

Charlotte Biswas  
Deputy Director Civil Society and Civic Space  
Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office

5<sup>th</sup> May 2021

Dear Charlotte,

**Response from Andrew Betts (Director, Advantage Africa)  
and Peter Ogik (Director, Source of the Nile Union of Persons with Albinism) to the  
withdrawal of Community Partnership grant 3K7N-BP9N-EP of £249,995 over three years**

I hope you are well. Thank you for your letter received on 28<sup>th</sup> April and for the online briefing on 30<sup>th</sup> April. We really appreciate your willingness to hear the response of charities affected by these cuts and communicate them to Ministers and decision-makers within FCDO.

**1. Impact of withdrawing Advantage Africa's grant**

**1.1** We are absolutely devastated by the UK Government's decision to withdraw Advantage Africa's Community Partnership Grant at such a late stage in the set-up process. The direct impact of this withdrawal means that:

- 1,000 people with albinism will be at increased risk of life-threatening skin cancer as preventative services including education campaigns, skin clinics, cryotherapy and access to sunscreen are compromised.

(Peter): Yesterday morning, a young man called Daniel died of the skin cancer that our project aimed to prevent and which causes people with albinism in Africa to have a life expectancy of just 30 years. The aggressive tumour had destroyed half of his face and he was bed bound, isolated and fearful (photos available on request). Before he died, I spent time with him, sang to and prayed with him, ensured that his wounds were dressed, he had food and that he experienced the respect, care and love that he had been denied throughout his life because of his condition.

Our work, and this project, aims to create a skin cancer-free generation of people with albinism in Uganda. However, we're afraid, and it breaks our hearts, that the withdrawal of this grant means there will be many more people like Daniel facing painful, avoidable and early deaths. Furthermore:

- 150 visually impaired children will not have access to spectacles and other vision aids to support their education.
- 1,500 people in 300 chronically poor families affected by albinism will not have the opportunity to earn an income to meet their basic needs.
- Training for 560 people including teachers, health workers, midwives, police and legal professionals will not take place and the misunderstanding and discrimination of people with albinism within their professions will continue.
- Public awareness-raising and campaigning on albinism will be much reduced. The persecution, exclusion and stigma experienced by people with albinism will remain unchallenged and current discriminatory laws and practices unchanged.
- There will be no replicable model to promote the rights and well-being of PWA across Uganda resulting from the evaluation of the project.

*Please will you make Ministers aware of the specific impact of the withdrawal of Advantage Africa's grant will have, alongside that of other charities affected?*

**1.2** The withdrawal of our grant has been met in Uganda with utter disbelief and dismay and has exacerbated the exclusion felt by people with albinism that the project was intended to overcome. One of our team reacted by saying simply 'You [FCDO] have made us liars to our people' and 'How does this fit with the commitments made at the disability summit?' Another said 'This is so disappointing. This project was going to change a lot of people's lives' and pointed out that the title of our project is 'Leaving No Person with Albinism Behind in Uganda' - and that people with albinism have indeed been left behind by the decision.

*Please will you inform Ministers of the immense damage done to the work of Advantage Africa and many other small charities through the removal of SCCF and Community Partnership grants around the world? We would be grateful if you would highlight the reputational damage and loss of trust in UK Aid that we and other grantees are now having to repair.*

**1.3** Advantage Africa and the Source of the Nile Union of Persons with Albinism (SNUPA) have spent almost three years developing this project to promote the health and self-reliance of this neglected group of people firmly within 'the bottom billion'. We first submitted our concept note to UK Aid Direct (UKAD) in June 2018.

*Could you please explain why these grants have been cut across the board and that there has been no apparent strategy (for example as regards reaching the bottom billion or people affected by disability) applied in cancelling them?*

**1.4** We have invested heavily in the application, due diligence and grant set up processes, sometimes working through the night to meet the exacting requirements and honouring tight deadlines specified by UKAD. Our analysis (available on request) shows we have spent at least 822 person hours (110 days, 22 weeks) meeting UK Aid Direct's requirements which involved answering 351 written questions (plus numerous more during three interviews/meetings) and submitting an additional 93 supporting documents and policies. This has taken a significant toll on our physical and mental health but we have persevered with determination, and met all the requirements because of the importance of this project for people with albinism in Uganda and beyond, and the transformational change that the grant would make.

*We appreciate that Ministers making top-level decisions may be distanced from the damaging impact of them on the ground, as well as the detailed processes of their departments. Therefore, please would you communicate to them the rigorous, exacting processes involved in applying for a grant from FCDO to inform their understanding, communications and future decision-making?*

*Will you review whether the application, due diligence and set-up processes outlined above are appropriate to the size of grants awarded, especially to small charities?*

On announcing the DFID FCO merger to Parliament, the Prime Minister said that 'For too long frankly UK overseas aid has been treated as some giant cashpoint in the sky'.

*Using the data above should you find it helpful, will you please do all you can to redress this erroneous belief among any who hold it within FCDO or the wider government?*

**1.5** We understand that making any application for funding comes with a degree of risk that the time involved may be wasted but the cost to our organisation and its life-changing work has been immense. The cost is particularly painful among small charities like ours run with a small number of staff who take on a whole variety of roles.

The extraordinary amount of time spent on our application and set-up process, based on positive feedback and alignment with the (then) DFID strategy which has now apparently been abandoned, could have been used on fundraising towards this work from other sources and we currently have very little secure funding for this vital project. We are awaiting the outcome of another time-consuming grant application which uses the leverage of the UKAD grant (which we were informed was secure) to further our albinism work in Uganda and beyond; this application is now in jeopardy.

