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## Labour, international development and Africa: policy rethinking in opposition

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Labour's Africa policy under the Governments of Tony Blair (1997-2007) and Gordon Brown (2007-10) was remarkable both for its prominence and its ambition. Few UK governments in recent times have made Africa such a focus of foreign and development policy. Not only did the UK respond actively to crises as they arose, whether in Sierra Leone or Zimbabwe, but the Labour Government came to promote a long-term and high-profile programme of support for African development. Indeed, Labour made so much of the running on international development that not only did David Cameron feel compelled to back Labour's pledges on aid spending but his first Secretary of State for International Development, Andrew Mitchell, claimed that international development policy had moved beyond party politics (Glennie, 2012). Labour's policy effort in government was not without its problems and tensions, and has been the subject of a substantial literature.<sup>1</sup> However, in opposition, and in a markedly different domestic and international climate, Labour had to rethink its approach.

How Labour's policy evolved in the years of opposition has not been explored in any depth in the academic literature. This chapter charts the discussions and changes that sought to remould Labour's international development policy as the party moved away from the Blair-Brown era. The focus is mainly on the broader subject of international development policy, as it is in those terms, rather than 'Africa policy' more specifically, that the issue has largely been handled. Nevertheless, Labour's policy development in this area addresses topics that are central to any future Africa policy, should the party return to government, and Africa has remained 'front and centre' in Labour's thinking on international development policy.<sup>2</sup> This chapter draws on Labour Party documentation, the limited contemporary media and online commentary its policy discussions generated, speeches, and some author-conducted open interviews with key figures in Labour's international development team.<sup>3</sup>

The chapter begins by outlining some of the background to Labour's policy development covering, first, the issues Labour's shadow international development team faced on entering opposition and second, the key policy processes over the period 2010-17. It then assesses the tensions and on-going challenges facing the party over international development policy. The chapter argues that while there has been a conscious attempt to move beyond the Blair-Brown approach to international development it has done so in a far less benign external environment than it had faced in the decade from 1997. Attempting to use both the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and a commitment to place human rights and social justice at the heart of development policy, the party has been partially successful in finding an effective left of centre approach to development. Constraints on this rethinking, including external and internal change, the turnover of Shadow Secretaries of State, and issues to do with the party's policy process mean that some key tensions remain to be resolved.

### **Into opposition: context and process**

Labour's thirteen years in office transformed Britain's international development landscape and brought Africa to the centre of policy. After many years in which development cooperation had languished at the margins of government, while aid budgets were reduced, the years between 1997 and 2010 saw massive changes: a new department (the Department for International Development (DFID)) with cabinet-level representation, a schedule to reach

the long-standing commitment to reach the 0.7 per cent of Gross National Income (GNI) aid target, and significant and sustained diplomatic efforts to boost international commitments to development in Africa. Yet, as the party entered what was to prove a prolonged period of opposition, policy on international development faced a number of challenges.

### *Context*

Foremost among these was the altered environment for development cooperation, both nationally and internationally, a context that arguably became progressively more hostile as the period in opposition progressed. Entering opposition, the party faced a world ‘changed beyond recognition’ (Glennie, 2011). Indeed, almost every factor that had enabled Labour to achieve so much in international development and in its policy on Africa – a growing international and domestic economy, a public dialogue domestically and internationally that was generally favourable towards addressing poverty and debt crises, and a supportive coterie of big NGOs – was absent or under threat. Moreover, as Kirsty McNeill (one time advisor to Gordon Brown) and Andrew Small argued, big tectonic shifts in the developing world, which Labour only partially grappled with while in government – the rise of middle income countries, a transformed geopolitical environment in Africa and a new ‘geography of development’ – meant that ‘many of the operating assumptions of the period [were] redundant’ (McNeill and Small, 2014). In 2013, McNeill and Small wrote, ‘even 2010 feels like a foreign country’ (McNeill and Small, 2013).

Second, there were also tensions within Labour’s previous approach to international development that would require some rethinking. The rise of large developing countries and accelerated growth in Africa, coupled with a need to design a global post-2015 development agenda, meant that the old approaches to development were in question. There was a need both to address the western-centrism of UK policy (despite the contribution African agency played in some of the more high profile summits (Landsberg, 2011)) and the missionary zeal around ‘doing good’ in Africa which continued to characterise some aspects of UK policy (Gallagher 2013). Indeed, it was perhaps for this reason, relatively unproblematic for Conservative leader David Cameron to adopt and adapt into his ‘golden thread’, much of Labour’s essentially liberal political and economic programme of change *for* Africa (Brown 2006; Brown 2016).

Third, Labour faced an on-going tactical problem of how to respond to the changed Tory position on Africa and the policies of the Coalition Government, outlined in detail in Chapter 6 above. Secretary of State for International Development, Andrew Mitchell went as far as to claim that ‘there is not a Conservative, Liberal Democrat or Labour development policy, but a British one’ (Glennie, 2012). Given that day-to-day criticism of government policy is part of the opposition’s task, it presented Labour with the problem of how to sustain and strengthen the bi-partisanship on aid while also holding the government to account.<sup>4</sup> Over time, as we shall see, policy space began to open up between Labour and the government, although that arguably generated new problems for the opposition.

