

Proposed Cuts in Overseas Development Aid (ODA) for international research

by Prof Sam Hickey, President of the Development Studies Association* (22 March 2021)

**The DSA acts on behalf of 1,226 academics and researchers from UK academia and research partners across the global south*

We urge you **to strongly oppose the UK government's decision to slash Overseas Development Aid (ODA) funding for international research in 2021-22 by half** and the **wider cuts to ODA** that have led to this decision. If the cuts go ahead they will cause huge damage that will be out of all proportion to the amount of money (£120 million) that will be saved.

The cuts undermine the **world-leading role that UK-led research plays in tackling global challenges**. Allocating ODA funds to international research has allowed the UK to play a major part in tackling global challenges, providing evidence-based responses to problems such as global health pandemics, conflict, migration and displacement, poverty and climate change. In an interconnected world, these are problems that directly affect UK citizens as well as poorer countries: **our research power makes both UK citizens and the wider world safer and more prosperous**.

The cuts **contradict the government's own strategic objectives for becoming Global Britain**, as set out in this month's [Integrated Review](#), which states that 'we will continue to use ODA to support R&D partnerships with developing countries, sharing research expertise in support of the SDGs' (p.37), and foresees a £10bn investment (p.105) in this area. These cuts flow from government efforts to reduce UK aid spending from 0.7 to 0.5 of GNI, which in itself **breaks a Conservative Party manifesto promise** (p53) and a longstanding cross-party commitment that remains part of UK law. However, the scale of the cuts to research are even worse than those to overall ODA spending; this signals a **worrying ideological shift away from 'following the science' as a guide to policy making**.

The UK's reputation as a trusted partner will be severely damaged. Cancelling future projects is bad enough; cancelling existing commitments profoundly undermines our international trustworthiness. This move also damages trust between government and **UK higher education institutions**: how can universities engage in future in good faith with the government if it decides to withdraw funding that has already been granted? The **haste of the cuts** will lead to chaos in the sector. The **prospects for many early career researchers within the UK and amongst research partners in developing countries will be ruined**, as the funds being cut have been particularly supportive of ECRs.

Importantly for **the UK taxpayer, these cuts constitute extremely poor value for money**. Many internationally ground-breaking research projects will no longer be able to deliver important findings that should shape future policy decisions. The cuts will actually **undermine UK productivity** given that every £1 spend on research in the UK reaps a return of £1.60

In the year that the UK hosts the **upcoming G7 Summit and COP26**, the cuts will leave the UK out of step with global efforts to tackle grand challenges through research led initiatives.

We therefore urge **Ministers to rethink this policy and return to its previous spending commitments** for development research and ask other **MPs and peers to oppose these cuts and to support the full reinstatement of ODA funding for UKRI's budget for 2021-22**. We have requested that the International Development Select Committee includes ODA research funding as a topic for its forthcoming inquiry and would urge you to encourage the IDSC, PAC, and relevant APPGs (e.g. on Africa, Science and Society) to **scrutinise the potential impact of these cuts and challenge both this policy and the wider reductions to UK's ODA from which it flows**.

Visit our website for further briefings (<https://blogs.soas.ac.uk/cop/>). If you would like a personal briefing or clarification on any of the issues raised here, please contact the author at sam.hickey@manchester.ac.uk. Do contact Professor Alison Scott-Baumann and her team for further briefings and access to other experts as150@soas.ac.uk

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