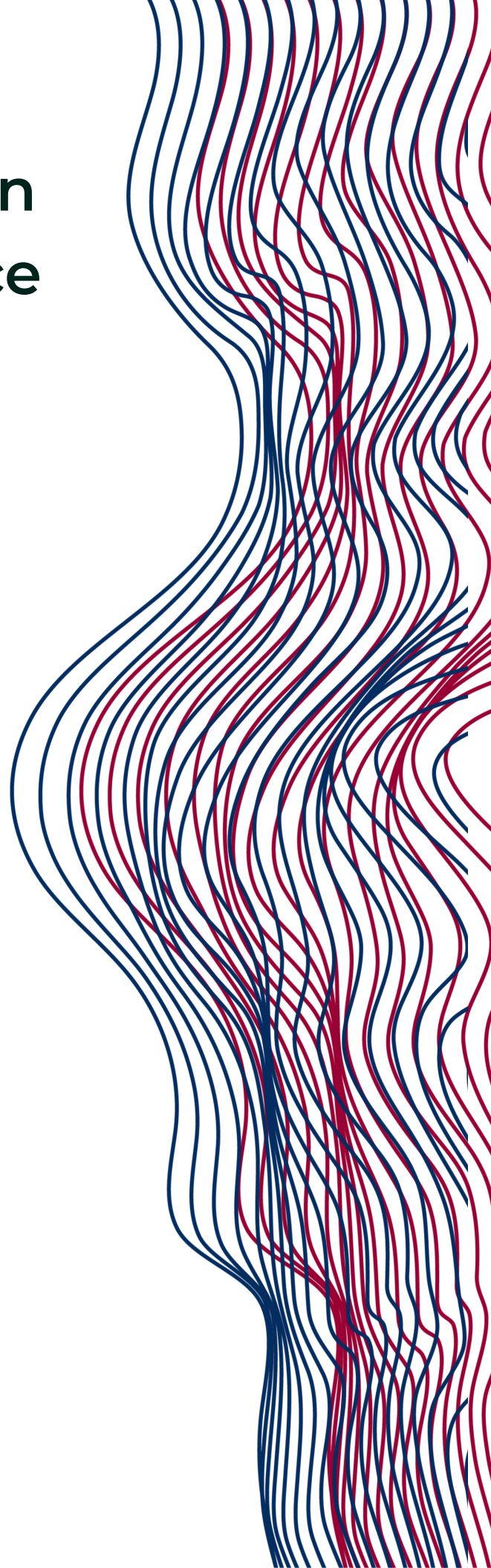


Thematic Evaluation of the UK's Influence on Development Leaders, 2014-2024

Executive Summary

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Executive Summary

This thematic evaluation assesses how leaders in the Global South perceive the United Kingdom's performance as a development partner over the last decade (2014-2024). The UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) commissioned AidData for an independent mixed methods evaluation with quantitative analysis drawing on four waves of AidData's *Listening to Leaders* survey and financial data, complemented by 109 qualitative interviews across six countries (Indonesia, Jamaica, Nigeria, Pakistan, Sierra Leone, and Yemen). This report investigates the UK's perceived influence and helpfulness vis-à-vis five evaluation criteria from the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) Development Assistance Committee (DAC): relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, coherence, and sustainability.

The UK's Performance

Despite political turnover, structural changes, and budgetary pressures, the UK has sustained strong marks on influence and helpfulness among leaders who worked with it. In 2024, nearly four-fifths (78 percent) of Global South leaders rated the UK as influential in shaping domestic policy priorities, and 84 percent rated the UK as helpful in implementing reforms—a rise of 20 and 11 percentage points, respectively, over the past decade. These gains underscore the UK's reputation as a trusted, technically-capable partner, and these sentiments were frequently repeated in key informant interviews. However, the UK's relative positioning has slipped. The UK ranked 6th in influence in 2014 and in 2017 among a set of 25 comparators, but fell to 11th in 2024. Helpfulness declined from 8th in 2017 to 10th in 2024. A more crowded and competitive marketplace for development assistance likely explains these relative ranking drops, rather than an absolute erosion in performance.

Drivers of Influence and Helpfulness

- The UK's influence and helpfulness are strongest where it is deeply engaged in social development and macroeconomic reforms, leveraging its convening power and technical expertise to drive impact.
- Alignment with national development priorities, especially in health, education, governance, and climate, reinforces perceived relevance.
- Short project and funding cycles undermine sustainability. To improve responsiveness, partners seek a stable and reliable relationship.
- Interviewees consistently reported that FCDO staff were both technically strong and respectful in working relationships.

Efficiency and Coherence

The UK is comparatively efficient in converting aid into influence and helpfulness. Statistical analyses show stronger marginal effects of UK financing on performance than for the average donor across a select group of comparators, likely strengthened by a grant-heavy portfolio and diverse offerings. The DAC defines coherence as the alignment between the UK's perceived performance and its stated policy priorities. Over the decade covered in this evaluation, the FCDO and its predecessor identified development cooperation as a core priority. Interviewees recognized consistency between what the UK identified as a priority and what it ultimately funded, and they valued the UK's assistance most when there was overlap between the UK's priorities and their own domestic development needs.

Regional and Sectoral Differences

Geographically, the UK performs best in Sub-Saharan Africa and Europe & Central Asia. In South Asia, the survey results for the UK's perceived influence and helpfulness rose in earlier survey waves and declined in 2024. Latin America & the Caribbean and small island developing states (SIDS) have seen improvement but remain lower on influence. Sectorally, social development is a key pillar of perceived performance, as leaders from this sector score the UK's influence and helpfulness very highly; environmental leaders report large gains in influence, signaling traction on climate agendas. Economic sector stakeholders consistently view the UK as more helpful than influential.

Looking Forward

The UK continues to be a valued development partner, seen as credible and technically strong, but risks diminishing influence if funding becomes volatile. To sustain the gains in influence and helpfulness, the UK should:

- Prioritize sectors where alignment with partner priorities and the UK's comparative advantage is strongest. Social development, governance, climate resilience, and economic recovery emerged as shared priorities for UK historical financing and Global South leaders.
- Reinforce respectful working relationships and maintain trusted partnerships. Some leaders expressed a desire for increased visibility of the UK's development assistance programming in their countries, noting that recipients often are not aware of aid provided by the UK. A few also acknowledged that colonial history may complicate the UK's ability to communicate extensively on the subject.
- Expand longer-term, predictable financing and reduce administrative burdens for implementing partners. This may improve opportunities for smaller, local organizations to participate in UK development programming, a desired outcome for many leaders.
- Bridge relief and reform: Combine humanitarian responsiveness with system-building in vulnerable or fragile contexts to ensure relevance translates into lasting outcomes.