### *Labour’s policy process*

For Labour, as with the Conservatives, influences on policy and the policy process itself differ considerably between time in government and periods of opposition. In office, Labour’s policy was closely coordinated through Number 10 with party leaders Blair and Brown exerting influence over most areas. In addition, when in government, the civil service, government political advisors and the departments of state, and the need to respond quickly to real world events, all give a different character to the policy process. In opposition, policy

is a more internal party process, though external actors and world events can and do exert some influence.

A key difficulty in Labour's rethinking on international development is that there are multiple sources of policy. Between 2010 and 2017, Labour's policies emerged from three main locations: the leader and the ad hoc policy reviews launched by Ed Miliband and the shadow cabinet; initiatives of the Shadow Secretaries of State (in this case for International Development); and the work of the party's formal policymaking machinery centred on the National Policy Forum (NPF) and annual conference.

While the election of a new party leader often signals changes in policy, Ed Miliband's leadership election victory itself had limited impact on international development policy, prompting one commentator to ask whether Labour 'still cares about international development?' (Haddad, 2010). The Iraq war aside, international issues had not played a major role in Miliband's leadership contest, with attention more focused on domestic issues, austerity and how to reposition Labour. Although Miliband launched a large number of ad hoc policy reviews, including one led by Harriet Harman on international development in 2011, it produced few concrete results and her successor as Shadow Secretary of State, Ivan Lewis, reorganised and internalised the review of policy within the shadow team.<sup>5</sup>

In the absence of a strong impetus from the leadership, the second area of policy work – the statements and initiatives undertaken by the Shadow Secretaries of State for International Development – proved to be more significant in this issue area. Their influence on policy broadly fell into two kinds: major speeches and statements on policy areas, developing and refining Labour's stance on a range of issues; and day-to-day shorter-term interventions, often in response to, and critical of, government policy. However, Labour had seven incumbents in this role between 2010 and 2017, which presented considerable challenges to sustained policy development.<sup>6</sup> While there is evidence of cumulative policy development, as various policy ideas and pledges were sustained, or recycled by successors in the role, at the level of over-arching strategy the record is more fragmented.

Though Harriet Harman established what became a consistent focus on achieving and writing into law the 0.7 per cent of GNI aid target, the most concerted early period of policy development came under her successor Ivan Lewis (Harman, 2011b). Lewis set out to build an agenda to develop a broader progressive vision of international development that 'built on but was not hidebound' by New Labour's legacy.<sup>7</sup> Developed through a series of consultations with NGOs, business and academics, a key focus of this work was outlining Labour's view of a post-2015, post-Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), development agenda. Lewis' position centred on ten targets,<sup>8</sup> all of which featured to some extent in subsequent party statements on international development, though often not in so coherent a manner. Lewis' work also concretised an approach to international development that was rights-based and universalistic, somewhat in contrast to the special programmes of funding (particularly and specifically for Africa) of the Blair and Brown era. Lewis also adapted some of Miliband's domestic 'responsible capitalism' language, to put forward a somewhat more critical take on the global political economy, in contrast to the Blair-era promotion of liberalisation and integrating Africa into international markets. Lewis also promoted policy commitments on labour standards, anti-corruption and good governance pronouncements that addressed Western governments and corporations as well as African states.<sup>9</sup>

Some of these themes were further developed by Lewis' successors. The renewed focus on inequality was recast by Jim Murphy, as a need for international development policy to address inequalities of power: 'the economic power to prosper ... the social power of opportunity ... and the political power to demand change and use a ballot box to affect it' (Murphy, 2014; see also Cartmail, 2014). However, Murphy was not in post long enough to develop the ideas much further. Similarly in turning the various strands of policy

development into a series of concrete manifesto commitments, Murphy's successor Mary Creagh drew on, but again reorganised, previous work. In three key speeches, in late 2014 and early 2015, Creagh focused in turn on tackling conflict-affected and fragile states; tackling inequality (with a particular focus on achieving universal health coverage and the role of private sector); and responsible capitalism (focussing on workers' rights, ethical and sustainable supply chains, and the payment of taxes) (Creagh, 2015a; Creagh, 2015b).<sup>10</sup> Creagh's approach also showed a new focus on the 'meso' level operating between the huge global organisations and the multiple micro-level initiatives – the missing link between 'giant global organisations and the mother in DRC or South Sudan who turns up at a clinic to find no vaccines, no healthcare workers' (Creagh, 2015a). To a significant degree, the policy as set down in the 2015 manifesto largely reflected these three themes.

