

Vote Global – Local Activist UK General Election Toolkit

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Why campaigning is important

The last UK General Election took place in 2005. Thanks to people like you who have written to MPs, taken part marches and made a noise about poverty, great steps forward have been made since then.

- In July 2005, G8 countries pledged to work towards 0.7% of national income in aid, some of poor country's debt was cancelled and the UK committed that aid should not be tied to damaging policies of privatisation.
- In 2006 the process towards a global UN Arms Trade Treaty began.
- In 2007 the government announced that they would replace air passenger duty with an environmental tax on planes.
- In 2008 the first Climate Change Bill in the world was passed committing the UK to a cut in CO2 emissions of 80% by 2050.
- In 2009 the UK government committed to supporting a law to ensure that aid spending commitments are met and also expressed support on the international stage for a tax on financial transactions, which could be used to raise money for tackling poverty.

Yet the instances of rich countries doing the right thing on one hand, has too often concealed continuing damaging policies on the other.

- 80% of developing country debt remains to be cancelled, including outstanding illegitimate debt 'owed' to the UK.
- Multinational companies dodge £98 billion in taxes owed to developing countries every year. Tax havens play a major role in this, and many of these are UK territories and dependencies.
- A lack of effective regulation of financial institutions has led to the current economic crisis, which is plunging 100 people every second in to poverty in poor countries. This stands in addition to the 130-150 million poor people pushed in to poverty by the food and fuel crises of 2008, reversing the progress made towards many of the Millennium Development Goals.
- Most dangerously of all, CO2 emissions remain at a far higher level than is safe, as figures reveal 300, 000 people a year die because of climate change. The government's plan to reach targets through ineffective and unjust 'offsetting' schemes constitutes a licence for polluters to continue polluting until it is too late.

Thus, the world stands at a crossroads and the UK is well placed to influence its direction.

We know that campaigning works. At the next General Election, a great many new MPs are likely to be elected, untouched in their political life by anti-poverty campaigning. It is crucial that we campaign together to make the next government make the right choices.

Write letters to newspapers

Writing letters to newspapers (especially local newspapers) is a great way to get your concerns out there. Letters pages of local newspapers are keenly read by all of your candidates.

It is best if you can 'hook' your letter to something covered in the newspaper already (for example a local resident doing something for the environment or for charity). Some ideas for this are below.

Template Letters

Aid

Dear Editor

[x person] deserves great respect for their [thing that they did for anti-poverty charity]. The funds from this will no doubt contribute to reaching the Millennium Development Goals – the targets set in 2000 to end extreme poverty by 2015.

Another key part of reaching the Millennium Development Goals is through UK government aid.

Thus it is vital that the UK government retains the commitment to 0.7% of national income being spent on aid by 2013.

The world's poor do not have a voice in UK politics, so it is down to us to make sure the UK government keeps its promises.

Yours,

[Insert your name here]

Finance

Dear Editor

[x politician] has spoken of the need to cut spending because of the economic crisis.

Yet if multinational companies pay the taxes they owe, the UK could recoup £12 billion a year. Poor countries could also gain £89 billion – more than all international aid combined.

Additionally, a global tax on speculation could raise up to £400 billion annually.

It is time for UK politicians to take the lead internationally to win global changes that could help people out of poverty in rich and poor countries alike.

Yours

[Insert your name here]

Debt cancellation

Dear Editor

[X person] is right to point out that we are all suffering from the effects of the economic crisis.

There are many similarities between the current financial crisis and the ongoing developing country debt crisis. Both were caused by irresponsible lending, both were deepened by barely regulated 'free' markets, and both are hurting the poorest the most.

Despite the impression sometimes given, the UK government has still not cancelled all developing countries' unjust and unpayable debt. It has also increased funding to the IMF – the body responsible for imposing the damaging policies that made today's crisis so intense.

We need an international debt tribunal, to deal with all poor countries' unpayable and unjust debts, meaning lenders can't get away with their current reckless behaviour.

The commitment to halve extreme poverty made in the Millennium Development Goals is not going to be met without such changes. If we are to find a way to tackle poverty in rich and poor countries alike, there must be no return to business as usual.

