United Kingdom
National Commission for UNESCO

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ELIMINATING WORLD POVERTY
The contribution of education, culture, science, communication and information

Response from the United Kingdom National Commission for UNESCO to the DFID White Paper consultation document of January 2006

1. DELIVERING DEVELOPMENT

Question 3 - What can donors do to help build more effective states?

Don't just work with governments; also work to strengthen the capacity of civil society to be an equal partner of government, including supporting the role of civil society in promoting freedom of speech and of expression, journalistic independence and access to information.

In turn we should recognise the vital importance of ensuring adequate domestic support for a continuing generous aid programme and for trade concessions if the current WTO talks achieve their objectives. Thus, one of the keys to progress in *Making Poverty History* is an engaged and informed active citizenry in the UK itself. DFID has made excellent progress in this area and we urge it to continue to strengthen its efforts.

See also answers to questions 5 and 11.

Question 4 - how best to ensure increased access to basic services?

All agree that education is crucial. When it is universal, attained by all, regardless of class or caste or gender, it is the key to overcoming poverty and unlocking the potential of every human being within a society. While recognising the very positive role the HMG has played in lobbying for more aid for basic education internationally and increasing its own commitments to aid in general and to basic education in particular in recent years, much more needs to be done if the aims of Education for All (EFA) are to be fulfilled.

See the allied paper on Education from the National Commission also attached.

Question 5 - how can the UK make sure that development is led by developing countries themselves?

Good governance underpins effective aid. Donors need continuously to be encouraged to use their influence to urge good governance, improved accountability and the building of a strong civil society voice.

In particular, capacity building is crucial. This should enable the building of long-term relationships and intellectual partnerships across the world. An important example is cooperation between scientists – both from the natural and the social sciences. By its very nature, science transcends political borders and geography, acting as a catalyst for shared intellectual endeavour among national communities. Science is therefore a powerful means of bringing about international cooperation between people from different cultures.

Support already exists for the building of long-term "partnerships for learning" between schools, teachers and pupils (DFID's major Global School Partnerships Programme). The recent UK re-launch of UNESCO's Associated Schools Project Network (ASPnet) could, if properly funded, provide further valuable outreach. At higher academic level there is need for the establishment of such long-term learning partnerships between higher education, cultural and scientific establishments in the UK and developing countries.

2 - BEYOND AID.

Question 8 - addressing the "brain drain"

Science and technology are at the heart of knowledge-based capacity building for sustainable development, of understanding key issues of the environment for risk preparedness and disaster mitigation, of conflict resolution and prevention, of agriculture, and of the fight against disease. Capability in science and technology is a principal imperative for progression on the evolutionary path to sustainable self-sufficiency, and central in delivering the products and mechanisms by which the MDGs can be achieved.

The establishment of such an environment, providing opportunities and means, will encourage the involvement of highly qualified people with the necessary capabilities, and will be crucial in alleviating the devastating effects of brain drain experienced by developing countries. This will help to retain critical mass of science and technology research capacity, as well as enhancing capacity for evidence-based decision-making on innovation strategies.

Question 10 - how can we help developing countries grow their economies while also managing the environmental dangers?

With the looming threat of global warming and destruction of global ecological support systems we need much more rapid progress in making people aware of the need to adapt their values, aspirations and lifestyles in order to live more sustainably. As the 2002 Johannesburg Earth Summit recognised, effective programmes of education for sustainable development must become a major priority if we are to face up to the challenges.

UNESCO is the lead UN agency for the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (2005-14) and as such has prime responsibility for raising awareness at all levels in education systems worldwide. This must be seen as an important component of international efforts to build understanding of the dangers of global warning and consensus on action which needs to be taken.

The German Parliament took a unanimous decision in July 2004 to support and promote the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development, instituting a funded, national structure of support coordinated by the German National Commission for UNESCO. The National Commission would like to encourage cross-departmental collaboration in Whitehall and the devolved administrations to ensure that this issue is given the same prominence in the UK

INTERNATIONAL REFORM

Question 11 - how can the international system work better to deliver humanitarian assistance and security in developing countries and prevent conflict and state fragility?

Peace and security in any country is the building block on which all development rests. Prevention of conflict before it starts is infinitely cheaper than intervening afterwards to pick up the pieces. Much more thought and effort needs to go into supporting efforts to increase understanding and cooperation between potentially hostile groups within states. As

UNESCO's constitution famously states, "Since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed". Education, science, culture and communication, UNESCO's subject areas, have key roles to play here and must be seen as elements in any comprehensive long-term approach to problems of peace and security. Whether we are trying to analyse what makes a person become a terrorist, to understand the ethnic or religious tensions which tear states apart, or trying to create a new consensus among peoples mired in mistrust, we have to look into the minds of men and women to understand the backgrounds from which they come and the assumptions and values they take from them. Here we enter into the milieux of cultural heritage and traditions, patterns of education and channels of communication.

We have witnessed first-hand through UNESCO the impact of activity in these areas in building understanding and tolerance amongst peoples, for instance in the re-habilitation of sites in post-conflict situations where restoration programmes have proved an important vector for reconciliation. We urge greater recognition of the role such activities play in contributing to peace and sustainable development, particularly in fragile states.

Freedom of information and expression are also extremely important, and relevant to all of the questions raised in the Consultation Document. It also draws attention to the need for non-partisan reporting and independent media in conflict areas and post-conflict situations and to the role which greater use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) could make, especially at community level, to promoting dialogue.

Whatever the issue, citizens need to be well informed. Whether we are talking about knitting together fragile states, encouraging better understanding between hostile communities or building consensus on the need for international cooperation to solve global problems,

freedom of information, impartial and independent journalists and editors and a pluralistic media system, all matter.

For more detailed comment on Peace and Security issues please see the National Commission's separate Report, sent in parallel to DFID and FCO.

Question 12 - what comparative advantage do the international, regional and bilateral agencies have in developing broader development advice and assistance?

Multilateralism is a call for collective action. For all the criticism it receives, we still believe that we would be nowhere without the vision of a United Nations. However, that has to be underpinned by genuine co-ownership of and participation in policy-and decision-making by all member states. There also has to be genuine coordination across the UN system.

Current moves for UN reform present a real chance to streamline the international system. We support DFID in its efforts in this direction - to eradicate wasteful duplication of resources and the blurring of mandates that reduce impact and effectiveness.

UNESCO's core competencies, together with the additional links to civil society provided through its 189 National Commissions, give it a unique role in the international system which should be more widely recognised and strengthened.

Question 15 - what should the UK be doing differently within the international system to make it more effective at delivering development?

A more holistic approach needs to be taken to UN reform - to the linkages between peace, security and development issues and to the role of civil society. We find it puzzling that discussions about strengthening the UN system for development or to deal with problems of terrorism, fragile states, conflict prevention and conflict resolution can be conducted apparently without serious attempts being made to consider the crucial role of culture, education, science and communication in stabilising - or de-stabilising - states and regions. Perhaps because of this gap it also appears that little effort has so far been given to considering what policies might best be adopted in these areas, which international institutions might most appropriately be tasked and supported to help HMG deliver those polices and how UK civil society might best be mobilised to provide additional support.

In the context both of UN reform and of maximising the effectiveness of UK aid policy we believe that DFID, and FCO, should now address these questions. In so doing ministers and officials will wish to consider whether, and if so how, UNESCO's potential to promote peace, cooperation and better mutual understanding can be more fully utilised to serve key UK policy objectives. We hope and expect that they will also wish to discuss with the National Commission how the strong intellectual, capacity building and networking skills of UK civil society which it embodies can best work together with government.