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# A year after Gleneagles pledges, Britain slips down development table

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Britain has slipped back two places in rankings showing rich nations' commitment to development, despite Tony Blair and Gordon Brown having put foreign aid at the top of the G8's agenda in 2005.

The annual Commitment to Development Index, compiled by the Centre for Global Development, the independent Washington-based thinktank, shows today that Britain dropped to 12th out of the 21 countries surveyed, from joint 10th last year.

The index awards points for action in seven policy areas, including aid, trade, investment and migration. With a mark of 5.1 out of 10, Britain fell back from the 5.3 scored in 2005, mainly due to arms sales to undemocratic governments. The average score of all countries in the index, which had risen slightly since the study began in 2003, also dropped this year to 5.2 from 5.3 in 2005. Although 14 countries improved over the index's duration, seven lost ground.

Nancy Birdsall, president of the thinktank, said there was improvement in some countries' scores but progress was slow and fell short of expectations raised in 2005, which had been dubbed the "Year of Development".

"From what was needed and what was promised, the results are disappointing," said David Roodman, who designed the index.

"The lives of a billion people could be improved in the next decade if rich countries reform their trade, migration and investment policies."

Barely a year after the Gleneagles summit of July 2005, when rich countries pledged to increase aid by \$48bn (£25bn) a year by 2010, several, including Britain, came under fire from non-governmental organisations and charities who said that G8 leaders had fallen short of their pledges on aid and trade.

The charity Oxfam published a report in June that said once money used for debt relief had been stripped out, the UK's aid budget fell in 2005. The Centre for Global Development research also found that 2.7 billion people worldwide were still surviving on less than \$2 a day, despite huge public

campaigns to relieve poverty.

The government's Department for International Development dismissed the Oxfam figures when they were released, and it insisted again yesterday that Britain would meet its commitments.

"The UK's aid budget is rising and will continue to do so. Total UK aid has almost tripled since 1997 to £5.9bn in 2005. We're the first government in British history to commit to a date to achieve the UN's target of providing 0.7% of national income as aid by 2013 - two years ahead of the EU target," a department spokesman said.

Britain did perform well in its efforts to invest in poor countries, however, according to the CGD report, and held the best environmental record.

But it still lagged behind the Scandinavian nations and the Netherlands, which came top of the rankings, having previously led the index in 2004. The Dutch achieved a score of 6.6 this year on the strength of generous aid giving and falling greenhouse gas emissions.

Over the three years of the index Britain and the US were jointly the second most-improved countries.

Yet even those that were doing well could do better, Mr Roodman said, with countries such as the Netherlands heavily involved in the EU's agricultural policies, which restrict imports from poor farmers by levying large taxes on their products.

"Politically, these changes are difficult," said Mr Roodman, "However, if rich countries are truly committed to development, they could easily bear the short-term costs of the reforms and the spread of prosperity would serve the interests of all countries."

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