After the 2015 election defeat, policy development was slow to regain momentum. The turmoil that engulfed the party, with the election of Jeremy Corbyn as leader, affected Creagh's successor, Dianne Abbott, a close ally of Corbyn. Abbott held the post for only nine months though she made a series of criticisms of the Tory Government's 'privatisation and securitisation' of aid (for example Abbott, 2016). Her successor in June 2016, Kate Osamor, faced a 'crash course in crisis management' despite having only had a year's experience as an MP (Casalicchio, 2016). This included not only the conflict within the Parliamentary Labour Party and the on-going refugee crisis associated with the war in Syria, but also the prospect of radical changes in DFID policy, as arch-aid critic Priti Patel took the helm as Secretary of State. Up to 2017 much of Osamor's time was taken with fire-fighting the government's aid policy, defending the 0.7 per cent of GNI aid target and in critiquing what she saw as an overly business-focused approach to aid spending (Osamor, 2016a; Osamor, 2016b; Osamor, 2017a). However, in a major speech at Chatham House, 'Development aid in turbulent political times', Osamor sought to 'put human rights and social justice at the heart of British Foreign policy' and emphasised earlier Labour themes of corporate responsibility, workers' rights and transparency and fairness in tax regulation (Osamor, 2017b). These ideas were taken further in a keynote address to the Overseas Development Institute in London in November 2017, which pledged to add a second strategic aim of reducing inequality to DFID's goal of poverty reduction (Osamor, 2017c). The move represented the beginnings of another attempt to reframe the guiding purpose of policy, although it also drew on existing pledges.

The third area of policy development was the Party's formal internal party process centred on the NPF. This rolling programme of policymaking was introduced under Blair's leadership and, though relatively marginalised when the Party was in office, arguably had a more prominent role in opposition. The work of the NPF is split into different policy commissions and for international development, the policy commission on international issues was the key arena of discussion (titled 'Britain in the world' up to 2012, renamed 'Britain's global role' following the 2012 reform of the NPF and the 'International' policy commission after 2015). To a considerable extent, the discussions of the NPF commission's work on international development closely followed the initiatives of the shadow team, at times reflecting close consultation between the two. The NPF commission in 2013 adopted Lewis' focus on the post-2015 global agenda (National Policy Forum, 2013: 140) and in 2014 reiterated Jim Murphy's inequalities of power in development (National Policy Forum, 2014: 202). The NPF's cycle of work, known as 'Agenda 2015', produced a 'final' report agreed at annual conference in 2014. This, after further consultations with Shadow Secretary of State Mary Creagh, was the basis for the 2015 general election manifesto.

The NPF established a similar process in 2016 called 'Agenda 2020' leading up to what was then the expected date of the next general election. Prime Minister Theresa May's snap general election in 2017 short-circuited this process. Though the NPF, and its new

‘International’ policy commission, had begun consultation processes in autumn 2016 and spring 2017 (National Policy Forum, 2016b; National Policy Forum, 2017a) the election required a speedy and ad hoc formation of 2017 manifesto commitments under the Party’s ‘Article 5’ provisions following a separate party-wide manifesto consultation (Labour Party, 2017).<sup>11</sup>

Given the controversies in the party after the election of Jeremy Corbyn, there is perhaps less policy difference between the 2015 and 2017 pledges on international development than might have been expected. In 2015, the manifesto played up Britain’s international role as the only country that was a member of the UN Security Council (UNSC), North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), G7, G20, the Commonwealth and EU (Labour Party, 2015). It repeated the commitment to meet global challenges also highlighting the need to work with ‘allies in Africa and Latin America’ (*ibid.*: 74). It pledged that Labour would sustain the 0.7 per cent of GNI commitment while ensuring value for money and focussing aid on the poorest countries (*ibid.*: 80). It reflected Ivan Lewis’ previous work and Mary Creagh’s three key themes by emphasising the SDGs, prioritising tackling inequality, putting human rights at the heart of development and focussing on conflict-affected states (*ibid.*). The manifesto also reflected existing policy threads, pledging Labour to set up a Centre for Universal Health Coverage to promote free health care for all; addressing tax avoidance and ensuring supply chains that were sustainable and protected workers’ rights (*ibid.*).

The 2017 manifesto – *For the Many not the Few* – revisited several of these themes and policies.<sup>12</sup> It pledged to realise Ivan Lewis’ earlier aim of ‘an integrated strategy on defence, diplomacy and development’ (Labour Party, 2017: 116) and reaffirmed an earlier focus on conflict prevention and resolution but making a new pledge to create a Minister for Peace and Disarmament (*ibid.*: 117). The party gave strong support to the SDGs and to report annually to Parliament on progress towards achieving them. Citing the loss of £46 billion to African economies through corruption and tax evasion, the manifesto repeated earlier Labour policy on improving transparency and regulation of tax havens (*ibid.*: 122). It included Osamor’s Chatham House pledge on funding civil society organisations and ensuring respect for human rights, workers’ rights and sustainability within supply chains (*ibid.*: 123). It also repeated Mary Creagh’s 2015 manifesto pledge to establish a ‘Centre for Universal Health Coverage’ and to promote UHC (*ibid.*: 123), pledged guaranteed access to the UK market for least developed countries in the wake of Brexit and to put conflict resolution and human rights at the heart of policy (*ibid.*: 122).

