



# IDS

## What Should Drive UK Aid to Developing Countries?

Results and Analysis from the UK Public Opinion Monitor

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## The UK Public Opinion Monitor: Aims and Approach

The UK Public Opinion Monitor (UKPOM) is a longitudinal panel of approximately 6,000 people from across the UK that is broadly representative of the demographic make-up of the UK population by gender, age, level of education and region. Members of the panel receive an internet-based survey every six to eight weeks. This report presents a summary of results drawn from the fourth UKPOM survey, undertaken during October 2010.

### Aims of the Research

The UKPOM aims to better understand how people view life in the UK and how their attitudes change over time. While the primary interest of IDS is in attitudes towards development issues, the panel aims to position these within broader views on economic, political and social issues. This is the first time that a long-term panel of the general public has been used to explore attitudes towards development in the UK, and in this sense the results provide a unique insight into the state of public opinion.

On the subject of public attitudes to development, the UKPOM is seeking to answer the following questions:

- How do attitudes towards development vary across the UK population and change over time?
- What are the key drivers of attitudes towards development?
- How do attitudes towards development influence the level and nature of support for aid to developing countries?
- What factors determine the other development-related behaviours that people engage in, such as donating to charities that operate in developing countries, political campaigning, product choices, etc?
- How can donors, development NGOs and others communicate most effectively with the public on development issues?

The findings presented here represent the part of an ongoing programme of research using the UKPOM that will enable donors, development NGOs and other stakeholders to engage more effectively with the public on development issues.

### Approach

The UKPOM provides a unique opportunity to explore changes in attitudes of the UK public over time. This is because, critically, the UK Public Opinion Monitor enables us to track changes in attitudes of identified individuals, rather than separate samples of (different) people that have similar characteristics. This will enable the drivers of changes in attitudes towards development to be tracked over time, which has not previously been possible.

To date, four surveys have been undertaken. The results presented here are drawn predominantly from the fourth survey undertaken in October 2010, with 2,786 responses. The sample is weighted to be representative of the UK population on the basis of gender, age and level of education.

Topics addressed by these surveys to date include:

- Diet and health;
- Voting behaviour at the recent general election and the importance of key policy issues;
- Extent to which the UK and the rest of the world are interconnected;
- Aid to Haiti following the 2010 earthquake;
- UK aid to developing countries;
- MPs' expenses;
- Migration;
- Aid to Pakistan following the 2010 floods.

Note that the UKPOM does not focus on aid issues alone. On the one hand, there is concern about biasing responses by only asking respondents about their attitudes towards aid. On the other, our interest is in how attitudes towards aid relate to broader social and political issues. This is an ongoing project and over time we will revisit many of the issues reported on here.

The UKPOM has a website, [www.ukpublicmonitor.org](http://www.ukpublicmonitor.org), which posts summaries of the survey results and includes a forum at which members of the panel can post comments. The UKPOM is a joint initiative between the Institute of Development Studies in the UK and the University of Guelph in Canada.

## Findings

Over time, the UKPOM aims to build up a detailed and unique picture of public attitudes towards development, and in particular the degree to which the UK public supports aid to developing countries, and how such attitudes change over time. The results of the first surveys present a baseline against which changes in attitudes over time can be tracked

The fourth survey asked respondents to indicate the importance of a range of factors in determining how and where UK aid to developing countries should be spent using a five-point scale from 'very unimportant' (1) to 'very important' (5). The focus of this question was on aid to developing countries generally rather than that targeted at specific situations, for example following a humanitarian disaster.

