

## **Concerns about UK Spending Cuts on Overseas Aid and Covid-19 Vaccine Inequity.**

We, as Mission Partners in Zambia, are greatly concerned with the present and apparent growing indifference and lack of positive engagement of the Westminster authorities towards the wider world in general, and Zambia in particular. Therefore, it was encouraging to read the reactions of the mainstream Churches to the vote in the British Parliament on cutting the International Aid Budget from the promised 0.7% to 0.5% of Gross National Income.

The decision has rightly been described as a moral failure, unfair, unwise and immoral, heartless and self-defeating. It is important to hear the prophetic voice of the Church, when unjust things are being done and it speaks out for the effect these policies are having on the world's poor.

In cash terms, we understand, it is a cut of around GBP4.5 billion, the GBP14.5 billion spent in 2020 falling to around GBP10 billion.

The UK has seven priority areas which the FCDO focus on:

1. Climate Change and Biodiversity;
2. COVID-19 and Global Health;
3. Girls' Education;
4. Humanitarian Preparedness and Response;
5. Open Societies and Conflict;
6. Science, Research and Technology;
7. and Trade and Economic Development.

Climate change and global health are the only two areas which appear to be getting an absolute increase over previous years. The other priorities are all taking severe cuts.

The UK's development approach shamefully, yet unashamedly, focuses on what directly benefits the national interest at the time of the UK Government, and is geared much less towards poverty reduction and the welfare of the poorest people and countries. International aid, if it is to be worthy of the name, should be given, with some degree of altruism, to help meet the most pressing development needs of the countries it is supporting, focusing on the poorest and most vulnerable countries and their citizens. Aid should not be just leveraged according to the UK's economic, security and development interests.

In human terms, on a global scale, the reduction means 103,571 fewer lives protected, as childhood immunization campaigns for preventable infectious diseases go unfunded. 15.7 million fewer women and children will benefit from essential nutrition programmes and 4.5 million fewer children will be helped from educational schemes. 2 million fewer people will receive humanitarian relief, 7.2 million women will lose access to family planning and reproductive health arrangements and 15,8 million people will no longer receive the same level of care with tropical diseases.

In Zambia in 2020 the UK Government allocated GBP42 million to Zambia. It was spent in three main areas:

Area	Percentage	GBP
Human Development	56	23.5 million
Economic Development	26	10.9 million
Governance & Security	18	7.5 million

In crude terms the International Aid figures point to a 28% cut all round, so we can expect the total budgeted for Zambia to fall accordingly to around GBP30 million. This will have a seriously damaging effect on the Zambian Government's attempt to reach a number of Sustainable Development Goals in the areas of acute malnutrition and food security, on the health and well-being and the provision of clean water and sanitation for many of its under-served people.

Whatever your view on Brexit, the UK Government has lost a great opportunity here, to showcase its much vaunted Global Britain with a generous, proactive and restorative International Aid component to a new ethical foreign policy. Instead, an irresponsible decision was taken that will have a minimal impact on the problem it is supposed to address 'back home'. The savings made here will do little to reduce Government debt, or the systemic nature of poverty and deprivation across UK society and there are well-founded misgivings by many that the 0.5% is probably here to stay.

The inequity of vaccine distribution is another example of this type of selfishness. After an initial GBP 250m donation to Covax, nothing further has been heard from or given by HMG. Last week our second batch of 288 000 of Covax AZ donated by the people of France, arrived in Zambia, an enthusiastic member of the Commonwealth. Apparently, there is no excess or spare from the 500 million doses the UK has already bought up.

The UK is currently looking to vaccinate their under 12 population, Zambia has yet to fully vaccinate those on the frontlines in hospitals and health centres who are caring for the sick and actively fighting the pandemic at source. Zambia has lost 146 doctors and nurses to the pandemic the 78 doctors lost is close to 10% of the total doctors roll across the country.

The Covid-19 situation here continues to be a concern, the figures produced by the Ministry of Health only account for Health Institutions, so we do not really know the statistics for community-managed cases. It is suggested that the deaths there are likely to be more than double the reported ones. The ZNBC told us last week that the Lusaka City Council had issued 1460 burial permits in the last week, which is 3 times higher than last year's figure, during the same period the average across the year is around 160 deaths a week.

Cemeteries are continually busy and for the first time we are seeing graves dug by excavators as the grave diggers cannot keep up. The main one in Lusaka is restricted to 15 burials a day and funeral parlours are overwhelmed by requests for coffins. There is great pressure on the existing mortuary space. The last time we were at our home in Lusaka, funeral corteges waiting to pick up bodies, were parked on both sides of Nationalist Road. Something we have never seen before in all our years in Lusaka.

From this week's statistics it seems that the numbers of cases and deaths from the third wave are falling from a high of 3594 in June to 1580 on 15 July. Daily deaths have reduced from a high of 72 to 42 yesterday. Cumulatively Zambia has had 182 129 cases and 2991 deaths. Only a very small percentage of the target population has been vaccinated where you need 40-60% to be vaccinated to have any chance of meeting a moral herd immunity. We are talking about 8-10 million souls here. Only 189 408 first doses have been given with 54,410 second doses.

In the meantime Zambia like so many other less developed nations has to rely purely on prevention and containment measures such as social distancing, mask wearing, sanitising and avoiding crowds. The Zambian Government through the Ministry of Health are doing their best with public messaging, strategic curfews, and stay-at-home schemes to slow the virus's spread.

The poorest daily wage earners who are in the highest density areas often fail to comply with these measures due to costs of staying home and the costs of loss of business because the economy is in partial shut-down.

With its fragile health infrastructure many cases are community managed by community health workers in even more straitened circumstances with little or no oxygen or medication to hand.

The international community need to accelerate their efforts to increase vaccine access in Zambia and the wider African continent to prevent an even more catastrophic tragedy from unfolding. Less than 4 percent of people in Africa are vaccinated. A fourth wave is now being predicted.

Meanwhile many churches and faith-based organisations have lent their support to the coalition called the People's Vaccine. Its primary aim is to make the vaccine available to all, everywhere and free of charge. Initially the vaccine should go to frontline workers and the vulnerable

The People's Vaccine coalition seeks to prevent monopolies and patents from controlling access and making sure the vaccine is allocated fairly, based on need rather than ability to pay. Purchase of these drugs should be at an affordable price for Governments.

It has as an objective to vaccinate 60% of the planet but to do this an increased manufacturing and distribution network needs to be funded and upgraded, as do public health systems worldwide .

In conclusion we would urge that the Church regularly remind the British Government of its broken commitment to spending 0.7% of GNI in International Aid. We believe that working together as a part of an advocacy coalition, such collaborative work as is the case with the People's Vaccine, enhances the reputation of the Church as a powerful force for justice, compassion and the common good, thereby upholding practically biblical tenets that support social justice.



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July 2021