While this process of policy development covered considerable new ground for Labour, and sought to respond to the changing relationships with developing countries, African countries not least among them, it remained a somewhat fragmented process. Though there were efforts to sustain specific policy pledges, the presentation of these, and their place within a wider development vision, was subject to considerable reinvention under different shadow secretaries. As a result, a number of tensions and challenges remained unresolved.

### **Tensions and challenges**

In contrast to its time in office, the considerable policy rethinking Labour engaged in during its years in opposition received much less media attention.<sup>13</sup> Progress was certainly not helped by the rapid turnover of personnel, reforms to the policy process itself and wider political disruptions, including the internal strife in the party after 2015, the snap general election of 2017 and Brexit. As a result, a number of broader tensions and challenges continue to face the party as it sought to regain office.

*Aid: defence or rethinking?*

A key problem for any opposition is how to meet the multiple, often competing, tasks of opposition: to oppose the government, to think more long-term about strategies and policy, and to achieve its own concrete policy outcomes even while in opposition. Following 2010, these tensions played out across the whole range of policy areas with Labour struggling to position itself on economic policy, deal with its legacy in relation to foreign military interventions and defend public services.

In international development policy this tension was most clearly visible between a need to defend past achievements on aid and take time to rethink development policy more broadly 'beyond aid'. Over the period from 2010, much time and effort was spent on engaging with debates around the overall level of aid spending: defending Labour's achievement, pressuring the Coalition to live up to Cameron's commitment to meet and sign into law the 0.7 per cent of GNI target and latterly defending this commitment against increasing attacks from backbench Conservatives and the right-wing press (most recently, Osamor, 2017b).<sup>14</sup> Indeed, the writing into law of the 0.7 per cent pledge via a private member's bill overwhelmingly backed by Labour MP's votes, was one area where Labour figures felt they achieved real policy outcomes against much foot-dragging, if not outright opposition, from the government's side (Anderson, 2015).<sup>15</sup> However, the level of aid was only one of several issues that needed to be addressed. The pursuit of other policy achievements, the rationale for aid and how aid related to wider rethinking of development policy, also competed for attention.

Labour did achieve some policy successes beyond the 0.7 per cent aid target. Under Ivan Lewis, Labour commissioned Tessa Jowell MP and Lewis' advisor, Jessica Toale, to run an online campaign to lobby for early years targets to be included in the SDGs (Watt, 2012). Remarkably this initiative was successful,<sup>16</sup> demonstrating for Lewis the ability of Labour, even in opposition, to achieve changes in policy, a fact he put down to the unique international standing the British Labour Party continued to enjoy on development policy issues.<sup>17</sup> On universal health care (UHC) too, Labour claimed success. Mary Creagh's championing of UHC had met with opposition from Secretary of State, Justine Greening, who implicitly supported private health provision instead.<sup>18</sup> In international development questions in the House of Commons after the election, Greening changed her position and backed the inclusion of UHC in the SDGs.<sup>19</sup>

However, while the underlying rationale for aid formed part of the party's campaign in support of the 0.7 per cent target, it remained an area where clearer thinking was elusive. As with the Conservatives' position, and with Blair's own policy towards Africa, aid was supported on a 'dual rationale' of being both morally right and in the national interest. This stance features in almost every Labour statement on international development: NPF policy documents, speeches of shadow secretaries and statements by campaigning groups like Labour Campaign for International Development (LCID) (Harman, 2011a; Lewis, 2012; National Policy Forum, 2014; Labour Campaign for International Development, 2014; Osamor, 2017a).<sup>20</sup> Yet this position, not only raises questions about the potential tension between the two rationales, it also reveals differences within each: differing accounts of what is the moral imperative for aid and multiple notions of what aspects of the national interest are served by aid – from curbing migration, to economic growth, to improving security (see for example Harman, 2011a; Lewis, 2013a; Lewis 2013b; Lewis 2013c; Lewis, 2017; Osamor, 2017b).

Some Labour voices urged more policy development 'beyond aid'. The campaign group LCID argued that the 'consensus' on development really only went as far as a consensus on the level of aid spending and Glennie (2012) wrote that there was a need to bring the politics

back in to development policy: ‘Let’s stop pretending development is like a mathematical equation; it is a political battleground’.

The Party did respond to this line of critique, Lewis’ work on the post-2015 development agenda and Creagh’s focus on the ‘meso’ level of development interventions among them. A number of figures in the party were also prominent in debates around the ‘beyond aid’ agenda. Labour figures such as Stephen Twigg (later to chair the committee) were key to the Commons International Development Select Committee inquiry into how to move international development cooperation beyond a simple focus on aid flows (Select Committee on International Development, 2015). Labour MPs, Glennys Kinnock and Stephen Doughty, edited a 2015 report ‘Beyond Aid: Labour’s ambition for a radical development agenda’, supported by the campaigning group LCID (Kinnock and Doughty, 2015). While both government and opposition accepted the general premise that development cooperation should be thought of in terms covering a wide range of policy areas (Glenny, 2014) they did so with considerably different emphases. Where the Conservative Government focused on security and private sector issues, Labour, focused on issues of fair trade, tax evasion, inequality and corporate responsibility. Arguably, too, Labour’s support for UHC, and the idea of an ‘international Sure Start’ (Watt, 2012) can be seen as promoting ‘international public finance’ rather than the ‘temporary fix’ of aid (Glennie, 2014; Alonso and Glennie, 2015).