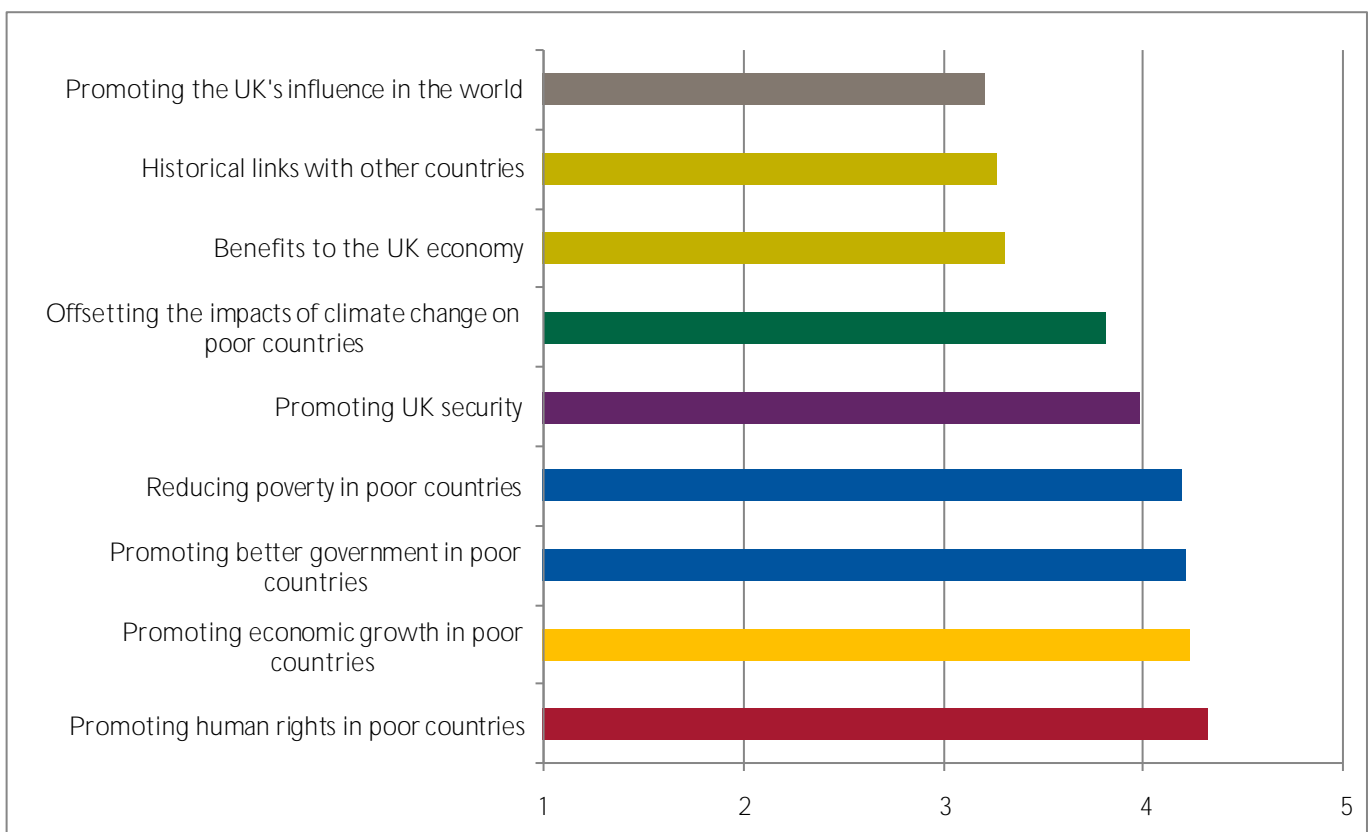
### Finding 1 – The UK public think promoting human rights in poor countries is more important in deciding how and where UK aid is spent than benefits to the UK in terms of security, global influence and/or the economy

Overall, respondents considered the most important determinant of aid to be promoting human rights in poor countries (Figure 1). The second most important factor was promoting economic growth in poor countries, followed by promoting good governance and reducing poverty.

The drivers considered of least importance were promoting the UK's influence in the world, historical links between the UK and recipient countries and the benefits to the UK economy.

