

## Leave no one behind? Seeking transparency in UK Aid for Trade

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### *Introduction*

The Commonwealth is a complex paradox of abundance and dearth; growth and constriction. Its vast membership is comprised of 2.4 billion people in 53 countries across Asia, Africa, the Americas, Europe and the Pacific. These members include some of the largest and most powerful countries in the world with members in the G7 and G20 as well as states with much smaller and more vulnerable economies.<sup>1</sup> As the Commonwealth celebrates its 70th birthday, shared prosperity across its membership continues to prove elusive as some states face significant obstacles to sustainable development. These challenges include increasing marginalisation as well as economic and environmental fragility, particularly amongst its poorest countries. The disparity amongst member states stems from both the economic diversity of the Commonwealth's members as well as the characteristics of their populations. For instance, 31 of its 53 members are developing countries with 14 of these states meeting the UN's criteria of least developed country status.<sup>2</sup> Within the Commonwealth, 20% of citizens are currently living on less than \$2 USD per day. These levels of poverty are nearly twice as high as the global average. With regards to population, the Commonwealth is particularly young, with 60% of its citizens under the age of 29 including 640 million people between the ages of 15 and 29.<sup>3</sup> To meet the needs of this young population, countries will need to create 17.5 million jobs per year, which translates to 50,000 jobs per day.<sup>4 5</sup>

Commonwealth Heads of Government stated their commitment to rectify this disparity by creating a fairer, more secure, sustainable and prosperous future for all Commonwealth citizens at the most recent Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting ('CHOGM', hereafter) in London in April 2018. Efforts to meet this ambitious goal will purportedly be funded in part by increasing trade between Commonwealth member states to more than

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<sup>1</sup> Moizza Binat Sarwar et al., "Opportunities for Commonwealth Development: Creating Jobs, Sharing Prosperity and Increasing Resilience", *ODI Briefing Note* (April 2018):2, <https://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/resource-documents/12159.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> "Aid for Trade fact sheet", WTO, accessed 31 July, 2019, [https://www.wto.org/english/tratop\\_e/devel\\_e/a4t\\_e/a4t\\_factsheet\\_e.htm](https://www.wto.org/english/tratop_e/devel_e/a4t_e/a4t_factsheet_e.htm)

<sup>3</sup> APPG & ODI, "Our Shared and Prosperous Future: An Agenda for values-led trade, inclusive growth and sustainable jobs for the Commonwealth", (April 2018):9, <http://tradeoutofpoverty.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Our-Shared-Prosperous-Future-April-2018.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> This issue is particularly pertinent in India where 7.4 million jobs will need to be created every year to meet the needs of its growing young population. Sarwar, et al., "Opportunities," 2.

<sup>5</sup> Sarwar, et al., "Opportunities for Commonwealth Development," 2.

\$2 trillion USD by 2030.<sup>6</sup> While there are benefits to intra-Commonwealth cooperation, with trade between two members costing on average 19% less than that with non-Commonwealth states,<sup>7</sup> internal barriers to trade continue to impact developing country members. As such, this paper examines Aid for Trade (AFT), with a particular focus on the UK's Aid for Trade partnerships with Sub-Saharan African countries in the Commonwealth. AFT is a form of Official Development Assistance (ODA) aimed at helping developing and least developed countries to access international markets by building the capacity and infrastructure they need to trade effectively. AFT may also include providing technical and adjustment assistance through grants and concessional loans.<sup>8</sup> These partnerships are highly relevant in the context of SDGs 8 & 17<sup>9</sup> in particular as they seek to enhance capacity-building, reject protectionism, and promote more equitable multilateral trading amongst a wide range of actors. The UK's Aid for Trade programme is a rich area for research given the conflicts and complexities of putting the poorest and most marginalised first while ensuring that aid works for Britain in the uncertainty of the UK's exit from the European Union on 31 October 2019.<sup>10</sup>

### *Methods and Methodology*

This research is informed by semi-structured interviews with members of stakeholder organisations relevant to the Commonwealth, UK government, aid agencies as well as consultants who have worked for development organisations with knowledge of Aid for Trade programming between June and September 2019. The purposive sample includes ten participants based in the UK who have professional expertise and experience in the areas of UK governance, sustainable development, investment in African countries, Aid for Trade, and partnerships within the Commonwealth. Four pilot interviews were completed in June and July 2019 in order to refine the research question and determine the relevance of AFT to development policies and programmes within the UK and Commonwealth. These participants include: a representative of a major Commonwealth organisation, a consultant with experience working with a wide range of international organisations and NGOs focused on development,<sup>11</sup> Richard Burge, the former Chief Executive of CWEIC and Mark Napier, the Director of FSD Africa. The

