

Future of aid during post-DFID era



FAHMIDA KHATUN

THE recent announcement of merging the UK Department for International Development (DFID) with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) has made the development community baffled and anxious. Though this move was being discussed and anticipated for some time, the announcement of the British prime minister has caught many by surprise. The UK government has been pursuing a progressive development policy for the betterment of the world. And DFID which spends about 73 percent of the UK government's official development assistance (ODA) has been a highly regarded development partner globally because of its purpose and action. It carried the ethos of Global Britain. But the integration of DFID and the FCO and the emergence of the new Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO), may threaten this image since concerns have been expressed around focus, adequacy, effectiveness and transparency of aid by the UK government.

With the objective to reduce and eliminate global poverty, the UK has an exceptional record in supporting the world's vulnerable people and building their resilience. In recent times, it responded to several humanitarian crises across Africa and Asia. Some of these include humanitarian support to Mozambique, Malawi and Zimbabwe after cyclone "Idai", to Sahel for tackling the effects of climate change, to Somalia for preventing the effects of drought and conflict, to Syria for humanitarian response, to east Nigeria for containing the Ebola outbreak, and to Bangladesh for responding to the Rohingya crisis.

DFID has been a major development

partner to Bangladesh. Out of 175.8 million pounds total net ODA and humanitarian support by the UK to Bangladesh in 2017, DFID's share was 95 percent, and of the FCO was 3 percent (DFID's Annual Report and Accounts, 2018-2019). In addition to the government, several other partners including private sector, non-government organisations, civil society organisations, educational institutions and the media have implemented DFID supported programmes during the past two decades or so. During times of crisis, the organisation had redesigned its support to address the emergent situation. These include support for victims of natural disasters, people in "Chars", Rohingya refugees and Covid affected people. Recently, the UK government has provided about 21 million pounds to tackle coronavirus in Bangladesh. The support is to build vital isolation and treatment centres in Cox's Bazar for treating the coronavirus affected Rohingya refugees and Bangladeshi communities.

Global Britain's leadership in promoting transformative research for facing global challenges has been reflected through activities implemented by DFID across the world. In Bangladesh, DFID supported research and knowledge generating programmes in many areas. It has invested in evidence-based analysis of social and economic challenges which can help improve the policymaking process in Bangladesh. Besides, it has provided capacity development support in areas such as tax, trade and electoral processes. To be specific, with the objective to develop a strong public finance system it supported projects like Revenue Reforms in Revenue Administration (RIRA) and Tax Administration Capacity and Taxpayers Services (TACIS) within the National Board of Revenue.

Globally, the UK government spent about 15 billion pounds as ODA in 2019. For Bangladesh, the UK is among the top five providers

of ODA. Among the bi-laterals, it is ranked third in providing ODA to Bangladesh after Japan and the USA. The UK is among the four countries in the world that have fulfilled the commitment of providing 0.7 percent of their Gross National Income (GNI) as ODA, according to 2018 data of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). Even after the financial crisis of 2008, the UK increased its aid flow. The UK government had promised to provide 0.7 percent of its GNI as aid while announcing the recent institutional change in aid delivery. However, the volume of its aid will be lower than before as the size of the economy has been shrinking due to economic recession in the face of Covid-19.

Apart from the apprehension of reduction in aid flow to poor countries, the transparency of aid under the new arrangement is also a matter of concern. In terms of Aid Transparency Index (ATI), DFID has been in the "very good" category for long. In 2020, it secured ninth position among 47 donors evaluated. The FCO, on the other hand is in the "fair" category,

coming in at 38th on the list in 2020. ATI is an independent measure of aid transparency among the major development agencies worldwide. What will be the position of the FCDO in the transparency index is to be seen in the years to come.

The other worry about the unification of DFID with the FCO is the risk of losing focus and independence of aid delivery mechanism.

Development policies are best pursued under autonomous bodies which focus exclusively on development priorities and outcomes. It is apprehended that the new FCDO could reduce aid effectiveness by tying aid with commercial or political interests of the UK. Such interests may reduce the flow of aid into countries or in areas where it is most needed and give priority to other strategically important countries. Earlier, similar decisions to combine development agency and the foreign office have been taken by the governments of Australia and Canada. The experience is that development priorities have been overshadowed by political and foreign policy interests. Of course, in Denmark and Norway, the aid administration is under the foreign

ministry. However, both these countries are compliant in terms of fulfilling the aid commitments and have been highly efficient in aid management.