### Figure 1. Importance of factors in deciding how and where UK aid to developing countries is spent

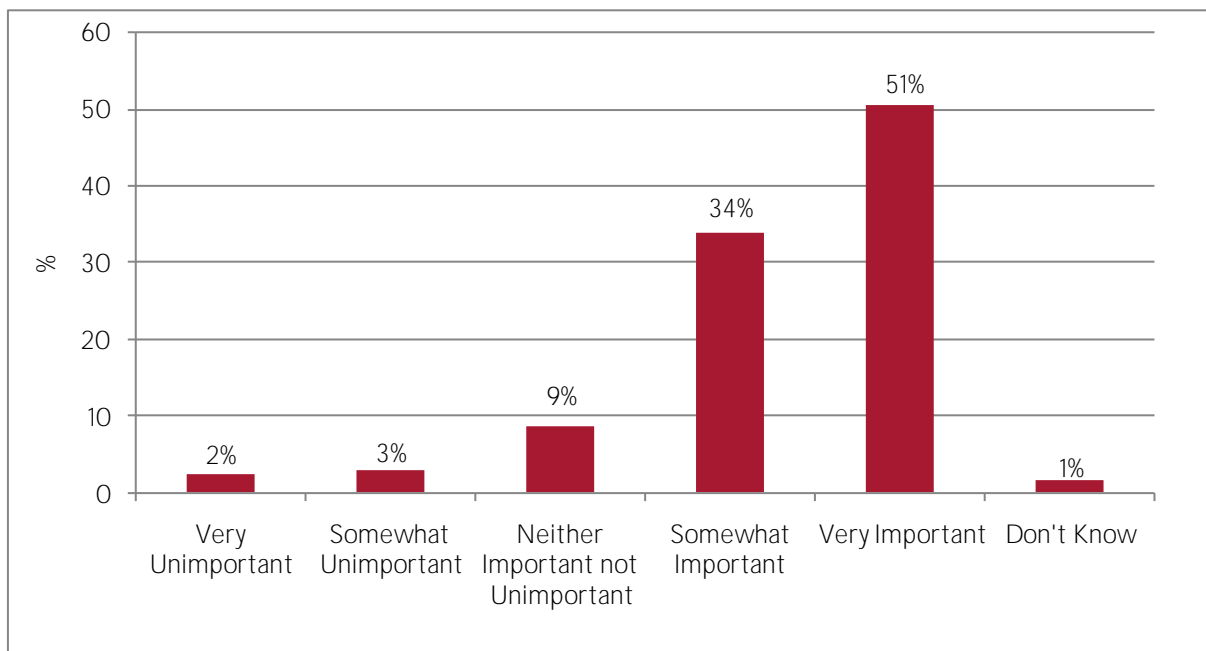
Note: Factors with the same colour bar are not significantly different at five per cent.



85 per cent of respondents considered promotion of human rights to be an important driver of where and how UK aid to developing countries is spent, of which 51 per cent considered it 'very important' (Figure 2).

In comparison, 69 per cent of respondents considered promoting UK security to be an important driver, of which 34 per cent considered it 'very important.' 45 per cent of respondents considered benefits to the UK economy to be important, of which 15 per cent considered it 'very important.'

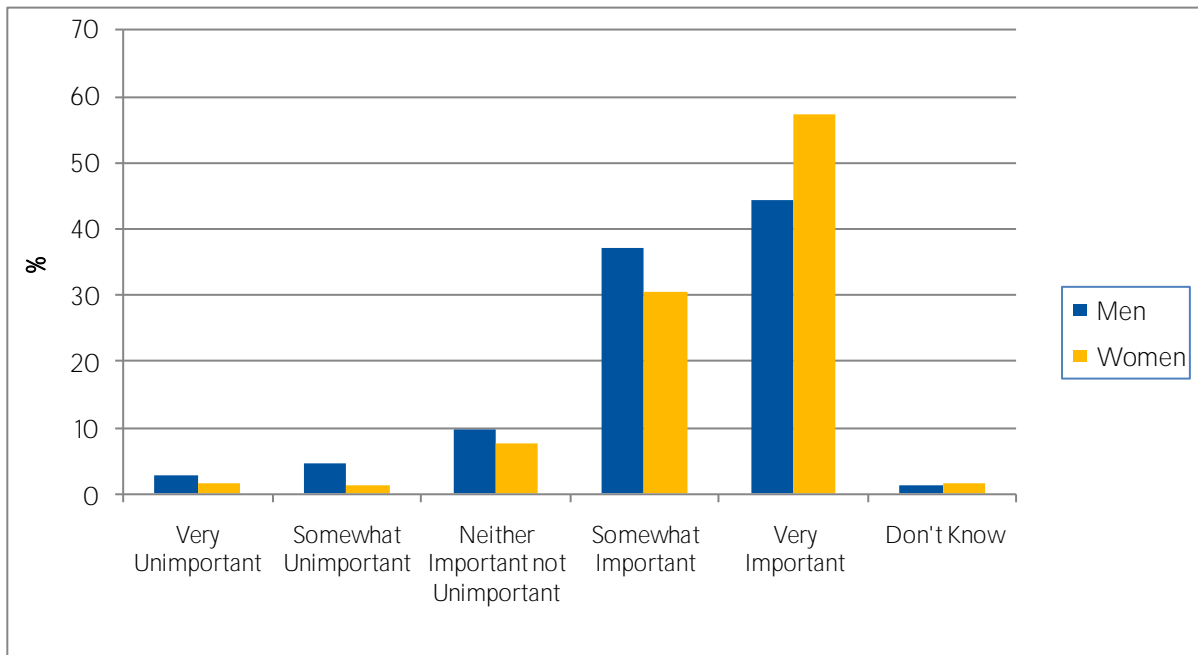
**Figure 2. Importance of promoting human rights as driver of UK aid policy**



## Finding 2 – Women are more likely than men to consider promoting human rights an important driver of aid spending.

81 per cent of men and 88 per cent of women considered promoting human rights in developing countries an important driver of where and how UK aid to developing countries is spent. 57 per cent of women considered it 'very important', compared to 44 per cent of men.