Yours,

[Insert your name here]

Climate change

Dear Editor,

It is good to see that [whatever environmental story is being reported in paper].

Climate change is killing 300, 000 people a year, mostly in poor countries. According to some studies we have less than 85 months before reaching the 'point of no return'.

To avoid this, we need a cut in CO2 emissions across the UK of at least 40% by 2020 – not a pretend cut in which the UK 'offsets' its emissions.

Candidates and voters in this election must show that the scientifically necessary is politically possible.

Yours

[Insert your name here]

Contact your candidates

It is well worth getting in touch with your parliamentary candidates. Politicians have to be persuaded that real action on poverty and climate change is vital to them getting elected. Candidates will then feed this information back to their parties, and take on what they have found out themselves.

Visiting your parliamentary candidates or holding an event and inviting them to visit you is the most effective way to get them to listen and to engage in a conversation and debate about your concerns. However, it may only be possible to, or you may prefer to, make contact by phone or letter.

Find your candidates

- Identify your constituency – go to www.theyworkforyou.com. Type in your postcode. This will tell you your constituency and your MP.¹
- Find out the parliamentary candidates in your constituency at <http://ukpollingreport.co.uk/guide>. Go to 'seats a-z' and click on your constituency. You will see a description of your constituency, including your current MP and the parliamentary candidates for all parties. Note your MP will not necessarily be the parliamentary candidate for that party, if they are stepping down, for example. The key opposition candidate is probably the one who came second in the 2005 elections – look at '2005 result' (or 'Actual 2005 result') to find out who this is.
- Find out their contact details – you should be able to do this if you 'Google' their name. If you are having difficulties doing this please get in touch.

Telephone your candidates

- If you are going to visit your candidates, ring their office and ask for a meeting, or alternatively, a conversation on the phone.
- Identify yourself as a constituent and state whether you are speaking as an individual or on behalf of a group. If you manage to get the support of a group (e.g. your church, synagogue, mosque, meeting or community group) this could strengthen your message.
- Ask to meet the candidate because you are concerned about climate change and global poverty and would like to know what they think about these issues and what action they and their party plans to take.

¹ A number of constituency boundaries have changed, which may affect which constituency you are in for the next election. If you are not sure whether this applies to your constituency go to a party website (e.g. www.labour.org.uk) and put your post code into the box under 'Labour in your area' in the right hand panel (all parties have a similar facility). This will tell you both your current constituency and constituency for the next general election. You need to use this later when taking the following steps.

Write to your candidates

If you would prefer to write to your candidates in the first instance, or to email them, you might try saying something like the below.

[Your Address]
Dear.....,
I write as a local constituent, very concerned about global poverty and climate change, planning to place my vote at the next election based on who will do the most on these issues.
I am pleased to see that your party has announced that it will stick to the target of 0.7% of national income being spent on aid by 2013.
I hope in the spirit of this, you party will help reverse the flow of funds from poor countries to rich ones through injustices relating to tax havens, unfair trade, illegitimate debt and corruption. Furthermore I hope your party will avoid poverty becoming permanent by making real efforts to reduce CO2 by 40% by 2020, without resorting to offsets.
[Enclosed OR Linked] is a copy of the <i>Vote Global</i> manifesto, which provides an all-round set of recommendations for the next government on international development. It has been endorsed by more than 100 development charities, including [insert name of your favourite endorsing charity].
I hope these concerns will be addressed by your party, and hope that you will be a champion of these issues.
Yours Sincerely
[Your name]

Meet your candidates

If you have not met your politicians before, don't be daunted. And don't assume that they will know any more than you do about world poverty and climate change – the chances are that they won't.

Choose one policy to emphasise (You can take your pick from the *Vote Global* Manifesto, a package of recommendations endorsed by 100 development charities).

The Q and A sheets in this pack can provide a useful basis for your discussion.