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<sup>6</sup> "The Ambition", CHOGM 2018, accessed 31 July 2019, [chogm2018.org.uk](http://chogm2018.org.uk)

<sup>7</sup> Max Mendez-Parra, et al., "10 Commonwealth Policy Priorities for Trade and Development", (2017):4, accessed 31 July 2019, <https://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/resource-documents/11341.pdf>.

<sup>8</sup> WTO, "Aid for Trade Factsheet"

<sup>9</sup> SDG 8 seeks to "Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all" and lists increasing AFT to developing countries and least developed countries amongst its targets. SDG 17 seeks to "Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development". "Sustainable Development Goals, UN, accessed 31 July 2019, <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdgs>.

<sup>10</sup> Leaders of the European Union granted former Prime Minister Theresa May a second extension to Article 50 delaying the UK's exit from the EU following her request in April 2019. May requested this extension after the third rejection of her proposed Withdrawal Agreement by UK Parliament on 29 March by 344 votes to 286. The European Council agreed to a six-month extension until 31 October, though the UK may withdraw earlier if the Withdrawal Agreement is ratified. Please see The House of Commons, "Briefing Paper Number 8549," (17 April 2019), <https://researchbriefings.parliament.uk/ResearchBriefing/Summary/CBP-8549>, for more information the extension process.

<sup>11</sup> These two participants have requested the use of pseudonyms in the research.

interviews were fruitful and demonstrated the relevance and feasibility of the research question and project more generally. They resulted in an expanded collection of primary and secondary sources as well as the recruitment of further research participants through the snowball approach to sampling. This new data branches into the construction and constriction of space for decision-making within the Commonwealth and the relationship between the UK government's stated commitments to AFT and investment in Africa and its efforts to rebrand the country's post-Brexit identity as that of a 'Global Britain' which rejects the growing wave of protectionism worldwide.<sup>12</sup> This narrowed focus on the UK's construction and perpetuation of its AFT relationships with African Commonwealth countries has resulted in the planned interviews with representatives from African finance ministries falling outside of the scope of this particular project. These perspectives, and the other side of these AFT partnerships as it were, are highly relevant to the sociological understanding of aid relationships and thus will feature in a second paper that will share similar theoretical underpinnings as well as primary and secondary data.

The data collected through early interviews with these participants and those that are forthcoming will be analysed using a thematic approach and triangulated with analysis of policy and programme documentation produced by relevant organisations including the Commonwealth Secretariat, the UK Government, the OECD and WTO amongst others. The iteration of the research presented here outlines how the project is structured, discusses the preliminary findings from the analysis of interviews, primary and secondary documents and signposts how the research will be conducted from this point. The version of the paper to be presented in September 2019 will include data from the interviews scheduled for the coming months as well as rigorous analysis of the expanded collection of primary and secondary documents. This will allow for a more robust answer to the research question: *what are the form and functions of the UK's Aid for Trade partnerships with Commonwealth African countries in the context of a looming Brexit?* In so doing, the research seeks to make transparent what is sacrificed and what is gained by donors and recipients in the pursuit of purportedly value-led development partnerships which seek to leave no one behind and create a sustainable, fair, secure and prosperous future for all.

### *Structure of the research*

The research question guiding this paper includes several related foci; the broadest of which is concerned with the Commonwealth's structure and approach to development. The 'modern Commonwealth',<sup>13</sup> established by the London Declaration on 26 April

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<sup>12</sup> Rt Honourable Penny Mordaunt, former Secretary of State for International Development, used the term 'Global Britain' to describe how the UK government will use its financial services, expertise and aid budget to build mutual prosperity based on British values during a speech on 9 October 2018. Please see "The Future of Aid Post-Brexit", Speech, UK Government, accessed 31 2019, <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/the-future-of-uk-aid-post-brexit>, for a full transcript of the speech.

<sup>13</sup> The term 'modern' is used here in accordance with the Commonwealth's own description of its post-1949 (and current) iteration. The Commonwealth describes the transition in April 1949 to its modern form as "point at which the legacy of the British Empire was replaced with a partnership of equal member countries sharing a set of principles and values". "Commonwealth at 70", The Commonwealth, accessed 31 July 2019, <http://thecommonwealth.org/commonwealth-70>.