DFID's demise and the establishment of the new FCDO comes at a time when the world needs international aid the most. As the world is struggling to overcome the biggest humanitarian and economic crisis of the century due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the need for development assistance by large players like the UK is higher than ever before. Because of Covid-19, the poor have become more vulnerable and some of the progress made in the past decades including child and maternal health, education, and poverty reduction, will be reversed. Assistance is not only needed for rebuilding economies and to save millions of lives but also for innovative research on science, technology, economy and society.

Therefore, any change in the aid policy of the UK government will have implications for Bangladesh's development efforts. Though Bangladesh has reduced its dependency on foreign aid over the years to about 2 percent of its gross domestic product, its contribution to some of the critical sectors including healthcare, education and climate change is still significant. DFID's support has been crucial for Bangladesh to achieve some of the targets under the Millennium Development Goals. Covid-19 has not only risked the achievements of the past but also of the future including the fulfilment of the SDGs by 2030 and Bangladesh's graduation from the least developed country category by 2024. Hence, the role of aid during and in the post-Covid period is immensely critical for Bangladesh as much as it is for the rest of the Global South. The ethos and values of DFID are thus crucial and should be reflected in the new aid architecture of the UK government.



PHOTO: STEFAN WERMUTH/AFP

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Solving the climate change problem

Being inspired is one thing, but ground level action is another ball-game altogether

SHAMS-IL AREFIN ISLAM

THE temperature in a small town in Eastern Russia, Verkhoyansk, located 10 kilometres above the Arctic circle, recently pushed to an astonishing 38 degrees Celsius—hotter than the annual average of Dhaka, Toronto, New York, or Los Angeles, during the same time of the year. One of many other signs of rapid climate change includes retreating glaciers, release of permafrost, and vast reserves of trapped methane in lakes and the ground that are slowly being released in the Arctic. Just earlier this month, the City of Norilsk had to face a 21,000-ton diesel leak from a tank that possibly failed due to weakened foundations from melting permafrost. And last year, wildfires roughly the size of Belgium burned across Siberia. This isn't simply concerning, but an urgent call that our current climate system is failing earlier than climate models had predicted.

If you think these are just one-off weather patterns, think again. According to Copernicus Climate Change Service, this past May 2020 was one of the warmest months in recorded history. Using satellite data, we have seen 1.68 million square kilometres of sea ice being lost, an area approximately 11 times the size of Bangladesh. In fact, the recent extreme temperature anomalies have surprised many seasoned climate scientists.

This is where the inherent risk lies; the possible underestimation of climate models and thinly-buffered responses from the COP meetings. There is no such thing as perfect data and if anything, it may have slowed climate action. First, it must be remembered that climate change, global warming or whatever

terminology you wish to label our current condition, does not respect any geo-political boundary and has endless variables. Second, while the hot weather in Siberia may seem like an isolated incident, there is mounting evidence that human-induced climate change is coupling with weather patterns to create climate extremes across the world, and Bangladesh will receive the brunt of it. Last year the epicentre was the 20

capitalistic ways. The profit maximisation model will hasten our linear movement to the same sputtering economic model that our forefathers had envisioned as the panacea for success. Yale professor Ben Cashore calls the global situation a "super wicked problem" in that the ones who are causing the problem in the first place are also trying to solve the problem. At this point, the hard truth is that the poorest half of our planet

due to the omnipresent foundations of our economic system. However, what we can do, as we pick up the pieces from a world visibly ravaged by the coronavirus, is to amplify the variety of tools already available in our toolbox.

A light at the end of this Covid-19 crisis tunnel comes from Paris. City authorities have already cleared up 650 kilometres of bicycling paths to prevent traffic congestion. Bike rental along with the sale of new bikes have gone up. Britain has come leaps and bounds from 2010, when 40 percent of its electrical power came from coal, and by early April 2020, the last coal burning plant was turned off (partly due to the coronavirus lockdowns). This milestone isn't just limited to coal-based power. The UK is now home to the largest off-shore wind generating farm in the world, estimated to be able to power over 10 percent of electricity needed for the country by the end of this year. City of Vancouver, Canada has an ambitious 100 percent renewable energy target and the United States, for the first time in well over 100 years, has consumed more energy from renewable sources than coal. If countries can replicate and keep the momentum going, we would still be somewhat on the right track.