Figure 3. Importance of promoting human rights as driver of UK aid policy by gender



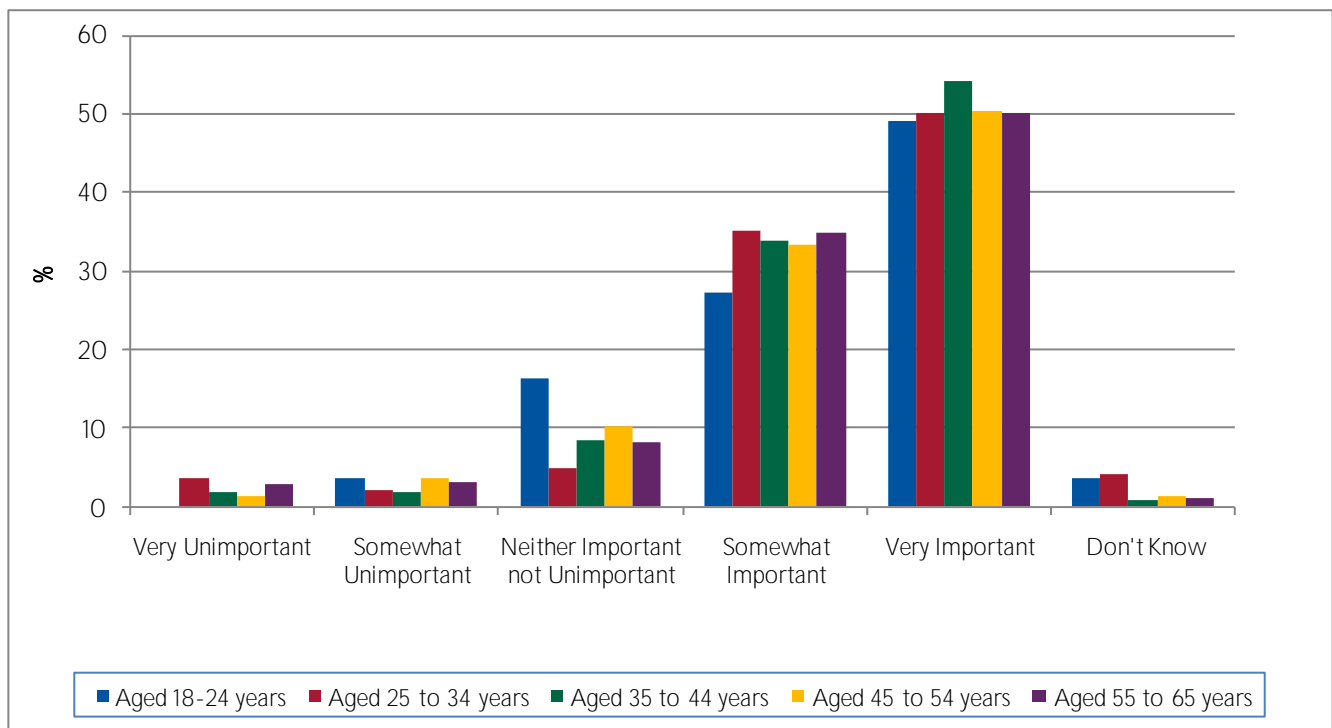
### Finding 3 – Younger people are less likely than older people to consider promoting human rights an important driver of aid spending.

The age group with the lowest proportion of respondents considering promoting human rights in developing countries to be an important driver of how and where UK aid to developing countries was spent was 18 to 24 years (76 per cent of those aged 18 to 24 years considered human rights important).

Amongst respondents aged 35 to 44 years, over 88 per cent considered promoting human rights to be an important driver of how and where UK aid to developing countries should be spent, whilst 53 per cent of that age group considered it to be 'very important'

Around 74 per cent of respondents aged 25 to 34 years, 44 to 54 years and 55 years and over considered promoting human rights in developing countries to be important.

