

TRANSCRIPT OF DEVELOPMENT DRUMS EPISODE 13 – ANDREW MITCHELL

Host: Owen Barder. Guest: Andrew Mitchell

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Owen Barder

Thanks for downloading Development Drums number 13. I'm Owen Barder in Ethiopia. Britain is widely recognized as a world leader in international development. There is broad public support, a cross-party consensus in politics and admiration for the work of the government's Department for International Development. There'll be a general election in Britain in the next 12 months and today's episode of Development Drums looks at whether and how development policy might change if there's a new government. I'll be talking to Andrew Mitchell, the man set to become the Cabinet Minister responsible for International Development if the Conservative Party wins the next election.

Before we talk to Andrew Mitchell, I want to remind you that you can subscribe to Development Drums on iTunes. Go to the iTunes store and search for Development Drums, it's free. You can also subscribe by going to the website at developmentdrums.org, and I want to apologize to those of you eager to listen to the forthcoming episode about philanthrocapitalism. We've had some problems with Internet connectivity here in Ethiopia which have conspired to prevent us from recording that show. Please bear with me. I hope that we'll have that for you soon. And also please go to the Development Drums group in Facebook or to developmentdrums.org to tell me what you think about the show. What topics do you want me to cover, who would you like to hear from in future episodes and what questions would you like me to ask?

If you believe the opinion polls in Britain, then there's a good chance that the Conservative Party led by David Cameron will win the next general election probably sometime in 2010 and if that happens the person set to become the Cabinet Minister responsible for International Development is Andrew Mitchell, the current Shadow Secretary of State. In this edition of Development Drums, I'll be asking Andrew Mitchell what Conservative policy on development will be and how it might change from current policies. Andrew Mitchell, Conservative Shadow Secretary of State for Development, welcome to Development Drums.

Andrew Mitchell

Thank you very much.

Owen Barder

Well before we talk more generally about Conservative policy on development, let's talk for a moment about your recent trip here to your recent trip here to Ethiopia and to Kenya and Eritrea. I last saw you here in Addis where you had just returned from Butajira, a town I suppose about 150 kilometers south of here to see the impact of the aid that the British government gives to Ethiopia. What did you see and what did you make of it?

Andrew Mitchell

Well, I had a fascinating trip to the horn of Africa which was principally to look at the situation in Somalia but from outside Somalia which is why I went to what is one of the biggest refugee camps in Africa in Dadaab in northern Kenya to meet and see what is effectively a sizeable percentage of the Somali population. But my visit to Ethiopia was to have a look at Africa's – the biggest program that the British taxpayers supports in Africa and to see how it was being spent and that was the reason for my visit which you have just described. And the truth is that the Social Protection Program which I saw seemed to me to be a very good use of British taxpayers' money and to be a highly effective way of helping the people who we set out to help.



I think that there is an interesting issue in Ethiopia which is that the government structures which are pretty strong and therefore able to make sure that what the government says it will do it does in particular in terms of the probity of the spending. But on the other hand the growth of the private sector which as you and I know is the key driver of getting people out of poverty, it is economic growth and economic endeavor is very weak. Indeed, one of the sort of oddnesses about my visit was in Ethiopia, you've got a country with strong government structures, but a weak private sector. In Somalia, you've got a country with very few government structures, but actually, quite a flourishing private sector and it's one of the ironies of that part of the world. But what I saw during the visit to Ethiopia was very encouraging, I spent time with the Prime Minister Meles Zenawi, and it's clear, that the program in Ethiopia is well-run and well-constructed, and if my party is elected next year, certainly one of the things we will want to do is to try and see how we can take forward the pace of development in Ethiopia, and if anything, intensify it.

Owen Barder

As you say, the government here is very strong, it delivers those kinds of programmes extremely effectively, and is able to account for the money, but there are concerns, as you know, about the democratic space, the evolution of governance, here in Ethiopia. Is that a concern that you share?

Andrew Mitchell

It is, and I certainly made the point, I hope, very firmly to Meles Zenawi, that Britain's desire to help, and the willingness of our taxpayers to support development in Ethiopia is actively hindered by the fact that he has incarcerated the leader of the opposition. And he had many reasons which he has said publicly for why this has happened but nevertheless incarcerating leader of the opposition is a mistake and I urged him to free her as rapidly as possible.