In the context of Bangladesh, being inspired is one thing, but ground level action is another ball-game altogether. For example, forest cover in Bangladesh was to be increased to 20 percent by 2015, and that goal has shifted to 2021, with potential for further delays. It is critical to understand why such an ambition did not meet its original goal to ensure there is no a repeat of the same problem. We saw during the recent super cyclone Amphan how the Sunderbans acted as a natural barrier

to absorb its impact. Thus, it is pressing that we continue to increase the buffer zone for the UNESCO World Heritage Site. Furthermore, we urgently need to develop a wide green-belt of forest area along the coastal regions of Barisal, Nohakhali and Chittagong that will help increase our national carbon sink and buffer against cyclones.

Furthermore, countries like Bangladesh need to find greener solutions to energy production as opposed to archaic methods from finite resources. The argument that wealthy countries had access to cheap energy and therefore we should as well is retrogressive. It leads to unsustainable national growth that will plague our immediate and future potential. Other than retroactively amending national policy, we should make use of the Green Climate Fund through effective green innovation from strong public-private partnerships. Such innovation can be a paradigm for the rest of the world to follow. Moreover, using the highly effective Canada Fund for Local Initiatives is another way small NGOs can have greater national impact.

Finally, we should not forget that we are now living in the time of the sixth great-extinction on our planet, and this one is being caused by us. Regardless of the cyclical nature of attempting to solve the very problems we have collectively manufactured, individuals can still make a difference. Don't forget to turn off your gas stove when it is not in use, turn off lights and air conditioners when you leave the room and guide others along the way. Those small gestures still add up, and they still matter.



The United Nations said it was working to verify reports of a new Arctic record temperature of 38 degrees Celsius in the Russian town of Verkhoyansk over the weekend.

PHOTO: AFP

percent of Australia's forest that burned, this past week it was a town above the Arctic Circle that faced the hottest day on record, and tomorrow a climate-based calamity may come knocking on your own door.

So, what can we do to address this problem? The news is inundated with countries desperate to go back to its

probably isn't anxious about how warm Siberia is, or that the COP-26 meeting was postponed due to Covid-19. Instead, they are rightfully concerned about actions that will bring food to peoples' tables this week. Thus, we must adapt our solutions in more practical terms. A completely new system is almost impossible to achieve on short notice,

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QUOTABLE Quote

ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING
(1806-1861)
English poet.

An ignorance of means may minister to greatness, but an ignorance of aims make it impossible to be great at all.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

- 1 Canary's home
- 5 Nova -
- 11 Weary sigh
- 12 Mount St. -
- 13 Easter lead-in
- 14 Waiting to bat
- 15 Contract language
- 17 "Give - rest!"
- 18 Broadway worker
- 22 Mint output
- 24 Long look
- 25 Easter item
- 26 Quick taste
- 27 Oil barrels
- 30 Is furious
- 32 Old photo tint
- 33 French friend

DOWN

- 1 Ref's decision
- 2 Out of the wind
- 3 Joining forces
- 4 Will topic
- 5 Oxford, e.g.
- 6 Official count
- 7 Senior
- 8 Course peg
- 9 Business abbr.
- 10 Demand
- 16 Put down
- 19 Ending a conversation
- 20 Buffalo's lake
- 21 Workout count
- 22 Dosages, for short
- 23 Shrek, for one
- 28 Treat badly
- 29 Cup's partner
- 30 Run into
- 31 Affairs
- 35 Clutter
- 36 Different
- 37 Not natural, in a way
- 38 Spotted
- 39 Old hand
- 40 Carnival city

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YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS

T	A	R	A	A	Z	T	E	C	S	
A	J	A	X	F	O	U	G	H	T	
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BEETLE BAILEY BY MORT WALKER

WHY DO YOU ALWAYS JUST ASSUME IT'S MY FAULT?
THIS MESS HAS YOUR NAME WRITTEN ALL OVER IT!
I DO LIKE TO TAG MY WORK

BABY BLUES BY KIRKMAN & SCOTT

NO WAY! YOU GOT A PHONE??
NO SILLY, IT'S MOM'S.
YOU KNOW HER RULE, NO PHONES FOR KIDS UNTIL HIGH SCHOOL.
SO YOU TOOK THAT TO MEAN YOU COULD SWIPE HER'S?
THERE'S SOME WIGGLE ROOM THERE.