Practice with a friend

Tips on meeting politicians

- Keep it simple - stick to a few main points.
- If the politician asks a question you can't answer, offer to get back to them with the information.
- If you give any background material to an MP, keep it short, simple and clear.
- If the politician tries to change the subject, politely but firmly bring them back to the topic in hand by saying something like, "I know your time is very valuable; we really only came here to discuss how you can help on this issue."
- It may be useful to take notes, particularly if some action is agreed on
- Remain polite and courteous throughout.
- Don't be blinded by spin. The Questions and Answers sheet at the end of this pack can assist with this.
- Offer the politician a lapel badge of your organisation if you have one
- Make sure you finish with an action point for them to take forward.
- Write a thank you letter afterwards and re-emphasise your points

Attend hustings and ask questions

If you don't feel able to organise a hustings event you might turn up at other Hustings and ask questions about global poverty and climate change.

Here are some that you might try:

"In the year 2000, world leaders made a promise to the world to halve extreme poverty by 2015. The UN calculates that to reach this each country would need to give just 0.7% of national income as aid – a sum first pledged by rich countries in 1970. How will you make sure this target is met?"

"According to the Global Humanitarian Forum, Climate Change kills 300,000 people every year, mostly in poor countries. Scientists say we need a cut in CO2 levels of 40% by 2020. What would your party do to stop further climate change and ensure sufficient funding for adaptation and mitigation in developing countries, without resorting to offsets?"

"The fact that companies and rich people can hide their money in tax havens costs Britain billions every year, and costs poor countries even more. What would you do to tackle the tax havens and make sure that everyone pays that the taxes they owe, so all countries can continue to invest in vital public services - rather than more profits for the super rich?"

Hold an event

Many people will organise events during the campaign.

Whatever you are organising, do your best to get your candidates involved.

Step one: Think of an event

You could organise a special service at your place of worship, and invite your candidates to attend. Alternatively attendees might sign a letter to candidates on the way out.

You might organise a public gathering, and invite your candidates.

You might organise a club night or fundraiser, and video a message to your candidates and email it to them/

Or perhaps if you are planning a trip to the pub, you could invite your candidates there!

Step two: Prepare the event

If candidates are attending the event, make sure people are fully prepared. You might open giving a short speech based on the introduction to this toolkit, or invite a speaker from a charity to speak about the importance of the policies in *the Vote Global* manifesto.

Make posters and leaflets about the event, advertise it in relevant newsletters and make sure to invite all of your own friends and family, as well as promoting it over relevant email lists.

Step three: Hold the event

Whatever you do, make sure you present candidate(s) with the *Vote Global* Manifesto.

Step four: Tell the world

After your event, write a letter to the relevant local newspaper comparing the performance of the politicians you met.

Consider writing a longer account of your encounters with your politicians in a faith magazine, a newsletter, on a blog (if you have one), on a social networking website (if you are part of one), tell a local radio phone-in about it, or simply write an email to all of your friends.

Suggested reading

There are lots of books out there that you might be interested in reading in order to find out more about the issues and how to campaign on them. Here are just a few.

Vanessa Baird and David Hamilton, *People First Economics*, New Internationalist, 2009

An introduction to the causes of the economic crisis. It argues that the best solutions also deliver social and environmental justice. Contributors include Susan George, Walden Bello and Ann Pettifor.

Ha-Joon Chang, *Bad Samaritans: The Guilty Secrets of Rich Nations and the Threat to Global Prosperity*, Random House, 2008

Cambridge professor Ha-Joon Chang uses a conversational style to offer an incisive insight in to the economic policies imposed upon poor countries by rich countries and why they often don't work.

Duncan Green, *From Poverty to Power*, Oxfam Books, 2008

A dense but rich volume by Oxfam's head of policy, arguing that models of development must include a strong state and a strong civil society if poverty is to be eradicated.

George Monbiot, *Heat: How we can stop the Planet from Burning*, Penguin, 2007

An engaging investigation into why the UK needs to drastically reduce its CO2 emissions, and how Britain might look if we did so.

Books about campaigning:

Saul Alinsky, *Rules for Radicals*, Vintage 1989 (Reprint)

The seminal campaigns strategy book by the 'father of community organisers'

Tess Kingham and Jim Coe, *The Good Campaigns Guide*, NCVO, 2005

A comprehensive campaigns guide, written in the style of a manual

Chris Rose, *How to Win Campaigns*, Earthscan, 2005

Environmental campaigns strategist Chris Rose, details everything to be considered in planning an effective campaign.

