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## China still needs help

Instead of ending financial aid, the British government should support efforts to combat poverty among Chinese children.

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As China's unparalleled growth gathers momentum and the Beijing Olympics grows ever nearer, the UK government should be paying attention to China - but instead the [Department for International Development](#) seems ready to turn its back.

In Beijing recently, met with DFID officials who confirmed that their financial support to the country would end for good in 2011. It is as if the British government is saying that in four years' time all of China's problems will be fixed - job done.

Gordon Brown has committed to the [Millennium Development Goals](#) - but if the government is serious about cutting global child poverty, it needs to keep its focus on China, simply because of the massive numbers of children there. China has one of the highest levels of child mortality in the world. The scale of the problem is huge.

The strategy that economic growth equals poverty reduction is risky. We know that support will be needed to see the right policies, systems and approaches are in place that helps the very poorest. The UK has experience and knowledge in this area and should use it. Completely cutting DFID's budgets and leaving China is a mistake.

It's not cash for large scale works that DFID needs to contribute, but it could play an important role in supporting innovations for those children whom authorities struggle to reach. The particular challenges from rapid industrialisation and the world's largest ever urban migration are impacting the children in cities and those left behind. For example, birth defects in China have risen 40% since 2001. Such rapid change requires a rapid response in exploring new solutions to new problems as these children grow and develop.

During my visit, the message I heard from [Save the Children's](#) government partners was that they recognise there is a long way to go and that they will need support to help bring the hardest to reach people out of poverty. There are currently 50 million Chinese children living on less than the equivalent of \$1 a day.

China is undergoing an industrial revolution, similar to what the UK went through in the 19th century. Massive economic growth has created a relentless demand for urban workers to feed the furnaces of industry in China's town and cities - making the consumer goods that we demand here in Britain. At the same time making a living from the land has become harder giving parents little option but to leave their village and head to the city.

The poorest children are most likely to lose out on this massive growth. Millions of children are left behind in poor villages to be looked after by uneducated elderly relatives, others move with their parents into a life of urban poverty. Being a migrant child in the city is tough - they don't get a place in state school and, those who can afford have to pay for second-rate schools, others don't go at all. With parents working long hours they are often left to fend for themselves. The struggle to make it in the city can lead to children turning to petty crime or being at risk of exploitation and trafficking or becoming part of a new urban underclass.

China is at a pivotal moment in its history, it recognises the scale of the problem facing its children and it wants to meet this challenge head on.

I've seen that the Chinese government isn't just sitting back and letting this happen. In our 13 years of working in China we [at Save the Children] have seen children's issues rise further up the government's agenda but the challenge is to make sure that words translate into real change for millions of children living in poverty.

I felt there was a real buzz among people working to help the poorest and most vulnerable people - we know big breakthroughs are possible. So now is not the time for DFID to cut its ties to China. We cannot and must not turn our back on the millions of Chinese children who are struggling to survive.

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