Figure 4. Importance of promoting human rights as driver of UK aid policy by age

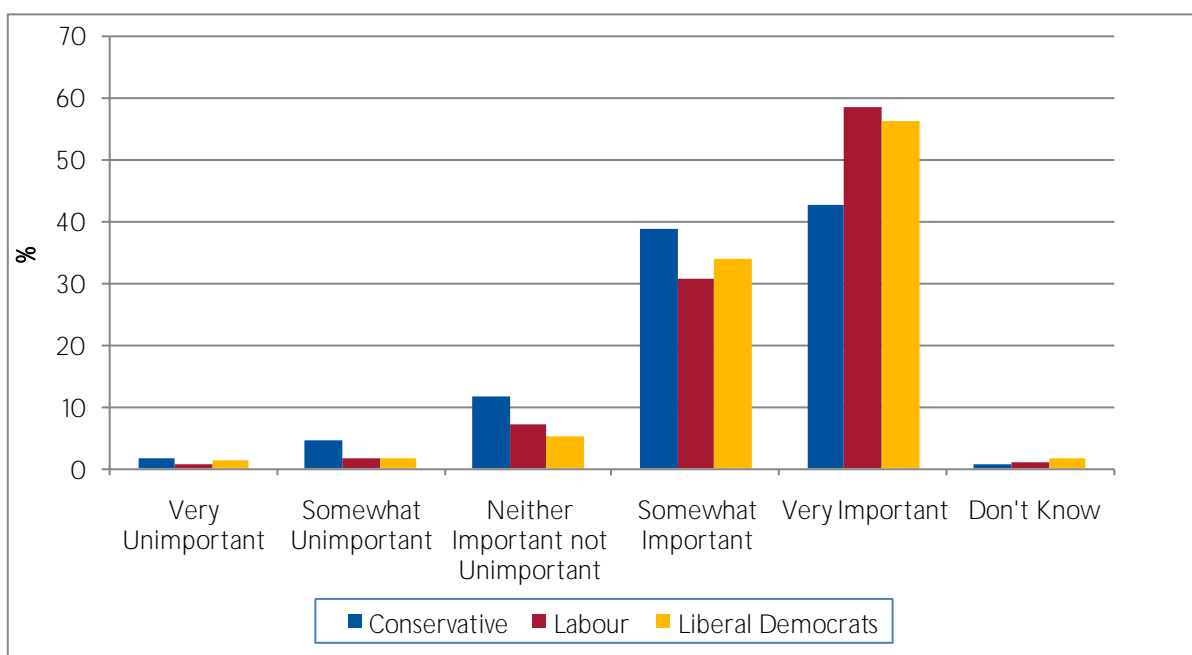




#### Finding 4 – Conservative voters are less likely than Liberal Democrat or Labour voters to consider promoting human rights an important driver of aid spending.

82 per cent of respondents voting Conservative in the last election considered promoting human rights in developing countries as an important driver of how and where UK aid to developing countries should be spent. This compared with 89 per cent of Liberal Democrat and 90 per cent of Labour voters.

Figure 5. Importance of promoting human rights as driver of UK aid policy by voting behaviour



Note that Conservative voters overall considered promoting better government in developing countries as the most important driver of how and where UK aid to developing countries should be spent, with promoting humans rights considered of secondary importance alongside promoting UK security and promoting economic growth in developing countries. This compares with Labour and Liberal Democrat voters, both of which considered promoting human rights in developing countries to be the single most important factor determining UK aid spending, whilst considering promoting UK security one of the less important drivers.

## Conclusions

### The UK public considers that benefits to people in developing countries are more important than benefits to the UK in driving UK aid

There is an ongoing debate about what factors should drive the aid given by the UK to developing countries, in particular the balance between reducing poverty and enhancing human rights in developing countries versus the UK's own interests, whether in terms of security, political influence or economic prosperity. As parts of its on-going research on public attitudes towards development in the UK, the Institute of Development Studies has been exploring what the UK public think should be the main drivers of UK aid.

The results of this research indicate that the benefits for people in developing countries are considered paramount; any positive implications for the UK are of secondary importance. Thus, whilst promoting UK security is placed amongst the more important drivers of how and where UK aid to developing countries should be spent, the majority of people consider promoting human rights, economic growth and better government in developing countries, and reducing poverty, to be of greater priority.

These results are broadly in line with the results of previous surveys using the UK Public Opinion Monitor, which suggest a strong view that the UK has a moral imperative to help the poor in developing countries. The implication is that the public would be most supportive of increased aid if this is directed at safeguarding civil and political freedoms in developing countries as much as more material outcomes, such as economic development. On the other hand, it would be more difficult to 'sell' increasing aid on the back of improved security and economic benefits to the UK. Of course, this requires robust evidence to be available on the positive changes that aid can bring about, on human rights, governance and poverty. The priorities and work of the Department for International Development (DFID) should be focused accordingly, if public support for increased aid spending is to be enhanced.