Owen Barder

And what do you think should happen in a situation like Ethiopia where we're reasonably confident that the aid money is being well spent, and you can see how it's being used, but where you have these concerns about the quality of the democracy and the nature of the governance, what do you think donors should do in a situation like that?

Andrew Mitchell

Well, I don't think there is a golden rule, but I think that there are a number of key principles. The first of these is that, in the end, if you decide that because of the actions of the government, you're going to withdraw aid from a country, what that means is that the poor people in that country, who you are trying to help, lose out twice over, once because they're not getting the aid, and secondly, because they've got a suboptimal government. And so the conclusion to these sort of discussions, in my view, should not be that you are going to withdraw aid, but it certainly affects the way in which you give it, and Ethiopia is a country which, we might be able to do some more budget support within the future, if there was more honouring of the democratic space by the government or the authorities in Ethiopia. The lack of that inevitably means one will do less through the government as a result of their actions.

Owen Barder

Even though the government is able to account for the money and you're able to see how the money is being used, so it is not a public financial management problem that you've got here, but a broader problem of the governance issues. Even in those circumstances you think more of the money should flow outside government, for example through civil society organizations, because of that lack of democratic space.

Andrew Mitchell

Yes, I do. I mean, otherwise you get yourselves into the position that the most authoritarian unaccountable government, because it delivered aid, should be strongly supported, and I think that, that is not acceptable. So although there are no hard and fast rules, part of development is enabling ordinary people to hold their leaders and their politicians to account for what they do and in a society where that is either not possible or where it isn't happening at all, I think that the international donor community cannot just ignore that because the structure of the government is such that the aid is we're reasonably confident that the aid is getting through. You have to view these matters in the round and, in my view, although I'm anxious that



ordinary people should not lose out because their government is suboptimal, it does certainly affect the way in which we work with our government.

Owen Barder

Right. And also visiting Ethiopia, you went south, as you say, to Dadaab, the refugee camp on the border between Kenya and Somalia, and there's now nearly a quarter of million people living in that refugee camp. What was that like?

Andrew Mitchell

Well, it was a salutary experience. I have visited many refugee camps in the four years that I have been doing this job in Opposition, and on each occasion, it is a pretty horrifying experience. You see the state in which these poor people live, you see the difficulties which they face every day of their life, you see the lack of security, sometimes the lack of food and adequate water and so on. And so while I always find myself uplifted by the support that the international community is giving on the spot and by the way in which these wonderful and devoted people seek to help the refugees, one is nevertheless left with a feeling of deep misery and depression at the failures which have led to them being there.

Dadaab is, as you said, a place of I think a little more than a quarter of million people now in space originally set up for 90,000 people. A sizeable chunk of the Somali population, several percent is there. Some of them have been there for 19 years, others are still arriving at the rate of more than 100 a day, and it's a situation where the international community has been very unsuccessful in addressing these points. So it was a sad and salutary experience.

On the other hand, I do think that there is the possibility of a glimmer of hope in respect to Somalia with the regime of Sheikh Sharif, and it was very important that we give such support as we feel we can to him and to what he is trying to do, otherwise, in six months' time, we may kick ourselves for not having maximized what looks like a rather better opportunity than we have had recently.

Owen Barder

Let's move on now to talk more generally about what a Conservative government might mean for the U.K.'s development policy. It strikes me there is being rather strong cross-party consensus in favor of the idea that the U.K. should play a leading role internationally in development. Is that also your sense?

Andrew Mitchell

Yes, I am very keen that international development should be seen as British and not as either Conservative or Labor, and just as it was a very Conservative government which started the debt forgiveness and the debt elimination programs under John Major and Ken Clarke as Chancellor of the Exchequer and Prime Minister. So Labour have, on some aspects of international development, done well. I think that DFID has made an excellent start. We'd like to make it more of a Department of State for Development in the developing world and perhaps take its rightful place more easily within the Whitehall constellation but we think that Clare Short did a very good job in setting up department and that's why we made it absolutely clear that DFID will remain under a Conservative government with its own member of the Cabinet as well.

