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A shelter camp in Haiti after the devastating earthquake in 2010.

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Let's not forget that development is more than just CIDA

Lucas Robinson And Owen Barder

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CIDA's merger into Foreign Affairs should be seen as an opportunity for Canada to do more to support development, and to move the debate "beyond aid."

The past fifty years have seen unprecedented progress on almost every dimension of human well-being, and many of these improvements have been supported and catalyzed by foreign aid. There is much more to do in this regard.

But people from developing countries are clear that development policy must mean more than giving aid. They want to benefit more from the resources and services they supply to the world. They do not want aid as compensation for unfair global trade rules; they want the rules changed. They do not want compensation for the damage done to the environment by industrialized countries; they want the destruction of our planet to stop.

We need to look beyond the management of aid, for which their organizations are designed, to a much broader agenda and new ways of working if we are to deal with the growing array of

challenges that require global solutions, including climate change, macroeconomic imbalances, inadequate financial regulation, tax avoidance, inequality, environmental degradation, dislocation, insecurity and corruption.

How does Canada do in this regard? The Center for Global Development's Commitment to Development Index scores wealthy governments on how their policies which affect poor countries in seven areas: aid, trade, investment, migration, environment, security, and technology. There is room for improvement for all countries, including Canada.

In general, individual Canadians give a lot, but the overall official foreign aid commitment is low (0.33 per cent of national income) and shrinking. The Harper Government can afford to do better.

Canada's low tariffs on non-agricultural commodities are helpful, but high tariffs on agricultural commodities keep poor economies out of the Canadian marketplace.

On investment, Canada is active in Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI). Given the importance of extractive industries in Africa, this will pay dividends to citizens across the continent.

On migration, Canada should be applauded for supporting immigrants from developing countries, and refugees during humanitarian crises.

Canada's track record on the environment is, frankly, terrible. Canada has one of the highest greenhouse gas emissions and fossil fuel production rates per capita. It also has very low gasoline taxes, high fishing subsidies, and the government has a poor compliance record when it comes to its reporting requirements. In short, Canada is – on this issue – a global pariah. The impact on places like Ethiopia, Cambodia and Burkina Faso is already being felt.

In terms of global security, while Canada does not export much in terms of arms to undemocratic countries, Canadians have recently contributed little in the way of finances or personnel to peacekeeping interventions (despite the nation's proud peacekeeping tradition).

Canadians should applaud the government's high tax subsidy rate to businesses for research and development, which drives innovation; but direct government support for R&D is low, and too much of what there is, is focused on defence.

Overall, Canada ranked 11th out of 27 countries this year, with a score just above the global average.

CIDA's move into the newly titled Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development is both a risk and an opportunity. The risk is that development becomes a secondary goal in a department with bigger fish to fry. The opportunity is that by putting development at the heart of a more powerful department with a broader remit for foreign and trade policy, Canada will now be able to promote development-friendly policies across the wide range of issues which most affect poor countries. It is not CIDA but Canada as a nation that needs to do more.

Owen Barder is senior fellow and director for Europe at the Centre for Global Development, in London. He tweets @owenbarder

Lucas Robinson is a former senior advisor with CIDA and a development consultant. He lives in Ethiopia and teaches at Addis Ababa University. He tweets @Lucas381