1949,<sup>14</sup> includes the voluntary membership of 53 countries around the world.<sup>15</sup> The Commonwealth Secretariat (the ‘Secretariat’ hereafter), established in 1965, is the main intergovernmental body within the Commonwealth. Led by Secretary General Patricia Scotland, the Secretariat convenes high-level meetings including the biennial CHOGM summits, executes the plans agreed by Heads of Government, and supports member countries to improve their governance and strengthen their institutions through the provision of technical assistance, election monitoring and expert advice.<sup>16</sup> The Secretariat’s work is guided by the values outlined in the Commonwealth Charter. The full list of shared Commonwealth values includes: democracy; human rights; international peace and security; tolerance, respect and understanding; freedom of expression; separation of powers; rule of law; good governance; sustainable development; protecting the environment; access to health, education, food and shelter; gender equality; importance of young people in the Commonwealth; recognition of the needs of small and vulnerable states; and the role of civil society.<sup>17</sup> Intra-state cooperation for development is purportedly fueled by the cultural and historical connections of Commonwealth members. These connections, including a shared language and legal system are purportedly strengthened by the values listed in the Charter. “For an organization of 53 member countries embarking on plans for enhancing economic co-operation, it is a major advantage and head-start to have such commonalities and established commercial partnerships in the institutional and regulatory frameworks across the Commonwealth, in areas such as customs, banking and insurance, transport, standards, intellectual property, competition policy and professional services”.<sup>18</sup> Other related organisations within the Commonwealth include the Commonwealth Foundation (CWF) and the Commonwealth Enterprise and Investment Council (CWEIC). The former is a stand-alone intergovernmental organization funded by Heads of Government which provides a platform for the participation of civil society in dialogue about issues relevant to policy, governance and development. The CWEIC is a non-profit organization that promotes private-sector growth, trade and investment within the Commonwealth.

The narrower focus of this question examines the UK government’s purported enthusiasm for Aid for Trade and the application of it in its development programmes with Commonwealth African countries. The UK government’s interest in and use of AFT is certainly not unique. What is unique, however, are the converging political and economic contexts in which this approach to development is being applied. These contexts include the UK government’s stated commitments to using aid money to fund trade and private sector growth in development countries. Former Prime Minister Theresa May made this commitment in the same speech in Cape Town, in which she

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<sup>14</sup> The London Declaration, signed by the Prime Ministers of the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, India, Pakistan, and Ceylon as well as Canada’s Secretary of State for External Affairs describes India’s decision to remove King George IV as their head of state, introducing a republican system, yet continue to recognise him as the head of the Commonwealth. The Commonwealth, “The London Declaration”, (1949):1, accessed 31 July 2019, <http://thecommonwealth.org/sites/default/files/inline/London-Declaration.pdf>.

<sup>15</sup> Membership includes 19 countries from Africa, 7 from Asia, 13 from the Caribbean and Americas, 3 from Europe and 1 from the Pacific region (APPG & ODI, 2018, p.9).

<sup>16</sup> “About Us”, The Commonwealth, accessed 31 July 2019, <http://thecommonwealth.org/about-us>.

<sup>17</sup> “Charter of the Commonwealth”, The Commonwealth, accessed 31 July 2019, <http://thecommonwealth.org/sites/default/files/page/documents/CharteroftheCommonwealth.pdf>.

<sup>18</sup> APPG & ODI, “Our Shared and Prosperous Future”, 18.

outlined her ambition for the UK to become the G7's biggest investor in Africa by 2022.<sup>19</sup> This focus on supporting the growth and development of trade is couched in language discussed above about Britain being a global nation reaching out to developing countries to create mutual prosperity. This commitment to reach outwards and build partnerships with developing countries in particular, is anti-protectionist in nature. The Commonwealth has expressed a similar commitment by stating that it fears that countries may become increasingly protectionist. This isolation could damage markets and limit opportunities for growth and development, particularly for Small and Vulnerable Economies (SVEs) within the Commonwealth. It states its commitment to support fair and inclusive multilateral trading between its members.<sup>20</sup> The final element of this complex context is the change in leadership from Theresa May to Boris Johnson on 24 July 2019. It is unclear at this stage how or if Johnson's leadership will impact the UK government's stated commitment to using AFT to support sustainable development in developing countries. It is now all the more important to understand these commitments and determine if there are gaps between the rhetoric and reality of this approach to development at this time of political uncertainty.

