

# Daniel Harris

Daniel is a communications professional with almost twenty years' experience at senior levels of central and local government and the not-for-profit sector.

He spent five years as media adviser to Alan Johnson, former Home Secretary, and also worked as special adviser to Clare Short, both in opposition and in government. Leading communications for the city of Liverpool, he delivered the city's award-winning millennium celebrations and laid the foundations for the successful bid for European Capital of Culture in 2008.

Daniel set up DHA in 2000 and has since worked with Government departments, major national agencies including the Arts Council, the Audit Commission, the Charity Commission, NHS Direct, the Equal Opportunities Commission and charities including Scope, Help the Aged, and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

He also advises governments in developing countries on health and education communications.



# What Next for International Development?

A little over ten years ago at the Department for International Development (DFID), as we mapped out the new government's development policy, we knew we were setting the course for the way the United Kingdom engages with the rest of the world.

In 2010 there are threats on the horizon for the development agenda as a whole and the UK's role in development in particular. With a changed approach in government and the global recession, the UK is in danger of retrenching into self-interest at the very time it needs to be looking outwards. The recent food crises and the financial crisis have made governments realise that the developmental gains in recent years are extremely fragile. In the decade ahead there is a need for a new type of development commitment that protects the most vulnerable against shocks in the economy, environment and food production. Just as it has done over the last ten years, DFID can lead the agenda and argue for accountability, not just from developing countries to their people, but from the international systems upon which we all depend.

The creation of DFID in 1997, a ministry of state in its own right and for the first time separate from the Foreign Office, spoke volumes about the priorities of the government of the day. Aid was not to be used as an instrument of British interests abroad, but as a tool in fighting poverty. This principle was enshrined in the International Development Act of 2002, which clarified the purpose of the aid budget as the eradication of poverty.

I remember well Clare doing battle with the Department for Trade and Industry, telling its people how they should go about conducting British trade. And with the Foreign Office, which was indignant at this upstart department treating developing country governments as equals. It took time to get the rest of government to see that here was the biggest, most important agenda there is. To his credit, Gordon Brown saw it even if it did give him an outlet for redder credentials that would play well with grassroots Labour supporters. And with some significant success Clare set about making international development central to other policy areas, including the treasury and environment. Part of my brief as special adviser was to get development into the home news pages. So, whether it was Lady Di's landmines cause, fair-trade bananas, the policies of the big supermarkets, ethical investment, Jubilee 2000 or Live Aid, we kept making connections back to the domestic policy agenda because it was good for development.

In 1997, as Clare set about reshaping the entire focus of UK development policy, it would have been hard to predict then that this would be one of the most important legacies of the Labour era. The coalition government's commitment to ring-fence the aid budget is in part a testament to what Clare put in place over ten years ago. Within months we had untied aid, meaning it could no longer be used as a lever for the purchase of British-made products and services. We uncovered shady deals, one in which the Indian government had been 'encouraged' to purchase defunct Westland helicopters in return for assistance. This sort of thing had been going on for years. More money went into mainstreaming gender issues. And into civil society organisations such as trade unions which could hold employers and governments to account.

Internationally, from Maputo to Islamabad, the UK Department for International Development is still seen as a superb example of how development should be done. This recognition comes from developing country governments themselves as well as agencies and donor nations. Time and again DFID sets the thought and policy agenda, seeking to work through governments where possible, rather than setting up parallel structures which, perhaps inadvertently, undermine the institutions already in place.

A powerful example of this is the DFID innovation, rather boringly-titled Sector Wide Approach, or SWAp for short. Put simply, SWAp involves DFID and partners making a commitment of trust to a developing country. It involves building the capacity of, say health or education ministry in a developing country to plan its sector reforms and to develop robust systems. Along with others, DFID negotiates and encourages donor governments to pool their resources and finance the plan, rather than everyone doing their own thing. As an aside, some of the biggest headaches for any developing country engaging with donors concern managing their competing agendas, dealing with different sets of bureaucracies, monitoring and negotiation. It would tax anyone's patience but, in ministries where capacity is weak, it can be pretty much all that civil servants spend their time on.