Nevertheless, on occasion, the need to defend the amount of aid spending has come at the expense of longer-term thinking. For example, Ivan Lewis (2013a) was criticised for arguing that, ‘ending aid dependency is the right objective for greater equality and the dignity, independence and self-determination of nations and citizens. It should be a core part of the mission of a centre-left development policy’. NGOs felt that it ‘sent the wrong signal’ on aid in a context where continued commitment to the 0.7 per cent aid target was under threat.<sup>21</sup> More recently the 0.7 per cent target was the main development-related issue raised in the party’s NPF consultations in 2016 and 2017 (National Policy Forum, 2016b; National Policy Forum, 2017a) and as right-wing attacks on aid increased, it dominated the initial policy contributions from Kate Osamor in 2016-17 (Osamor, 2016b; Osamor, 2017a; Osamor, 2017b). Notably, in late 2017, Osamor began to speak to this issue, arguing that aid was only ever a ‘sticking plaster’ and the party needed to address the ‘underlying causes’ rooted in a deeply unequal international system (Osamor, 2017c).

### *Political context*

The task of balancing short-term opposition work with longer-term rethinking was made even more difficult, between 2010 and 2017, by the changing domestic and international context. Escalating challenges to aid from right-wing Conservative MPs and media meant that defensive interventions – protecting the aid budget as well as opposing what Labour saw as aid diversion (to defence and foreign office uses), securitisation and privatisation were given greater prominence than longer-term rethinking. This was perhaps more the case for the post-2015 period as Coalition Government was replaced by a Conservative-only administration and an ascendant, euro-sceptic and aid-sceptic right-wing made itself felt. Indeed, in the run-up to the 2017 election there was widespread speculation that the Conservatives would either fail to recommit to the 0.7 per cent target or undermine it by re-categorising aid or diverting it to military or diplomatic budgets. Labour figures such as Ivan Lewis (Lewis, 2017) and prominent international private donors such as Bill Gates weighed in. Early in the campaign, the Conservatives announced they would in fact retain the commitment in their manifesto (Conservative Party, 2017).



However, Labour also had to respond to a wider challenge to international cooperation. Labour has a long-standing commitment to multilateralism in international affairs, within which its development policy and policy towards Africa had always resided. Yet this was a far more promising context in the 1990s, in the post-Cold War push for liberalisation and expansion of a liberal, US-led international order than in the un-cooperative and increasingly mini- or bi-lateralist context of 2017, where the whole direction of US grand strategy appeared to be in doubt. The 2017 NPF policy consultation noted that long-standing Labour values of internationalism, social justice and universal rights were under threat, facing ‘seismic challenges’ (National Policy Forum, 2017a: 3). Even in 2014, the final policy document of the ‘Britain’s global role’ policy commission had noted the challenge: ‘bi-lateral diplomacy, or a foreign policy driven solely by short-term commercial interest, is not sufficient to deal with global or regional issues that transcend national borders’ (National Policy Forum, 2014: 125). And, in its 2016 paper on defence policy, the ‘International’ policy commission, also noted the negative impact of the weakening it perceived of international institutions that have underpinned stability and cooperation for seventy years (National Policy Forum, 2016a: 95). However, while reiterating commitments to international cooperation, internationalism and international justice, its 2017 manifesto and the limited policy work that had preceded it, gave little indication of what this would entail in practical terms, nor how such commitments could be framed in a way that shifted the foreign policy and aid debate within Britain (see Cargill, 2017).

### *Where is Africa?*

A third and rather different point relates to the position of Africa within Labour policy. In the Blair and Brown years, much discussion of international development, as well as a host of related policy initiatives, centred quite explicitly on Africa. Indeed, the party manifestos in 2005 and 2010 had explicit commitments relating to Africa, the 2005 manifesto having an sub-section of its own on Africa and committing the party to focus on ‘Africa and the fight against global poverty’ (Labour Party, 2005: 2010). After 2010, Africa was far less prominent in terms of specific commitments and much policy discussion and the 2015 manifesto noted the shift in the global economy from West to East and pledged an ‘Asia Step-Change Task Force’ (*ibid.*: 75). Although African countries would be affected by a series of policy pledges – on Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) reform, migration and peacebuilding – these, like international development pledges, were cast in general rather than Africa-specific terms (Bailey, 2015). Despite mentioning a series of African conflicts, the 2017 manifesto, and the 2017 NPF report, were otherwise quiet on specifically African concerns, the NPF report having a section devoted instead to ‘Asia’ (Labour Party, 2017; National Policy Forum, 2017b: 57).