## *Literature Review*

### *Sociology of development*

Viterna and Robertson (2015) trace the evolution of the field of sociology of development from the twentieth century, highlighting its role in analyses of how complex issues like inequality, gender and state action, amongst others, impact development. They explain that the sociology of development began to lose academic and public attention in the 1980s as its critical view of the global capitalist system did not fit with the predominant paradigm of the time – neoliberalism.<sup>21</sup> Over time, sociologists refocused their work in several related sub-fields including globalization, economic and political sociology. Viterna and Robertson argue that the diffusion of sociology of development into these sub-fields and the failure of sociologists to identify themselves as development practitioners excluded them from important discussions relevant to policy-making and problem-solving. The authors contend, that given the opportunity, sociologists could have added to the discussion by examining the ways in which actors, institutions, and contexts interact to impact how social change takes place around the world.<sup>22</sup> The authors also trace the understanding and application of a number of prominent theories in the field more broadly. These include World Systems and Dependency theories, examining exclusion of developing countries from the capitalist system and New Growth theory, which states that 'smarter growth' requires the engagement of institutional actors and investment in human capital.<sup>23</sup> This study of the support and application of human capital facilitates the analysis of how institutions, market and states interact and are shaped by the complex systems and contexts in which they operate.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> "PM's speech in Cape Town: 28 August 2018", Speech, UK Government, last accessed 31 July 2019, <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/pms-speech-in-cape-town-28-august-2018>.

<sup>20</sup> APPG & ODI, "Our Shared and Prosperous Future", 14.

<sup>21</sup> Jocelyn Viterna and Cassandra Robertson, "New Directions for the Sociology of Development", *Annual Review Sociology*, 41 (2015):10.

<sup>22</sup> *ibid*:15.

<sup>23</sup> Elhanan Helpman, 2004, cited in Viterna and Robertson, "New Directions" 18.

<sup>24</sup> Viterna and Robertson, "New Directions" 20.

Drawing on similar themes and theories, Harry Bernstein (1979) discusses the dichotomy of critical and optimistic perspectives of growth, world systems, and key actors within the sociological study of development. He relates the former perspective to the assertion by some that sociology must look beyond the purported ideologies of modernization to understand why developing countries are still poor and isolated.<sup>25 26</sup> This approach, the 'sociology of underdevelopment' as it were, sees underdevelopment as an active process rather than an enduring state of being in which poor countries are passive and cannot escape.<sup>27</sup> As such, underdevelopment is understood to be the result of historical processes and systems, i.e. capitalism, through which rich Western nations stay rich.<sup>28</sup> Bernstein clarifies that the emphasis on obstacles to development inherent within theories of modernization perpetuate the notion that developing countries struggle because they are deviating from Western norms and processes of development in some way.<sup>29</sup> These depictions of obstacles and problems in development and the resulting policy-based solutions to mitigate them leave modernization theories open to criticism for being overly prescriptive and admiring of Western forms of and paths to development.<sup>30</sup>

The sociology of development facilitates the investigation of the actions, motivations and values of a range of different actors. Norman Long (2001) attempts to rebalance what he describes as development study's obsession with the role of conditions and contexts in social life by applying an actor-oriented perspective informed by a social constructionist understanding of the social world.<sup>31</sup> Long's work recognizes the role of individual agency and interaction of these actors in contestations over meaning, legitimacy and control in development. His Actor-Oriented Social Constructionist Approach explains how individual actors and groups internalize and interpret external factors in their lives differently. Their interpretations are informed not only by their lived experiences but by both the intended and unintended consequences of their and other actors' projects and programs. The larger contexts and frames of meaning in which these projects take place also impact how actors understand their lived experiences.<sup>32 33</sup> Blake D. Ratner (2004) also applies a constructionist approach to his analysis of sustainable development. He recognizes that the meaning of this multidimensional concept is informed by the diverse and sometimes competing values of actors interacting in local, national, regional, and global contexts.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Harry Bernstein, "Sociology of Underdevelopment vs Sociology of Development?" in *Development Theory: Four Critical Studies*, ed. David Lehmann (London: Routledge, 1979), 77.

<sup>26</sup> Ivaar Oxaal, et al., cited in Bernstein "Sociology of Underdevelopment" 77.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, 84.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, 81.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, 82.