DFID takes the rather unglamorous role of systems builder. But it works. In many respects, it would be easier and better for headlines at home if it focused on building schools and hospitals, distributing mosquito nets, and buying school books. But DFID says that to really build development you have to ensure systems can sustain beyond three or five year projects, and support development in the long term. Politicians in

developing countries may want new facilities, but it is better, argues DFID, to ensure the ones that are there serve the population more effectively. This means building the capacity to measure and monitor what is being done, where the money is going, how many teachers or nurses are needed, where they come from, and how planning turns into delivery.

Next time you come across DFID, you may notice a small but potentially significant change; the name is morphing into UK AID. Aid is now a gift. The inference is that developing countries are once again seen as recipients rather than partners. And the focus is shifting onto 'doing good works'. The poor become needy. The dangerous power relationship is returning. The UK as rescuer. And that inference is not all. There are signs the UK development budget may once again serve diplomacy. Is it right, for example, that development assistance should be used directly to support the military effort in Afghanistan? But UK development efforts must always be about poverty, working through governments and strengthening their capacity.

Beyond the worrying signs from the UK government, there are elephants in the room. They are called the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Signed at the Millennium Declaration, the MDGs have been a tremendous galvanising force across the world for both developed and developing nations. They have set challenging targets for 2015 on income poverty, hunger, maternal and child mortality, disease, inadequate shelter, gender inequality and environmental degradation. As their deadline draws near, there is now an urgency to construct the post-MDG international development architecture.

But a hasty move towards a new set of MDG-type targets would not necessarily be a good idea. As Ban Ki-moon said recently, Africa's relative isolation from the money markets has not shielded it from the effects of the global recession. There is a need to consider the criticisms voiced by many that the one-size-fits-all, donor-centred and market-driven social targets may have reached their sell-by date. It is also worth bearing in mind that, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, the MDGs as targets are way beyond the reach of many governments. This can have the effect of reinforcing the notion of Africa as 'failed' among the media and policy makers.

The next phase for agreement on global development may well include targets, but any reflection should consider how donor and developing nations are protecting the most vulnerable nations against shocks, be they from food, fuel or finance. The answer is,

in my view, tax. Tax is the most sustainable source of finance for development. And it is the actions of multinationals and corrupt leaders that undermine the tax revenues of most developing countries. As companies avoid their liabilities and huge assets are moved to tax havens, countries are deprived of the income that can lift them out of poverty. And it is the public, and governments, that carry all of the debt.

By not tackling tax we are, in effect, throwing taxpayers' money at developing nations at the same time as global corporations siphon it off. Take any developed country and its tax income amounts to around at least 40% of its GDP. Action on tax has the potential to deliver far greater gains than development assistance. And it stands a far better chance of protecting developing nations against the next financial crisis. The UK government must lead the way, argue for an end to tax havens, for harsh punishments against those avoiding their obligations and for international agreement on taxing the international speculation.

So, DFID and the UK's role in the coming decade must be to continue to be a systems and capacity builder. But this now must mean building global as well as national systems and mobilising the capacity of civil society to demand change on a much bigger scale. DFID has been a powerful force arguing how development should be done over the last ten years or so. It now has the opportunity to lead again, setting the post-MDG agenda. This may indeed mean setting targets. But they should equally be for global finance and multinationals as they are for officials in threadbare government departments struggling with demands from competing donor country offices. Within countries, DFID can support those organisations that seek to hold their government to account. And globally, DFID should work to hold international systems to account and to change them. Just as happened in 1997, the opportunity for DFID is to make international accountability and responsibility central to the agenda of the UK government as a whole.

That passion to challenge, to take on self-interest is what has defined DFID at its best. If the global financial crisis has shown us anything, it is that the system is both unjust and economically dangerous. People demand transparency and accountability. I, for one, would like to look back on the decade when we get to 2020 and feel proud of the UK and DFID's leadership role on the world stage in holding institutions to account, tackling corruption, tax avoidance and crucially, ensuring new finance to fund development. DFID can help to deliver it and set a new course for British engagement with the world.