

## **Making poverty history – five years on**

### **A call to action**

Five years ago the British people showed that they wanted to make poverty history, and that they care about what is happening on the other side of the world as well as in their back yards. Tens of thousands gathered in Hyde Park for the Live Eight concert and similar events around the world. At least 225,000 people marched through the streets of Edinburgh to demand action from the world's richest governments on poverty at the G8 summit in Gleneagles, and millions wore white Make Poverty History wristbands to show their solidarity with the world's poorest people.

This unprecedented coalition of hundreds of UK organisations mobilised the public into action on a massive scale, never seen before on global poverty issues. Backing the campaign's calls for more and better aid, drop the debt and trade justice, people showed they understood tackling poverty means confronting its underlying causes. They understood that whilst poverty was never going to be made history in a year, that it was right to use the opportunities that 2005 presented to make as much progress as possible. In 2005 the UK was both leader of the G8 and held the Presidency of the European Union and the government was challenged to take a lead internationally at the G8, the UN World Summit and the World Trade Organisation;

Since then, many of the people who wore white bands, marched the streets and attended the concert are still supporting charities and campaigning for change.

### **Achieving real change together**

This unprecedented action was an important factor helping to improve people's lives. It added momentum to changes such as these:

- Globally there are 33 million more children in the classroom than a decade ago. In Bangladesh far more girls now go to school than before.
- Increased health spending that means 10,000 fewer children die every day now worldwide than in 1990.
- There has been a ten-fold increase in the coverage of AIDS antiretroviral treatment over five years. In Zambia there are now more than 60 times more people living with HIV on these life-saving medicines.
- In Tanzania, aid supported over 250,000 cashew nut farmers to come together and negotiate increases in the prices they receive, so they are now fairly rewarded.
- In Sierra Leone British aid has helped the anti-corruption agency to increase its power and recover \$1m of government money

- In Rwanda, aid has supported the tax authority. A total investment of £20 million enables Rwanda to collect this same amount every four weeks. Poverty is decreasing and almost all children go to primary school.

It also improved the ways work is done with developing countries:

- Make Poverty History led to the cancellation of debt for more than 20 poor countries, most of them in Africa. This is one of the best ways to support poor countries as they can spend the money on their own priorities.
- In the UK the 0.7% aid promise is enshrined in every major political party's thinking as part of Britain's way of reaching out to the world.
- Aid is getting better, and the UK leads the world on the quality of its aid:
  - The UK works well with developing country governments supporting them, not bypassing them; it is now widely recognised that governments must be able to drive forward their own development to ensure coherence and consistency and that it is on the scale needed.
  - The UK's aid is the most predictable of the richest countries and it works with other donors to avoid duplication.
- Developing countries refused to sign a trade deal at the World Trade Organisation that pushed them to open their markets. The campaign strengthened the message to governments that the deal on the table was not in the interests of the poor.

### **But poverty is not history...**

Global poverty cannot be ended by a single event, politician or country. Development is complicated, takes time, and involves ordinary people, businesses and governments all over the world, in poor and rich countries. Make Poverty History also built on a long history of campaigning for change, and one that continues today.

You couldn't expect poverty to be history yet. Roughly \$500 billion has been given to sub Saharan Africa since independence and that sounds like a lot of money. But it isn't. Aid per person over the last 20 years has averaged 41 cents – or 28 pence – a week.

In 2005 the G8 promised to increase aid by \$50 billion. The UK has delivered on its commitment. But overall there is an \$18 billion shortfall, with Africa particularly affected - \$14 billion of the shortfall should have gone to Africa.

Moreover, making poverty history is about much more than aid. It also includes making trade fair, cracking down on tax havens and tackling corruption, for example.

There are also new challenges. The increasingly urgent need to stop climate chaos is a key part of the picture, as climate change is affecting the poorest first and worst. Developing countries are also suffering the fallout of a financial crisis they did least to create.

### **So what now?**

To defeat poverty we need ongoing and committed action all over the world at community, national and international levels. As well as being the right thing to do, ending poverty is in all our interests. The fact is the UK spends a relatively small amount on aid – around a

penny in the pound – but it helps to build a better and safer world for all, helping deal with problems like the drugs trade and climate change.

Creating a world free from poverty is not just about building schools or digging wells, important as these are – it's about fixing the whole system in a poor country. And who are the best people to do this? It's the people who live there and know what needs to be done. It's their children who need a decent education and clean drinking water.

Real change in poor countries comes from people – from a women's group in a local village standing up against domestic violence, to thousands of farmers demanding better support from their governments, to a group tracking the money spent by the local school to make sure it is actually spent on children's education. Ordinary people need to join together and hold their politicians accountable.

People living in poor countries don't want our pity or a hand out – they want the opportunity to improve their own situation. They know what needs fixing and international development agencies work with them to make this happen.

But the solutions don't just lie with poor countries. In the way they do business or give aid, rich countries can help to accelerate positive development – but they can also undermine it too. Above all, making poverty history is about supporting developing countries to make their own choices. It is about helping not hindering.

That's why aid agencies in the UK are part of an international movement of people from the UK to Uganda and from Sweden to South Africa, who stand up and speak out against injustice, and for a fair deal for the poorest people on the planet.

This briefing was written by Anna Thomas, Melissa Hall and Jenny Ricks and edited by Jane Moyo and Sean Kenny.

ActionAid UK  
Hamlyn House  
Macdonald Road  
London N19 5PG  
+44 (0)20 7561 7614

[www.actionaid.org.uk](http://www.actionaid.org.uk)