Even so, it was clear from Africa’s constant rhetorical presence in speeches and policy documents, often proving real-world examples within which broader policy points were being made, that it hadn’t entirely slipped from view. Mary Creagh argued that there had not been a ‘downgrading of Africa’ in policy and claimed, ‘I was always very clear that Africa was front and centre in my mind when thinking about development’ and the Ebola crisis in west Africa shaped her thinking on health care in 2015.<sup>22</sup> Moreover, even if less central to Labour policy than under Blair’s leadership (which was in any case rather unusual in its focus on Africa), African states continue to be important to Labour policy dilemmas beyond providing rhetorical or anecdotal material to speechwriters.

Perhaps at the broadest this is evident in the desire expressed in some circles to ‘forge a new kind of relationship’ with developing countries.<sup>23</sup> As noted earlier, despite a language of partnership, Blair-era Africa policy was to some extent still characterised by a Western-

centrism placing a liberal morality and conditionality at the forefront of policy (Gallagher, 2013; Brown, 2006). Lewis put this as a need for ‘replacing paternalism with dynamic partnerships between North and South, developed and middle-income countries’ (Lewis, 2012) and Murphy proclaimed that ‘our own economic, political and social advance is not brought about by conquest but the self-advancement of African countries themselves’ (Murphy, 2013).

The tension here is, not only thinking through what those new relationships might look like, but also how such goals sit alongside other now well-established aspects of Labour foreign and development policy such as commitments to human rights (including explicitly, LGBT rights), governance and anti-corruption. For its part the Party’s NPF noted the violation of human rights in a number of African countries including Zimbabwe and DRC and called on the UK to ‘lead by example ... upholding moral and legal obligations at home and supporting the development of free societies abroad’ (National Policy Forum, 2013: 141). It went on to say that human rights, ‘should also be a consideration in our bilateral relationships with other countries, including in our aid relationships and in trade between countries’ (*ibid.*). From 2016, Jeremy Corbyn, Shadow Foreign Secretary Emily Thornbury and Kate Osamor all stressed the centrality of human rights to any future Labour Government’s foreign and development policy; Thornbury arguing this would go beyond the ‘ethical dimension’ initially pledged by Robin Cook in 1997.

However, this all implies continued forms of conditionality – whether to cut aid in response to homophobia, oppression of women, abuse of human rights, corruption or absence of democratisation (McNeill and Small, 2014). Several shadow secretaries of state – Lewis, Murphy, Abbott and Osamor – all endorsed at least some forms of conditionality. Lewis grappled with the issue most directly, arguing for ‘greater up-front conditionality in relation to human rights and corruption’ (Lewis, 2013a). Indeed, Lewis argued that the UK should withdraw budget support for Rwanda in the wake of the UN report into eastern Congo, a move that was met with criticism from Rwanda and from the UK Government.<sup>24</sup> Reflecting on the approach, Lewis argued, ‘I felt the message too often was “you can do what you want” because these were leaders who had delivered on economic growth and to some extent poverty reduction ... [but that] government to government support is essentially a kite mark – I accept you as an acceptable partner’.<sup>25</sup> Lewis also tried to balance conditions on corruption by addressing the actions of western institutions and countries as well as African governments pledging to be ‘tough on corruption and tough on the causes of corruption’ (Lewis, 2012).<sup>26</sup> Labour policy henceforth contained strong commitments to tackle tax evasion.

Whether such tensions can be managed through a combination of distinguishing between ‘poor people and poor countries’ on the one hand (McNeil and Small, 2014), perhaps withdrawing direct budget support without withdrawing aid as Lewis suggested, and agile country-specific diplomacy on the other (Lewis 2017a), is an open question. Even then, the reactions of ever-more diplomatically assertive African states may still make such tensions difficult to handle (see for example Fisher, 2013).

Africa is also ‘front and centre’ when thinking about how to spend aid effectively and avoid ‘waste’ when also committing to focus on conflict affected states. A focus on conflict-affected countries was part of Labour’s policy while in government, this increased under Cameron’s Government but was also a key theme of Labour’s pre-2015 development policy and as Creagh noted, ‘virtually all the conflict states are in Africa’.<sup>27</sup> Yet how to do that while also combatting corruption and fraud is a tricky prospect (McNeill and Small, 2014). Indeed, there was a claimed quadrupling of fraud cases relating to UK aid following Cameron’s move to ensure that half of DFID’s budget should go to fragile states and regions (Syal, 2015). Labour’s response has not been to question the focus but to accept greater risks need to be

taken with aid money: ‘the more we focus our resources in conflict-ridden and fragile states the greater the risks we are taking’ (Lewis, 2012). Yet the implications of that are not clear while also trying to shore up the aid budget from critics.