While UK tax payers' money has been invested in comprehensive due diligence and grant set-up for our project, not a single penny has helped a person with albinism in Uganda. Quite the reverse in fact - we estimate the (financial) opportunity cost of our application to UK Aid Direct to be approximately £40k per year. This means, in addition to the reputational damage that now needs to be repaired, we are also in a far worse financial position than if we had never applied for a grant.

*Please will you make Ministers aware of the actual harm done to Advantage Africa and other charities by withdrawing our grant offer? We would be grateful if you would particularly highlight the damage done to small charities and the calls for government support being made by the SIDCN's Small but Mighty campaign <https://smallbutmighty.co.uk/>*

## **2. Comment on the aid cut**

**2.1** We're very aware that the UK has retained a strong, albeit no longer world-leading, aid budget. We also know that the impact of the cut from 0.7% to 0.5% of GNI will be catastrophic for many people around the world; estimates suggest that one million girls won't receive an education, 7 million women will not have access to family planning services, 4m will not access safe water and 100,000 deaths will result from the lack of vaccinations.

Advantage Africa is one of many international development charities affected by the aid cut and have been in contact with others about the impact of their withdrawn grants, which in some cases threatens the very future of their organisations. We have been following the updates on what the cut means for water and sanitation (-80%), reproductive health (-85%), girls education (at least -25%, despite being a government priority).

We believe that failing to support vulnerable communities and countries as much as possible during a pandemic, which can only be addressed effectively at a global level, is potentially short-sighted, and runs the risk of extending the duration of the threat posed by COVID-19 to the UK and the rest of the world.

Advantage Africa's project included a component to enable people with albinism to start small enterprises and farming activities to meet the basic needs of their families for education, healthcare and food. As far as we are aware, it was the first such income-generating project for this group of marginalised people to be funded by a government donor worldwide; we believe that many of the projects cut also have components of self-reliance, food production and nutrition.

*Despite the above, during Dominic Raab's session with the IDC that followed his recent statement on the cuts, he said that 'No-one is going hungry because we're not writing the cheques'. Please would you inform him that they are, and that they are also going without safe water, healthcare and education?*

**2.2** The rationale given for the cut to 0.5% of GNI in aid spending is that the government has had to reduce aid expenditure from 0.7% to 0.5% of the UK's GNI because of the impact of COVID-19 on the economy and the debt accrued during the last year. This ignores the fact that 0.7% was a promise to the electorate and the world's poorest people and that the aid budget is purposefully based on a percentage of GNI and therefore shrinks with the economy. The amount of the cut, at £4bn, is just 1% of the national debt arising from COVID-19 - and comparable with the government's recent increase on military spending.

The cut also flies in the face of overwhelming legal opinion that it contravenes the International Development Act 2015.

Our supporters have already started writing to their MPs to make the point that the UK is apparently abandoning the world's poorest people, at a time when their suffering is greater than ever before because of the pandemic. They are urging the government to rethink the cut to 0.5% of GNI to ensure 'that the UK is a global force for good'. One said 'This decision not only breaks promises made to some of the most marginalised people in the world, it damages the UK's reputation as a leader in international development and as a partner that can be trusted long-term in global affairs.'

*Please will you communicate to Ministers that while we understand the rationale of reducing aid spending in line with falling GNI, we and our supporters do not support the additional cut for the above reasons and request that it be reversed?*

*Furthermore, will you do all that you can to prompt the UK government to reflect on its promises made at 2018's Global Disability Summit, in its Disability Inclusion Strategy, and indeed to fulfilling the Sustainable Development Goals (which went unmentioned in Dominic Raab's budget statement), and realign its strategy to genuinely remain 'prioritised on the bottom billion'?*

**2.3** We are grateful for your understanding for the unanimous request among charities that if the above change to spending does not happen in the short term, existing grants be restored as soon as possible to ensure their planned impact can be achieved and the wastage of transactional costs in preparing and assessing them be minimised.

*If the aid cut is not reversed in the current financial year, will you work during the autumn review to persuade Ministers to prioritise the restoration of these grants in the 2022/23 financial year?*

Finally, we would be most grateful if you would pass on a direct plea from SNUPA's team members to Dominic Raab and FCDO: 'People with albinism in Uganda have no support. SNUPA alone is giving support to help people practically and to change attitudes among service providers. This project will help us walk with our heads up. We wish you would reconsider, please!'

With our grateful thanks for your consideration,

Yours sincerely,



Peter Ogik  
Director, SNUPA



Andrew Betts  
Director, Advantage Africa

cc: Esther Kyozira; Chief Executive Officer, National Union of Disabled Persons of Uganda (NUDIPU)  
Rt. Hon. Rebecca Kadaga; MP, Speaker of the Parliament of Uganda  
Hon. Hellen Grace Asamo; MP, Eastern Region's Member of Parliament for People with Disabilities  
Ikponwosa Ero; Independent Expert on the Enjoyment of Human Rights by Persons with Albinism (UN OHCHR)  
Karen Stephenson, Liz Wambugu, Maria Zuurmond; Mannion Daniels  
Abi Cleeve; CEO Ultrasun UK (a partner in the approved project)  
Mafalda Soto; Executive Director, Beyond Suncare (a partner in the approved project)  
Ben Everitt; Milton Keynes North MP

This is an open letter that has been made available on our website and shared with our supporters and associates.