Questions and Answers on the Vote *Global Manifesto*

Part 1: More and better aid and debt relief

Why did the figure 0.7% of national income for aid get chosen?

Research by the United Nations (UN) indicates that 0.7% of rich world GNI can provide enough resources to meet the UN Millennium Development Goals. The figure was already first committed to in a 1970 General Assembly Resolution. By supplying a percentage rather than a set amount, all countries can make a fair contribution relative to their wealth.

Why should the Department for International Development (DFID) be independent?

Aid should be delivered as part of a project to reduce and ultimately eradicate poverty. An independent DFID is more likely to be able to do this, than if it was part of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, where aid decisions would be more likely to be subservient to foreign policy or military interests.

What is a debt tribunal?

In the past the focus of debt campaigns has been ad hoc debt cancellation for poor country governments (e.g. Jubilee 2000, Make Poverty History in 2005). However, still only 20% of unpayable poor country debt has been dropped.

There is now great support for a new way of dealing with debt – the creation of a fair, democratic and transparent debt tribunal, run by the United Nations that would review all unpayable or illegitimate debt.

What is wrong with economic conditions linked to debt cancellation and aid funding?

In order to be eligible for debt cancellation or some loans, poor countries must be following policies set by the International Monetary Fund (IMF). In order to actually get debt cancellation or loans, poor countries often have to meet 30 or more specific conditions: some relate to technical reforms of financial management, or meeting the government's own targets on health and education, but many are economic policy changes including widespread privatisation - of water, energy, agriculture, transport, etc - and severe cuts in public spending including cuts in social spending/ services. Too often these undermine democracy and damage living conditions for the poorest.

The UK has promised not to attach economic policy conditions to aid it gives directly to poor countries, saying it is "inappropriate and ineffective for donors to impose policies". The Commission for Africa in 2005 questioned the role of conditions, for instance stating that "forced liberalisation will not work" as a way of reducing poverty. The 2005 G8 communiqué stated that "developing countries...need to decide, plan and sequence their economic policies." Despite this, aid as well as debt relief and cancellation granted by the World Bank and IMF - which the UK helps to fund - still has huge numbers of damaging conditions attached.

What is an ‘innovative financing mechanism’?

There are many ways other than aid and debt relief to provide funds to poor countries. The first ‘development tax’, agreed in 2006, in the form of the Air Ticket Levy - whose funds provide treatment for HIV/AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis – sets an important precedent for further progress in this field.

Decision-makers, in the UK and internationally, should take all steps necessary for an early introduction of new and additional financing initiatives, such as a Financial Transactions Tax with proceeds ring-fenced for sustainable international development objectives. This could raise £400 billion for tackling poverty. The September 2009 G20 meeting committed to investigate such mechanisms and Gordon Brown expressed his support in November 2009. The next government must see them through.

Doesn’t aid get channelled in to corruption?

Corruption is a barrier to development, and a whole section of the manifesto is dedicated to tackling corruption. The UK needs to make sure it is not supporting corrupt projects through its companies, its private sector projects, or its aid.

One way it can do this is to channel aid in part to anti-corruption bodies and civil society, another is to make changes to UK practice and law to ensure UK companies do not support corruption.

Part 2: Tackling Climate Change

Is climate change really happening, and is it created by humans?

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) – the global authority on climate change, which takes evidence from thousands of scientists from over 130 countries – concludes that there is a more than 90 per cent chance that the observed warming since the 1950s is due to human activity.

The world has previously experienced warmer and colder periods without interference from humans. However, such a rapid increase in average global temperatures over the last century cannot be accounted for by natural factors alone, and strongly correlates with CO₂ levels.

This increase in temperature leads to changes in climate including sea level rise and drought – most recently seen in the mass floods in Bangladesh and the Philippines.

What is the urgency of a 40% cut in CO₂ emissions by 2020?