Owen Barder

So that means it will remain – this is an important pledge that the Conservative Party has repeated, is that – it will remain both a separate government department and have its own cabinet minister under the conservatives.

Andrew Mitchell

Yes, as David Cameron has made this point on many occasions and I am happy to reassert it on your program.

Owen Barder

The Labour government when it came to power in 1997 said in its White Paper then that the purpose of the aid program was to eliminate global poverty and that as you know was enshrined in law in the International Development Act. So now in the U.K. it's - I guess people outside the U.K. and may be in the U.K. don't



know that it's - illegal to use the aid program for anything other than reducing global poverty. Is that something that the Conservative Party if it came to government would intend to keep in place, that restriction on how the aid program is used?

Andrew Mitchell

Well, we've made it absolutely clear that we do not intend to change the Act and that remains our position. And we will be setting out thoughts on development in our Green Paper which we hope to launch shortly which will set out in great detail how we intend to take forward British Development Policy. But I think that you will see when we publish our Green paper that our commitment to this being a British policy where everyone of whatever political party and no political party can support that approach, will be very strongly enshrined in that document.

Owen Barder

Now, I don't expect you to tell me everything that's going to be in the Green Paper but just to be clear that means that the principle that the aid program should be used to eliminate global poverty as set out in the International Development Act that you intend to keep in place?

Andrew Mitchell

Yes.

Owen Barder

It seems to me that there are many different things that you can do to reduce poverty and governments of all political parties make choices about where to spend money, how to spend money, what to spend it on within that overall goal of poverty reduction and some of those choices are made again under any government taking into account Britain's other national interests, there are commercial interests, there are security interests. Do you think that this present government has got their choices broadly right? Is that something that Conservative Party would want to see the development programs still being used for poverty reduction but used more in support of other foreign and commercial objectives? Do you think that there'll be a change in the balance there about how these decisions are made?

Andrew Mitchell

Well, let me make three points. First is that we are absolutely clear that we need to demonstrate that development expenditure made by the British taxpayer is well-spent. And that's why we have said that independent evaluation of our aid program will be right at the top of our agenda. And if you think about it, it's a very important aspect of development policy going forward because given the state of the public finances there will be no chance of maintaining public support for the point seven unless we can demonstrate to the taxpayer that they're getting really good value for money and that's why we think it's very important to make sure that the spending is spent in the best possible way and just as we want accountability to be independent in the developing world, so too in Britain the accountability should be external to the department of international development. It should be truly independent and that's why we said it will report to parliament and not to DFID and I think that's a key priority for us.

It's part too of demonstrating that we are trying to focus on outputs and outcomes rather than the inputs beloved of the current Labour government. Labour are very fond of announcing big packages of money, for example on daytrips to Maputo when Gordon Brown announced \$0.5 billion for education. We think that what is much more important is the output, in other words how many teachers do you train, how many schools do you build? And even more important than the outputs the outcomes, how many kids are actually getting a decent education? So we will change the focus very much onto outputs and outcomes.

Owen Barder

So there'll be no announcements of spending under the Conservatives? So you won't be flying around the world announcing new British contributions; you will be only announcing the results those contributions are expected to achieve?



Andrew Mitchell

No, we'll be doing both but we think that you can't – the focus is too much on inputs where that's the only thing the governments are announcing rather than on the outputs and outcomes. And we need to do that firstly because we need to know that the aid program is being deployed in the best possible way; and secondly to give a proper accountability and satisfaction to our taxpayers that the money is being really well spent.

So that is one aspect, the second aspect of course is that we need to inject a bit more private sector and civil service DNA into DFID because it is through economic growth and economic development that poor people are lifted out of poverty. India and China have shown that beyond peradventure in recent years by lifting hundreds of millions of their citizens out of poverty by being part of the international trading system, by making things and selling things that people want to buy. So that is a sort of key objective of ours as being the first and most important driver of the elimination of poverty.

And then of course there is conflict resolution. Stopping conflict starting; once it started stopping and once it's over reconciling people who have been at war with each other and that is a very important aspect of development too. It's a point brilliantly made by Professor Collier in both his recent books that in the end it is conflict which condemns people to poverty no matter how much access they have to aid and trade. So our development policies will be designed to promote economic growth and bear down on conflict and I think that both those two things are incredibly important.