Finally, African states are to the forefront when thinking through the relationships between development and broader foreign policy goals. This came to the fore especially in the context of discussions of terrorism and combatting the threat of ‘ungoverned spaces’, most of which are identified as being in the Middle East or Africa. In response to terrorist attacks in Algeria and Mali in 2013, Ed Miliband highlighted the threats from ‘ungoverned spaces and security vacuums’ in North Africa and for the need to use ‘diplomacy and development in response’ (Miliband, 2013). This line of argument was echoed by Jim Murphy, then Shadow Secretary for Defence, calling for ‘preventative intervention’ in the ‘arc of instability across north and central Africa combining military, developmental and diplomatic activity’ (Murphy, 2013). In its 2012 report to conference, the NPF emphasised security, stability and the rule of law as key to making aid effective and for the combination of development, diplomacy and defence policies (National Policy Forum, 2012). In 2013, Lewis asked Lord McConnell to help to coordinate the work of his team and the shadow defence team under Jim Murphy and shadow foreign office work of Douglas Alexander (Lewis, 2013c).<sup>28</sup> This need for coordination was reiterated in the 2017 manifesto, which called for ‘an integrated strategy on defence, diplomacy and development’ (Labour Party, 2017: 116). Thus, although the party opposed the Conservative Government’s blurring of aid *funding* by channelling overseas development assistance through the Ministry of Defence (MoD) and Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) because of the lack of accountability it entailed, it argued for *policy* coordination, and close cooperation between the three areas ‘on the ground’ (Osamor, 2017c).<sup>29</sup>

### *Brexit*

Finally, there is the challenge of Brexit itself, a set of problems that Labour, like others, are only just beginning to think through. Perhaps not surprisingly there was precious little in the 2017 manifesto, nor in policy work since June 2016, on how Britain’s international development policy would need to change in the wake of Brexit. The only explicit commitment given in the 2017 manifesto was to protect market access to the UK for the least developed countries (Labour Party, 2017). This pledge relates to one of a number of key problems Brexit poses for UK development policy, namely how to reorganise the UK’s trade with developing countries once outside of the EU umbrella.<sup>30</sup> Though rather vaguely phrased, the commitment at least showed an awareness of the issue. Whether the UK stays within the single market and customs union, or not, was not, in 2017, in Labour’s hands. If inside, most of the existing trade arrangements with developing countries would remain in place. If outside, then Labour would need to do some considerable work thinking through what a progressive trade architecture ought to look like.<sup>31</sup> It remains to be seen, how the Party will fashion a response that addresses the very significant issues this poses for African states. Brexit also poses difficult issues about how future UK aid is allocated and whether, and how, it can be used in conjunction with European allies (*ibid.*). Several Labour figures have expressed a fear of a loss of British influence in aid circles, not least because the UK was able to exert great influence on development policy within the EU and was able to achieve UK development goals by forging cooperation with European allies.<sup>32</sup> Echoing Lewis’ point about the high standing the UK was held in development circles, as a legacy of Labour’s time in government, Mary Creagh argued that there would be a decline post-Brexit in countries looking to the UK for ‘thought leadership’ in development policy.<sup>33</sup> Here there were few signs that Labour’s policy was catching up with the Brexit timetable, the NPF annual report in 2017 acknowledged the impact Brexit would have on development objectives in very

general terms only and there was little specific discussion of how the party should revise policy towards African states in the light of Brexit (National Policy Forum, 2017b). Following the better-than-expected 2017 general election result, Labour was arguably in a stronger position to push the government for commitments on international development issues as Brexit negotiations progressed. Though complicated by changes and uncertainties on the shape of future EU development policy and aid budgets (DG-Ex, 2017) there was arguably a need for Labour to seek to press the government in the interests of the least developed countries – in aid and trade – in a context where the dominant political and media voices were focused on securing Britain’s own interests.<sup>34</sup>

## Conclusions

Labour’s attempt to rethink its policy on international development, to build on, but not be bound by its record in government, has shown some successes. A focus on a more universalistic and rights-based approach to development, and an orientation towards the SDGs, provide a promising basis on which to recast the relationships underpinning development cooperation. A number of pledges – on inequality, health, worker rights and conflict-affected states – have become embedded within Party policy. As we have seen, all of these will be key to reshaping relationships with African states. This rethinking has taken place in difficult circumstances. A harsher political context, the difficulties of opposition itself, the frequent changes of key personnel and a rapidly changing international agenda have all impacted on the Party’s efforts on international development. The period between the general elections of 2015 and 2017 saw something of a hiatus in policy development, as internal turmoil, Brexit, and election campaigning dominated the party’s time. Yet by late 2017, there were signs of a renewed focus on reviewing the overarching strategy of development policy. It remains to be seen whether this will address some enduring tensions and uncertainties in the Party’s approach. In a difficult domestic and international political environment, a progressive left-of-centre strategy for Africa specifically, and international development more generally, is both more essential, and tougher to formulate, than ever.

