

RESULTS UK's response to the Conservative Party's Green Paper – 'One World Conservatism'

July 2009

RESULTS and its network of volunteers have been working to generate the political will to end hunger and poverty for more than two decades so it is very positive to see this week that the Conservative Party have re-committed to increasing UK aid and to helping meet the Millennium Development Goals. We are pleased that international development is an issue that now enjoys full cross-party support.

We welcome the reassurance provided by the Green Paper that DFID would remain a separate government department with an exclusive focus on poverty reduction and have a separate Secretary of State for International Development under a Conservative Government.

We warmly welcome the Green Paper's strong focus on aid effectiveness and delivering results for the poorest. We also welcome commitments to measure the impact of UK aid on the lives of poor people. Any efforts to measure the impact and effectiveness of UK aid should include tools to measure the impact on the very poorest sectors of a population and also on the most vulnerable groups such as women and disabled people. We believe that to fully realise the promise of accountability to the poorest a Conservative government would need to invest in building capacity within developing countries to help the poor to hold institutions to account.

Whilst the Green Paper does recognise that it is harder to measure certain outcomes such as how many children receive a quality education, or whether governance has improved, a number of the initiatives proposed in the Green Paper have the potential to divert attention away from qualitative and long-term outcomes. For example, the 'cash on delivery' and aid voucher schemes proposed may encourage recipient governments to prioritise achieving short term outputs and focus on the 'easy wins' rather than significant impact on poverty alleviation. It is essential that we do not focus on "quantity" to the detriment of quality.

Empowerment of the poor is extremely important but RESULTS is yet to be convinced that the use of aid vouchers, as proposed in the Green Paper, is an effective method to achieve this aim. Aid vouchers will not address systemic issues that prevent countries from recruiting sufficient numbers of trained teachers and health workers or purchasing sufficient equipment such as school books and essential medical supplies. Such a scheme would generate additional bureaucracy and as the Paper notes, would not be appropriate for the poor living in areas where there are very few or no services to choose from.

Whilst RESULTS agrees that it is important that the British public are educated about development issues and are supportive of UK aid – in fact this is a large part of what we do as an organisation – the Conservative Party's proposal to create a new 'MyAid Fund' runs the risk of being one of the many 'fashions' and 'fads' that the Green Paper accuses other donors of. It may also have the unintended consequence of popularising gimmicks rather than effective, sustainable and long-term initiatives.

Microfinance

We welcome the Green Paper's recognition of the importance of microfinance as an anti-poverty tool and the commitment to champion a range of microfinance services including loans, savings and insurance for the poor. Particularly, we are pleased that the Conservatives recognise that there is

more work to be done to scale up microfinance in Sub-Saharan Africa. Any further investment in microfinance should ensure that programmes target the very poor and are able to measure their impact on helping individuals move above the poverty line.

Health and education

We welcome commitments in the Green Paper to radically expand access to quality education and healthcare.

The Green Paper promotes a greater role for the private sector in the delivery of services for the poor. RESULTS agrees that the private sector has an important role to play in development but would not like to see DFID move away from supporting the development of strong, independent and sustainable public sectors. Priority should be given to investment in public services in order to deliver free health and education for all. Evidence has shown that even minimal user fees prevent the poorest from accessing essential services such as healthcare and education, meaning that those groups that the Paper specifically cites as currently missing out – girls and the disabled – are the most likely to be underserved in a system that charges for access.

We strongly welcome the Green Paper's attention to the importance of ensuring that girls and disabled children get an education, but encourage the Conservatives to consider the specific barriers that they face in accessing services in order to turn these warm words into reality.

We are concerned that the Green Paper does not address the issue of the severe lack of teachers in public education systems in many developing countries. With too few teachers children are packed into huge classes, which is one of the main causes of the underperformance of public education systems cited in the Paper. We would suggest that the solution for this is to train more teachers and ensure that the state can hire them by providing sufficient resources and tackling systemic barriers.

We welcome the Conservative Party's commitment to tackling malaria but regret that no similar commitments were made to scaling up, or maintaining, the UK's response to HIV, TB or other major diseases of poverty. We welcome the Green Paper's commitment to take urgent action to address the growing issue of drug-resistant diseases. We would like to see multi-drug and extensively-drug resistant tuberculosis taken up as a greater priority by DFID in the future.

Reform in international institutions

We welcome the call for greater reform of the global institutions, however we are concerned that the detailed proposals in the Paper focus largely on the EU and do not go into sufficient detail on what reforms the Conservatives would like to see in the International Monetary Fund and World Bank. We are pleased that the Conservatives see the economic downturn as an opportunity to reform these institutions, and we look forward to hearing more about the Party's specific policies in this area.