There's one other emphasis I should also like to mention which is that there's has been a move towards multilateral rather than bilateral spending. And also in some cases towards budget support and we want to look very carefully at that in government. We suspect that budget support is being too widely used. We understand completely that budget support is the best way of doing development if you can trust the government with whom you are working. But it must be accountable to the parliamentarians and civil society in that country which is why we have said that up to 5% of amounts we make available in budget support can be used for evaluation and independent assessment of the quality of that spending. But also in terms of bilateral spending we don't want to see that program diminished in favor of multilateral spending unless there's very strong development case for it. And we think that there should be the availability of more funding sometimes on a matched basis to some of Britain's brilliant NGOs which operate so magnificently around the world and therefore we have announced that we will set up in the first year funded to the tune of £40 million, a poverty impact fund which will be available to NGOs on a matched basis to double the output and the outcomes that they are achieving if the taxpayer is able to double the inputs and the income that they're getting. And that is a long answer, Owen, to your slightly general question...

Owen Barder

It was very clear.

Andrew Mitchell

...on what our priorities would be.

Owen Barder

A point you made earlier was that you wanted to see DFID continue its evolution into being a development ministry. And when you said that I understood you to be contrasting it with an aid agency so that the difference between development and aid. But I – how much do you see DFID moving into having a stronger voice in policy areas. You talked for example about conflict and there're a number of policy issues in which DFID might play a stronger role, for example, in arms controls or in peacekeeping where the issues are not necessarily to do with aid but to do with broader policies of the industrialized countries. And again in private sector growth, you said that a Conservative government would place more emphasis on that. And there are a set of issues to do with for example trade policy or intellectual property rights that might affect private sector development. Do you see DFID having a big role in a broad range of broader government policies that affect developing countries? Or do you see it primarily focusing on its role as a giver of aid?



Andrew Mitchell

No I think that we all must remember that DFID pursues not so much DFID priorities but as part of the architecture of the British government, it pursues British government priorities. And I think it's a sort of – it's not a secret that when it comes to trade policy the very high quality of DFID's economists and so forth who have worked on that has been available to other departments and I think has contributed hugely to the policy of the British government in that respect.

I think the point that I'm really making about DFID's role within the constellation of Whitehall is that I think to be a department state for development in the developing world requires a non-developmental DNA as well as those who've had the sort of classic route through an NGO or a development agency. And that's why I think that injecting a little more civil service DNA and business DNA for the reasons I set out on the importance of business is extremely important and that really was the point I was making, making sure that DFID develops into a department state for development in the developing world. It's something which you can't do overnight DFID's made an absolutely brilliant start but obviously inevitably there is further to go.

Owen Barder

As I'm sure you realize there are lots of DFID staff who listen to Development Drums and I guess some of them will be wondering whether you have something specific in mind about a bit of civil service DNA or indeed a bit of private sector DNA that's currently missing. Is there a behavior or a pattern that you observe from your position as opposition spokesman that you would like to see changed?

Andrew Mitchell

I think that, no, I think the answer to that is that this is all about a sort of easing on the tiller in the direction that we're going. We're heading in the right direction but I think that there are some times concerns that there needs to be a little bit more of the civil service in DFID and perhaps you know slightly more of the private sectors as well to enhance the general thrust of the department's work. I think that no one should be alarmed by that and in my experience many who work at DFID understand and support that proposition.

Owen Barder

And your Green Paper will be being published in the summer?

Andrew Mitchell

Yes not too long now and I think that – I know it will be widely read and I hope it will be very strongly approved of by many of the development actors in their different roles. The Conservative Party has never produced a document quite like this before. I'm immensely proud of it and I will think that not everyone will agree with it. It's after all speaking to a huge range of opinion but I think it takes forward an agenda which I passionately believe in. I'm very proud of what the Conservative Party has said and done under David Cameron and I'm absolutely convinced that if we are to have the honour of being in government, then our time in – I was going to say at the crease, to use a cricketing metaphor, but our time at the crease will be very well used to take forward an agenda which is passionately supported in Britain.

Owen Barder

Andrew Mitchell, Shadow Secretary of State for International Development, thanks for coming on Development Drums.

Andrew Mitchell

It's a pleasure.