<sup>31</sup> Norman Long, *Development Sociology: Actor Perspectives* (London and New York: Routledge).

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Please see Jennifer Melvin "Optimising the role of Sub-Saharan African Remittance Senders in Sustainable Development", *European Journal of Development Research*, 31 no.3, for the application of this theoretical approach to the sociological study of international remittance senders in Sub-Saharan Africa.

<sup>34</sup> Blake D. Ratner, "'Sustainability' as a Dialogue of Values: Challenges to the Sociology of Development", *Sociological Inquiry*, 74, no.1 (2004): 55.

Other authors, including Samuel Cohn (2016) focus on the state as a key actor in development. Cohn recognizes the importance of this role by providing a comprehensive list of both positive and negative ways in which states impact development. These range from creating and legitimizing credit institutions and providing basic infrastructure to interfering in business by taking bribes and raising costs of money to investors by over-borrowing.<sup>35</sup> In their review of the literature, Viterna and Robertson (2015) emphasize the impact of not only state behaviour but that of institutions within and outside of states. They clarify that sociologists reject the notion that one type of institution or institutional process can explain outcomes in development. Rather, they point to the sociological analysis of the action of both states and institutions in the complex contexts in which development takes place.<sup>36</sup> This commitment to understanding contextual specificity lends sociologists a richer understanding of how complementary and conflicting interests, actions and forces impact development. As Cohn and Hooks argue, "Development is a process that combines all of the social, economic, political, and cultural forces that make up a society – as well as both local and global dynamics – and interweaves contemporaneous events with historical legacies. Development is profoundly synthetic. There are few analytic traditions, methodologies, theories, regions, or historical periods that do not inform this process in some way. It therefore follows that the study of development needs to be profoundly synthetic, as well".<sup>37</sup> The sociology of development provides the flexibility and rigor to examine how the values, interests and actions of a wide variety of institutional, individual and group actors impact development processes in the contexts in which they take place.

### *Findings*

*The findings presented here are preliminary only as data will continue to be collected and analyzed throughout August and September 2019. These findings demonstrate the author's initial impressions of the primary and secondary data. The findings and discussion that will be included in the conference paper will be more rigorously analyzed as they will be informed by a more robust set of data. The primary data discussed here comes from pilot interviews as well as a series of documents produced by key stakeholder organisations including but not limited to the Commonwealth Secretariat, UK Government, and the House of Commons. Please see the bibliography for a full list of primary documents.*

A number of broad themes have begun to emerge from the preliminary analysis of the primary and secondary data discussed above. These themes have been roughly categorized into three sets to facilitate discussion of their meaning in the contexts from which they emerge. The first set of themes emphasise the benefits of AFT, membership in the Commonwealth and partnership with the UK for recipient states, particularly African countries and SVEs. The second set of themes focus on the purportedly unique

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<sup>35</sup> Samuel Cohn, "The State and Development", in *The Sociology of Development Handbook*, ed. Gregory Hooks (Oakland: University of California Press, 2016): 394-395.

<sup>36</sup> Viterna and Robertson, "New Directions" 20.

<sup>37</sup> Samuel Cohen and Gregory Hooks, "Introduction: a Manifesto for the Sociology of Development", in *The Sociology of Development Handbook*, ed. Gregory Hooks (Oakland: University of California Press, 2016): 5.

characteristics of both the Commonwealth and the UK that bolster the success of membership and partnership respectively. The third set, which will be expanded as the research continues, identifies some of the tradeoffs and synergies perpetuated by UK AFT relationships and aid relationships more broadly.

Aid for Trade supports developing countries to build their capacity, skills and infrastructure for trade in a number of ways. Donors may provide technical and adjustment assistance, invest in certain industries and sectors to improve productive capacity, and/or fund infrastructure projects that will allow countries to grow their domestic markets and access global ones more effectively.<sup>38</sup> AFT is relevant to development not only because it is counted as a form of ODA, but because it helps developing countries to access international markets and benefit from the opportunities this affords. As Stiglitz and Charlton (2006) state, access to markets is not enough, "...without decent roads, efficient ports, and the technical capability to produce and distribute goods of sufficient quality, new trade opportunities are meaningless for the poorest countries".<sup>39</sup> The high costs of transport in Sub-Saharan African countries constrain economic growth and trade in parts of the region. Edwin Laurent and Mohammad Razzaque (2011), using the findings from a study sponsored by the Commonwealth Secretariat, argue that AFT has a particularly positive effect on trade policy, regulation and economic infrastructure in this region.<sup>40 41</sup> Mendez-Parra et al., (2017) writing for the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) in London present similar findings: doubling the amount of AFT given decreases the cost of imports by 5% in African countries and SVEs. The authors include giving more and better focused AFT as one of their Ten Policy Priorities for Trade and Development in the Commonwealth. They contend that AFT is most impactful when it focuses on mitigating the greatest constraints to trade, reinforces existing policies and institutions in recipient countries and brings multiple actors together.<sup>42</sup>

