think it's in large part to the strong and vocal NGO movement – many of you here today and I thank you – because the last few years have seen public interest reach a peak, with people more concerned than ever about Africa's appalling levels of poverty.

And we should never take it for granted that we haven't just had one Prime Minister we're now on our 2nd Prime Minister who's passionately committed not just on a political sense but on a personal sense to development and, but that commitment has also been driven by the unprecedented groundswell of public support around the G8 in Gleneagles in 2005, which pushed it right to the top of the political agenda.

But we can't count on things always being like this. Once the big events are over, it's still I think only the minority of people – like you, like me - who stay focused on the issues. In fact today, as we're facing an economic downturn, rising food prices and higher energy bills, and we've possibly already seen the peak of public support for development.

So does it matter – that's the biggest questions?

It is my view and I'd like to know your view that we need that support to continue if we're to generate the advocacy and the political will – domestically and internationally – to keep development in the limelight. We need the public to demand action in the UK, and to put pressure on other governments to take action as well.

But if we want people to stay interested in what we're doing, we need to find a way to inspire them about development, and show them it's why it's actually in their own interest. So far I would own up to the fact that I think we've not been doing very well on that one. We – the development community - need to do better.

I think many of us, DFID in particular, have often been preaching to the converted – talking to people already passionate about development and using a language that most other people couldn't possibly seek to understand.

I can go around talking about, and indeed I'm frequently invited to talk about, things like country-led national health plans, targets, sub-targets and SWAPS, or neonatal mortality rates and universal access to anti-retroviral therapy.

Frankly most people just glaze over. That kind of language doesn't register with people who are not members of the development community.

But doesn't it have far more impact if I tell you about Victoria who I met in Ghana, and has spent 31 years working as a midwife. She

still sees too many mothers dying during childbirth because the health district where she works has only four health clinics to serve 130,000 people.

Or when I tell you about Jummai, a 7 year old from Kano who has never gone to school and is never likely to simply because in the rainy season the roads are inaccessible.

A picture of reality based on people like Jummai and Azumah face every day I think paints a picture about how just a little investment can make a huge difference to people lives.

The problem is that when we talk about Africa, although you and I might think about a billion people living on less than a dollar a day, most people think about, and I've been asked this many times, Robert Mugabe bankrupting Zimbabwe's economy, and corrupt leaders siphoning off aid for their own benefit. So Zimbabwe's repercussions have gone far beyond just what you might think is the political immediate.

When we talk about health, you and I think about 2.5 million people around the world being newly infected with HIV each year, but other people in the UK will think about the NHS, and how quickly they can get an appointment with their doctor.

When we talk about education, you and I think about the 18 million extra teachers needed by 2015 if we're to meet the Millennium Development Goals, but many people still think our aid ends up getting spent on arms, and again I've been asked that regularly.

When my next door neighbour – or yours - thinks of Africa it's not enough to tell them that 75 million children are out of school – because we've heard figures like that over and over again. But what they would want to know about is that a women dies in child birth every single minute of every single day of every year. But what they would want to know that their taxes is helping Georgina, a 17 year old mother I met in Malawi, so that she can give birth safely. I saw Georgina stand up in front of her community and tell me in the most passionate and articulate about her experience of giving birth was a good one and how grateful she was for the care that she received in the time she needed it and the place she needed it.

We need to show people that improving things like health and education in Africa is not a wasted effort, or a bottomless pit, but makes a real, tangible difference to young women like Georgina in Malawi.

The problem is that if the average person was asked to explain, in 100 words or less, the ways in which their actions here in the UK can contribute to poverty reduction overseas, and how, in turn poverty reduction overseas affects them in the UK, I suspect they'd struggle to answer. When I ask officials in my Department to tell me what we are about in three short sentences, they struggle to answer too! It is intellectually difficult to express that chain reaction, that link, that connection by necessity we should reduced it to statements that have meaning and resonance with people.

But we need to show the public that by investing in health and education, we aren't filling the coffers of corrupt leaders, we're ensuring our money reaches the people who need it. So that people like Georgina stay healthy, and can develop the skills that she needs to get a job and provide for her family. And that we're helping to build a healthy, educated workforce, and creating the foundations for economic growth, so that the developing countries can lift themselves out of poverty – and in the long run become less reliant on aid.

Because of course we know we're all in this together. In the increasingly interdependent world we're living in, development is no longer just about altruism. As Simon said so well in his recent article - it's also about self interest. Enlightened self interest - yes. But self interest nonetheless. Because the richest citizen in the richest country is directly affected by what happens to the poorest citizen in the poorest country.

The issues that affect us in the UK - climate change, migration, global pandemics, drug trafficking, people trafficking and international terrorism – are all linked directly or indirectly to poverty and inequality.

Just a few examples:

The increasing risks from fragile states and those emerging from conflict, where many of the bottom billion in society live, create problems right here on our doorstep. Through poverty and instability, many of these countries become havens for crime, drug

trafficking, and terrorism - with negative regional effects and global consequences in terms of international security and migration.

Poor health in a developing country creates a devastating drain on the economy, but it also creates a risk for the rest of us. Disease knows no international borders. HIV, SARS, Avian influenza are all examples of diseases which spread through developing countries because of poor health care, and can lead to the kind of global pandemics that put the UK at risk.

And climate change could mean by 2080 an extra 600 million people worldwide will suffer malnutrition. We know that, although developed countries are responsible for the majority of historical carbon emissions, developing countries will be responsible for most of the increases over the coming decades, and they will also be hit first and hardest as the climate changes. Resource shortages, flooding, and crop failures will lead to an increase in violent conflicts in the countries at the bottom of the heap, with knock on effects for the rest of the world.

So it seems to me we had all better worry about what happens to the poorest citizen, and help poor countries build the institutions they need to overcome these challenges – to become stable and effective states, and get back on the path to economic growth in order that they can be in control of their own destiny.

That's the message we need to get across.

This Government's has put huge efforts into achieving social justice here in the UK - and our international development work

can be seen as an extension of those efforts. But it's not just about reducing poverty, it's not just about doing what's morally right – I also firmly believe it's the key to our own future, and that of our children as well.

It's often unfashionable in development circles to dumb down the message – but I think it's crucial we talk to people in a way they can relate to. And to show them that the present economic crisis doesn't is not a reason to relax our efforts, it a reason to accelerate our efforts.

Over the last ten years there has been a marked step change in the UK's commitment to International Development. DFID became a Department in its own right, with a single mission of alleviating world poverty. By 2010, this government will have trebled the aid budget in real terms since 1997; a stark contrast to the halving of the budget under the last government.

I believe that it's incumbent upon those of us who are passionate about development to go out and make the case for why we're doing this.

If we don't tackle the problems created by global poverty, we'll pay the price – and much sooner than we think. The British public has indeed got a generous spirit. I believe that together we can build on that generosity, and encourage everyone to see that international development is in our national interest, and part of what it means to be British. The British development community – NGOs, academics, businesses, concerned individuals and

government – is indeed making a huge difference to the lives of millions of the world's poorest.

The point that we need to work on and I hope that we can talk about this now – is just think how much more we could do with the will, the mood and the spirit of the entire nation truly behind us.

Thank you.