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UK and US do better on helping developing world

By Andrew Balls in Washington Published: August 31 2005 03:00 |

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The US and Britain are among the countries that have done the most to improve the help they give to the developing world over the past two years, according to a ranking of 21 rich countries by a leading development think-tank.

The 2005 Commitment to Development Index, produced by the Washington-based Centre for Global Development in association with Foreign Policy magazine, suggests the UK and US have partially matched their rhetoric on development with actions.

The US has a larger foreign aid budget than other countries measured by dollars but, adjusted for national income, it is close to bottom of the list. Although the US's agricultural trade barriers do more harm to poor countries overall, it is close to the top ranking for being open to trade.

The administration of George W. Bush has pledged since 2001 to increase the country's efforts in development. Although its score increased by more than most countries, it has only moved from 13th place to 12th in the past two years.

Smaller countries remain the most pro-development, with the Netherlands, New Zealand and Australia again at the top of the index. Among the Group of Eight leading nations, Germany was in ninth place, Canada 11th, France 15th, Italy 18th and Japan last in 21st place. The UK, which this year put development and Africa at the centre of the agenda when it chaired the G8 summit, was placed 10th, up from 14th in 2003, when the index started.

World leaders meet in New York next month for a summit to discuss progress on meeting the United Nations millennium development goal of halving poverty by 2015. The measurement, which adjusts for a country's size, is based on the quality and quantity of each country's aid, openness to imports from developing countries, foreign investment, as well as policies on migration, environment and arms sales to poor countries.

The UK, which improved across the board except on migration, came first in two categories: policies that promote investment in poor countries, and environmental policies. It ranked second-to-last in security owing to arms exports to undemocratic countries, with only Switzerland having a worse record.

The US is high in the rankings on openness to trade, investment flows and the creation and transfer of technologies to poor countries. It does poorly on the generosity and usefulness of its overseas aid, environmental policies and security, and exporting arms to undemocratic countries.

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