The All-Party Parliamentary Group for Trade Out of Poverty (APPG) in association with ODI encouraged Commonwealth Heads of Government to keep trade in the centre of their plans for development at the CHOGM summit in April 2018. Their comprehensive final report, released in the same month as the summit, includes recommendations for Commonwealth member states to strengthen partnerships between governments, businesses, diaspora and civil society. "Government-to-government partnerships" as they are called in the report, focus on AFT. The authors outline the opportunities for cooperation between donor and recipient states within the Commonwealth structure. Member states have the opportunity to discuss pertinent issues and strategies during meetings convened by the Secretariat and share examples of best practice, coordinate strategies and make plans to advance successful programs through knowledge-sharing

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<sup>38</sup> WTO "Aid for Trade Fact Sheet"

<sup>39</sup> Joseph E. Stiglitz and Andrew Charlton, "Aid for Trade: a Report for the Commonwealth Secretariat", (2016), accessed 31 July 2019, [https://unctad.org/sections/ditc\\_tncdb/docs/ditc\\_tncd\\_bpgeneva03-06\\_en.pdf](https://unctad.org/sections/ditc_tncdb/docs/ditc_tncd_bpgeneva03-06_en.pdf), 18.

<sup>40</sup> Commonwealth Secretariat, "Assessing the Effectiveness of Aid for Trade", (2011), accessed 31 July 2019, <https://www.oecd.org/aidfortrade/47700215.pdf>, 6.

<sup>41</sup> The case study prepared by Edwin Laurent and Mohammad Razzaque for the Commonwealth Secretariat. It summarizes a number of studies sponsored by the Secretariat and thus does not reference the specific study from which the point about the impact of AFT in Sub-Saharan Africa was originally made.

<sup>42</sup> Mendez-Parra, et al., "10 Commonwealth Policy Priorities", 11.



platforms.<sup>43</sup> These opportunities for cooperation and dialogue are purportedly part of what makes the Commonwealth unique, particularly with regard to how it promotes sustainable development. Two of the participants in the pilot interviews emphasized numerous qualities that make the organization uniquely able to support the sustainable development of its members. These include a common language and legal system, as discussed earlier in this paper<sup>44</sup> as well as the voluntary nature of the organization.<sup>45</sup> The Secretariat's chief role as convener of the Commonwealth, means it cannot compel members to behave in any particular way. The participant described these convening powers and the organization's voluntary nature not as weaknesses but rather, as conditions for greater adaptability to the interests and needs of member countries. This flexibility to respond to changes in the global discourse about development has been integral to the Commonwealth's survival and continued relevance. It has also allowed the organization to better represent the voices of its smallest and most vulnerable states at the UN.<sup>46</sup> The APPG expressed a similar sentiment about the positive impact of the Commonwealth's structure and approach. The group clarified that while the Commonwealth may not share the budgets of the World Bank or IMF or have power to make and enforce rules like the WTO, its ability to convene 53 countries far exceeds that of other international organisations.<sup>47</sup> Both research participants concur that the Commonwealth's shared values, enshrined in its Charter are important, but only aspirational. The shared history of its members is not as important as the documents discussed earlier in this paper make it seem. Rather, it is the shared consequences of this history, e.g. the diaspora, that create opportunities for cooperation and development in member countries.<sup>48</sup>

A House of Commons International Trade Committee meeting in November 2018 highlights the context in which the UK is pursuing trade and AFT within the Commonwealth. This context also informs why and how the UK depicts itself as a donor and partner for development. Nigel Evans a Conservative MP, asked, "You say that you want to use trade for closer ties to the Commonwealth. Why have we left it so late? We could have done it before, irrespective of Brexit, couldn't we?" George Hollingbery, the Minister of State for Trade Policy at the time, responded to the question by stating his surprise that the UK has not done more to foster these opportunities. He clarified that the UK is changing its trade relationships with Commonwealth countries going forward and there are Trade Commissioners now in place to support these plans.<sup>49</sup> Aid for Trade will purportedly feature prominently in the UK's relationships with Commonwealth countries. Dr Brendan Vickers from the Commonwealth Secretariat commended the UK for its role as a global leader in AFT as it has committed more than £1 billion GDP to regional and multilateral AFT programmes. He did however, clarify, that there is room

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<sup>43</sup> APPG & ODI, "Our Shared and Prosperous Future", 39.

