

UK international development white paper: call for evidence

Response from UCL Institute for Sustainable Resources

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Contributors: Jim Watson, Julia Tomei

The UCL Institute for Sustainable Resources delivers world-leading research, teaching and enterprise in the sustainable use of global resources.

We would be delighted to discuss this evidence, or any of our other work. Please contact Katherine.page@ucl.ac.uk

Question 1

- **How do partnerships need to change to restore the credibility of international development and the multilateral system and regain the trust of Global South?**
- **What role should the UK play in this and what specifically should we do differently?**
- **What should we do to ensure we are listening better to those most in need?**

Equitable partnerships are an essential component of an effective international development strategy. Until recently, the UK had a hard-won reputation as a leader in international development, partly as a result of its significant financial commitment via the Official Development Assistance (ODA) budget – but also because of its leadership across several global challenges. In the last few years, that reputation has been damaged significantly due to large reductions in the ODA budget, which have had widespread effects on development programmes and development research.

In common with many other universities, research projects at UCL have been curtailed or downgraded due to these budget reductions – with knock on impacts on our partners in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs). In cases where budgets have not been cut entirely, this has made it very difficult to plan and implement research programmes and to develop the sustained partnerships required.

Given this recent history, it is vital that a new strategy brings greater stability to development budgets and programmes. This will enable existing relationships to be strengthened – and the new relationships to be formed. We are involved in research collaborations which demonstrate the benefits of long-term partnerships, including research funded by UKRI via the Global Challenges Research Fund and research funded directly by the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) (see our response to question 6). These benefits include ensuring that research focuses on questions that are relevant to decision-makers in LMICs, incorporating of local knowledge and expertise in research teams, and increasing the opportunities for research to yield tangible outcomes and impacts.

Trust is an essential component of successful partnerships. In addition to more stable funding for international development, the UK could rebuild trust in the following ways:

- Being very clear that the primary objective is development rather than other UK policy objectives such as international trade. Since the merger of the Department for International Development (DFID) and Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) into FCDO, it is even more important to emphasise the primary focus on development.
- In the area of climate change and energy, where we work, ensuring that the UK's domestic actions are compatible with international agreements. Whilst the UK has been seen by many as a leader in this policy

area, recent decisions on new fossil fuel development call that into question. These decisions make it harder for the UK to advocate for more 'climate compatible' development pathways by other countries.

- Ensuring that the partners the FCDO works with to deliver international development programmes are given sufficient space to operate independently. This is especially the case for organisations delivering research programmes. The credibility of their research and recommendations rests partly on their perceived independence.

Question 6

- **How can progress on tackling ending poverty, economic growth, and the challenges of climate change be best brought together, in the context of Agenda 2030 (including building resilience, adaptation, and sustainable growth)?**
- **How can the opportunities be maximised? How can the limits and trade-offs be managed?**

Sustainable economic development is essential for all countries. This is particularly the case for low- and middle-income countries (LMICs), which face multiple challenges. Ongoing research programmes involving researchers from the Institute for Sustainable Resources have explored the potential for such development pathways in detail. Our research suggests three key insights for maximizing opportunities and managing potential trade-offs.

First, it is essential for research to be carried out collaboratively with researchers and stakeholders in LMICs. Our recently completed project on *Greening the Recovery in Zambia and Ghana* was a collaboration between UCL, the Zambia Institute for Policy Analysis and Research and the University of Ghana: <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/bartlett/sustainable/research-projects/2021/oct/greening-recovery-ghana-and-zambia>

The project developed detailed scenarios of a green recovery from Covid-19 with stakeholders in both countries, and quantified the implications for energy supply, demand and emissions. In both cases, the policy implications focused on the need to integrate sustainability across policy areas and government departments, the opportunities for decentralised decision-making, and the need for an increase in finance for climate mitigation and adaptation – particularly from international sources.

A second, related insight, is that development pathways that meet Sustainable Development Goals are diverse and depend on national circumstances and resources. It is essential that countries like the UK do not prescribe development pathways as a condition of aid funding or other forms of support. A recent paper from the FCDO Climate Compatible Growth programme, which is led by a consortium of universities including UCL, discusses diverse energy transitions in Africa: <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41560-022-01152-0>

The paper includes a significant number of authors from African institutions, and makes four recommendations:

- Geopolitical narratives need to recognise diverse energy needs and choices, and take into account country-specific trade-offs between climate and development agendas.
- Policies are required to support country-specific energy pathways – including long-term strategies and specific policy instruments.
- Low cost finance is required at a larger scale, and tailored to the needs of African countries. Pledges of climate finance must be kept, with greater integration between public and private finance institutions – including those in Africa itself.
- Stronger research capacity is also needed in many countries to ensure that the evidence for decision-making is stronger, more specific and relevant.



A third more specific insight is about the shift away from fossil fuels. Whilst the costs of renewable energy technologies have fallen dramatically, these technologies can still be difficult to finance at scale in many LMICs. For example, the paper summarised above highlights the very wide variations in the cost of solar photovoltaics across Africa. Some of this variation is due to differences in solar resources, but differences in investment risk also play a significant role.