Scientists have said we need an 80% cut in CO₂ emissions by 2050, but this must be a constant downwards trajectory. For instance - if the entire 80% cut came in 2049, so much CO₂ would have been emitted in to the atmosphere that it is likely the planet would have passed the point of no return.

What about China and India?

China and India are both significant and growing contributors to greenhouse gases. However, developed nations remain the main polluters and are historically responsible for 70 per cent of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, so they must lead the way in cutting emissions. After all, the average carbon footprint of each person

living in China is only half that of someone living in the UK and a third of the country's emissions are generated by producing goods for export to rich countries like our own.

What is wrong with carbon offsetting?

Offsetting is the theory that some people can pollute more if other people agree to pollute less. However it does not work. It does not guarantee emissions cuts because many 'offset' projects in developing countries would have happened anyway. Even if it did work, offsetting would allow people in rich countries to carry on polluting while requiring unfair reductions in developing countries, who did not create the problem.

The world needs developed countries to cut their own emissions first and fast and pay up for adaptation and mitigation in developing countries.

What is technology transfer?

The transfer of environmentally-friendly technologies from rich countries to poor.

What is climate change adaptation?

Climate change adaptation means communities, supported by governments, taking early action to reduce the damaging impact that climate change will have on their lives. Development charities are already carrying out work to help people adapt to the impacts of climate change. Examples include upgrading national flood early warning systems, building homes and schools on raised foundations, building high platforms for emergency flood shelters and creating community-based disaster response plans.

What is wrong with channelling money to deal with climate change through the World Bank?

The World Bank is unaccountable to the poorest countries (see part 3) and has a history of funding polluting projects and attaching damaging conditions to its loans. To make sure this does not happen again, funds for adaptation and mitigation should be made in the form of grants through the UN.

Part 3: Making the Global Economy work for the poor

Are you in favour of protectionism/against free trade?

We are in favour of Trade Justice – fair rules regulating world trade that protect poor people and the environment.

Both the current economic crisis in rich countries and the longstanding economic crisis in poor countries were caused by misguided faith in the virtues of unfettered 'free' markets, and the lack of transparency and accountability of financial institutions.

However, the rhetoric of 'free trade' has only been used when it suits rich countries – for example to force developing countries to stop protecting emerging industries.

Meanwhile many rich country agricultural subsidies and tariffs continue to hurt poor countries.

What is wrong with the trade deals at the World Trade Organisation (WTO)?

The Doha trade talks collapsed because no deal was better than a bad deal for poor countries as major agricultural exporting countries put self interest above other considerations.

Central to the collapse was the failure to agree to a generous special safeguard mechanism, which would have enabled developing countries to impose or raise tariffs to protect their poor and vulnerable farmers from surges of agricultural imports.

These issues have not been resolved.

What is wrong with the trade deals at the EU?

The new trade deals that the EU is trying to secure with 34 countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America (Economic Partnership Agreements – EPAs) under the destructive ‘Global Europe’ strategy could have disastrous impacts on jobs, livelihoods, human rights and the environment for the developing countries that sign up.

Since 2007, the European Commission has been negotiating an agreement with a group of Central American countries (Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua, with Panama as an observer), a region where 40 per cent of people live on less than US\$2 a day.

These deals could result in significant job losses amongst producers of manufactured goods, many of whom are women who would lose access to decent work opportunities, reduced government income from trade taxes to invest in decent public services like health and education, reduced access to cheap medicines for the poorest people and reduced access to financial services for low income communities and small businesses

What are the IMF and World Bank, and why do they need to be reformed?

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank are two of the global institutions that oversee global financial flows. The World Bank has a specific mandate to support developing countries by providing grants and concessional loans to poor countries. The UK Government gives large amounts of money to both the World Bank and the IMF.

Unfortunately many World Bank and IMF decisions have not benefited poor countries, and some have actively harmed them. Particularly controversial are their ongoing forcing of economic conditions on loans and their funding of dirty fossil fuel projects.

The USA and Europe between them command around 50% of the votes at these institutions. Senior posts have been largely given to European and US American representatives including the post as head of the IMF and the World Bank. The combined vote of Sub-Saharan African countries however, is less than 5%.