<sup>44</sup> Richard Burge, interview with author, 26 June 2019.

<sup>45</sup> Name withheld, interview with author, 15 July 2019.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> APPG & ODI, "Our Shared and Prosperous Future", 19.

<sup>48</sup> Burge, interview, 26 July 2019.

<sup>49</sup> Please see House of Commons International Trade Committee, "Trade and the Commonwealth: developing countries", Fifth report of session 2017-2019, (21 Nov 2018), accessed 31 July 2019, <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmtrade/667/667.pdf> , for the full transcript of the meeting.

for improvement, for instance, the government could increase and adapt its support for productive capacity.<sup>50</sup>

The UK's identity as a global leader and champion of AFT and both aid and trade more broadly is a salient concept in the data. The country is depicted by political leaders as the best donor and partner for development, driven by its commitment to leaving no one behind. Rt Hon Penny Mordaunt describes the UK as a "powerhouse of commerce and wealth creation", driven by the country's selfless values.<sup>51</sup> A similar statement is made about the role the City of London in the UK's unique offering to development.<sup>52</sup> The City, Burge argues, provides the skills, experience and connection to support innovative trade and investment.<sup>53</sup> Mordaunt explains in her speech how the government will best make use of these skills and experiences in the context of Brexit. The government plans to use the opportunity created by Brexit in conjunction with their aid budget and the expert knowledge of the financial services sector of the City to a dual end: bring the people of Britain greater financial security and end extreme poverty. "We will harness the huge opportunities in Asia and Africa. Global Britain wants mutual prosperity; based on British values. And I want to use our development programmes to help build the foundation of a more inclusive global economy".<sup>54</sup> This emphasis of British values and interests reflects former Prime Minister Theresa May's assertion that the UK is a trusted partner in development that can bring more to its partners than simply government funding. She does stipulate that the UK's approach to aid and investment in Africa, including seeking to be the G7's number one investor in Africa by 2022, is not about extending the country's geopolitical authority. Rather the UK is seeking to build partnerships based on mutual benefits of economic growth and security for both partners. "True partnerships are not about one party doing unto another, but states, governments, businesses and individuals working together in a responsible way to achieve common goals".<sup>55</sup>

### *Discussion and next steps of the research*

The enthusiasm of key stakeholders including the UK's Conservative Party, the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Trade out of Poverty, and the Commonwealth Secretariat, amongst others, for AFT and the UK's approach to it more specifically has obscured a clear view of the tradeoffs of such relationships thus far. Moving forward, the research will more closely examine the first two sets of themes in addition to a third set that has begun to emerge in interviews and analysis of primary documents. This latter set includes such themes as: transparency, accountability, trust, voice and participation, and point to the challenges and benefits of constructing aid relationships that mutually benefit donors and recipients. If the UK is to live up to its commitment to put Britain first and 'leave no one behind' it must become clearer how it promotes its own interests while protecting those of both recipients and the poorest people living in these countries. The next steps of the research include conducting the remaining interviews of the sample, taking examples from current UK AFT partnerships with Commonwealth African countries (both successful and not) to understand more fully how these relationships are

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> UK Government, "The Future of Aid Post-Brexit".

<sup>52</sup> Burge, interview, 26 July 2019.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> UK Government, "The Future of Aid Post-Brexit".

<sup>55</sup> UK Government, "PM's Speech in Cape Town"

constructed and perpetuated. Finally, this data will be analyzed thematically to understand the values and interests that guide the UK's action in the highly uncertain times of a looming Brexit and new leadership under PM Boris Johnson.

### *List of Pilot Interviews*

Richard R Burge, former Chief Executive of CWEIC, 26 June 2019

Name Withheld 28 June 2019

Name Withheld 15 July 2019

Mark Napier, the Director of FSD Africa, 31 July 2019

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