## Notes

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- 1 For example, see Abrahamsen (2005); Abrahamsen and Williams (2001); Brown (2006); Brown (2009); Cumming (2004); Porteus (2008); Gallagher (2013).
- 2 As former Shadow Secretary of State for International Development, Mary Creagh put it.
- 3 It should be noted that publicly available Labour Party documentation is very incomplete and there is no single accessible and up to date Labour archive. Key interviews used for this chapter were conducted by the author in 2017 with former Shadow Secretaries of State, Mary Creagh and Ivan Lewis, and with Linda McAvan MEP.
- 4 Author interview with Ivan Lewis MP, London, 28 February 2017.
- 5 Author interview with Ivan Lewis MP, London, 28 February 2017.
- 6 They were: Douglas Alexander (June-October 2010); Harriet Harman (November 2010-October 2011); Ivan Lewis (November 2011-November 2013); Jim Murphy (November 2013-October 2014); Mary Creagh (November 2014-September 2015); Dianne Abbott (September 2015-June 2016); Kate Osamor (June 2016-time of writing [November 2017]).
- 7 Author interview with Ivan Lewis MP, London, 28 February 2017.
- 8 These were: decent jobs and universal social protection; access to universal health care and social protection; universal access to basic utilities; quality primary and secondary education; protection of ecosystems and biodiversity; basic food security; women's empowerment; freedom from violence; good governance including from recipient governments, donors and multinational companies; and active and responsible citizenship including choosing elected representatives (Lewis, 2013b).
- 9 Author interview with Ivan Lewis MP, London, 28 February 2017.
- 10 Author interview with Mary Creagh MP, via phone, 26 January 2017.
- 11 The consultation website was accessible at:  
[www.labour.org.uk/index.php/shapeourmanifesto/](http://www.labour.org.uk/index.php/shapeourmanifesto/) [accessed 10 January 2018].
- 12 At over 120 pages long, the manifesto was felt to be making an ambitious number and range of pledges but was widely regarded as helping Labour to secure a far better result in the election than most had predicted. Labour, at around twenty points behind the Conservatives in most opinion polls and having an eleven point deficit in the May 2017 local elections, secured forty per cent of the vote to the Conservatives' forty-four per cent, [www.bbc.co.uk/news/election/2017/results](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/election/2017/results) [accessed 10 January 2018].
- 13 Exceptions here include the 'early years' campaign run by Tessa Jowell (Watt, 2013)
- 14 Also author interview with Ivan Lewis MP, London, 28 February 2017.
- 15 Author interview with Mary Creagh MP, via phone, 26 January 2017.
- 16 The target is in SDG target 4.2, <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdg4> [accessed 10 January 2018].
- 17 Because of the high regard that continued in Africa for Blair and Brown, Lewis claimed, 'The British Labour Party had a voice that normally you wouldn't have as an opposition party', author interview with Ivan Lewis MP, London, 28 February 2017.
- 18 Author interview with Mary Creagh MP, via phone, 26 January 2017 and author e-mail communication with Mary Creagh MP, 5 July 2017.
- 19 Author interview with Mary Creagh MP, via phone, 26 January 2017 and author e-mail communication with Mary Creagh MP, 5 July 2017. Greening's comment is recorded in 'Sustainable Development Goals. Oral answers to questions', House of Commons, 3 June 2015, [www.theyworkforyou.com/debates/?id=2015-06-03d.575.7&s=SDGs+section%3Adebates#g576.5%20](http://www.theyworkforyou.com/debates/?id=2015-06-03d.575.7&s=SDGs+section%3Adebates#g576.5%20) [accessed 10 January 2018].

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- 20 Also author interview with Mary Creagh MP, via phone, 26 January 2017.
- 21 Author interview with Ivan Lewis MP, London, 28 February 2017.
- 22 Her own background was in working for Oxfam and she had made visits to Burundi, Rwanda and DRC whilst a backbench MP. Author interview with Mary Creagh MP, via phone, 26 January 2017.
- 23 As Jonathan Glennie (2014) put it ‘the British remain ... somewhat patronising and condescending to people of other countries, especially poorer ones’.
- 24 Author interview with Ivan Lewis MP, London, 28 February 2017.
- 25 Author interview with Ivan Lewis MP, London, 28 February 2017.
- 26 In 2012, Lewis commissioned Hadeel Ibrahim of the Mo Ibrahim Foundation to produce a report on tackling corruption for the shadow international development team (Lewis, 2012 and author interview with Ivan Lewis MP, London, 28 February 2017). Though never published and despite the Foundation’s focus on African governments’ performance, the report was highly critical of Western multinationals and banks, author interview with Ivan Lewis MP, London, 28 February 2017.
- 27 Author interview with Mary Creagh MP, via phone, 26 January 2017.
- 28 This coordination was limited by the cabinet reshuffle in which both Lewis and Murphy moved positions, author interview with Ivan Lewis MP, London, 28 February 2017.
- 29 Also author interview with Ivan Lewis MP, London, 28 February 2017.
- 30 See also Lightfoot *et al.* (2017); Mendes-Parra *et al.* (2016) and Chapter 1 above and Chapter 9 below.
- 31 Author interview with Linda McAvan MEP, Sheffield, 3 March 2017.
- 32 Author interview with Mary Creagh MP, via phone, 26 January 2017; author interview with Linda McAvan MEP, Sheffield, 3 March 2017.
- 33 Author interview with Mary Creagh MP, via phone, 26 January 2017.
- 34 Author interview with Linda McAvan MEP, Sheffield, 3 March 2017.