What are tax havens, and how would greater transparency help?

Tax havens are countries that offer low or zero taxation, and a veil of secrecy that undermines international regulation. They allow big companies and wealthy individuals to escape from their responsibility to pay tax.

Christian Aid has calculated that illegal tax evasion by multinational companies costs developing countries at least US\$160bn (£98 billion) in lost revenue annually. Tax havens play a key role in enabling this money to be siphoned away from where it's needed.. If that money was allocated according to current spending patterns, the lives of 350,000 children under the age of five could be saved every year.

Greater transparency would make it much easier to see if companies and rich individuals were paying the taxes they owed, in the countries they were operating in.

A new international accounting standard is needed with country-by-country reporting. It would require companies to reveal, for every country in which they operate, the name(s) under which they trade, the profits they make and the taxes they pay.

Also, all countries should automatically share basic tax information with each other, so suspicious activity can be investigated.

Why do we need a UK Commission on Business, Human Rights and the Environment?

NGOs have documented a number of ongoing instances of UK businesses being complicit in human rights abuse and environmental mismanagement in developing countries.

For example, 750,000 people in 450 communities of the three countries were affected by the Baku-Tblisi pipeline, completed in 2005. Issues included inadequate compensation for compulsory confiscation of land; loss of livelihood through land degradation from construction work and the inability for people to access their land; as well as intimidation and violence against those protesting against the pipeline. BP was one of the organisations with corporate interests in this.

Currently, the gas flaring and water pollution caused by Shell in Southern Nigeria is very well documented.

The UK Government has a responsibility to ensure UK companies do not continue to get away with violating human rights and damaging the environment abroad. A new UK Commission on Business, Human Rights & The Environment would provide guidance to companies on what standards they must adhere to when operating abroad, and act as a forum for hearing and resolving allegations of infringements.

What is the ILO, and what are Decent Work Country Programmes?

The International Labour Organization (ILO) is a part of the UN that brings together governments, employers and workers of its member states in common action to promote decent work throughout the world.

Decent Work Country Programmes assist governments, employers and employees in achieving national development strategies and promoting decent working conditions.

Part 4: Good governance and tackling corruption

How do we have effective development and avoid corruption?

The key to effective development is a functioning and accountable state and a strong civil society to monitor government's performance and funds. Thus, by channelling some of our aid to support to parliamentary committees, national human rights institutions, independent auditing, the freedom of the press, civil society organisations, anti-corruption groups and academia, people in developing countries are better able to hold their governments to account.

It is also key that the UK does not itself contribute to or play a part in corrupt practices.

What is the UNCAC?

The United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC) and the OECD Anti Bribery Convention are international agreements against corruption.

The UK is a signatory to both treaties and must set an example and ensure that their implementation is independently monitored.

Part 5: Responding to Conflict Situations

What is the 'Responsibility to Protect'?

The Responsibility to Protect is a UN principle based on extensive research which aims at addressing the international community's serial failure to prevent and stop genocides, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity.

Its key pillar is the principle that it is the responsibility of the international community to take timely, decisive and proportionate action, by force if necessary, to prevent and halt genocide, ethnic cleansing, war crimes and crimes against humanity if a state is manifestly failing to protect its population, and if all other routes of intervention have been exhausted.

What is the International Criminal Court?

The International Criminal Court is an international tribunal where individuals can be tried for genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes. It came into being in July 2002. 110 ten states are members, including the UK. Notable non members include the USA and Israel. The court is currently investigating situations in four African countries – the Democratic Republic of Congo, the Central African Republic, Sudan and Uganda.

The UK should do all that it can to strengthen the court and support its actions.

What is the status of the UN Arms Trade Treaty?

Irresponsible arms transfers fuel conflict, poverty and human rights abuses. In the past, the UK has shown leadership in promoting a strong Arms Trade Treaty at the United Nations. But right now the Treaty is stuck in the slow lane – governments have been discussing the ATT since 2006, meanwhile over 2 million people have died from armed violence.

The UK Government needs to finish what it started.