

International Development Committee

Oral evidence: Humanitarian crises monitoring: coronavirus in developing countries: secondary impacts, HC 292

Tuesday 24 November 2020

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Members present: Sarah Champion (Chair); Mr Richard Bacon; Brendan Clarke-Smith; Mrs Pauline Latham; Dr Dan Poulter; Mr Virendra Sharma.

Questions 302 - 350

Witnesses

I: Gwen Hines, Executive Director of Global Programmes, Save the Children; Jennifer Miquel, Head of United Nations Population Fund's Regional Syria Response Hub, United Nations Population Fund Jordan; Lee Webster, Co-Chair, Gender and Development Network, and Deputy Director of International Development Policy and Practice, ActionAid UK.

II: Wendy Morton MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State (Minister for European Neighbourhood and the Americas), FCDO; Matthew Wyatt, Head of CHASE, FCDO; Rachel Turner, Director, Economic Development, FCDO; Darren Welch, Director of Policy (Delivery Office), FCDO.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Gwen Hines, Jennifer Miquel and Lee Webster.

Q302 **Chair:** I would like to start this session of the International Development Committee's inquiry into the secondary impacts of Covid-19. This is our third and final witness session. Thank you very much, witnesses, for joining us. I would like you to introduce yourselves and tell us a bit about your role, please. We are joined by Lee Webster, Gwen Hines and Jennifer Miquel.

Lee Webster: It is a pleasure to meet you all. I am Lee Webster and I am the co-chair of the UK's Gender and Development Network. We are a large UK network of NGOs and experts working with international partners to bring gender equality to the heart of international development policy. I am also deputy director for international development at ActionAid UK. We are a key delivery partner to the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, and a recipient and deliverer of numerous contracts focusing on women's and girls' rights.

Gwen Hines: I am Gwen Hines. I am head of global programmes at Save the Children UK. Save works as a movement across the world, working in more than 120 countries at the moment on the Covid response. Our underlying theme is that every child should survive—so health and nutrition work—get a quality education and be protected from violence. We are working on the long-term development challenges as well as the emergency response needed on Covid and ongoing challenges like Yemen. We are also a delivery partner for the UK Government.

Jennifer Miquel: My name is Jennifer Miquel and I am the head of UNFPA's Regional Syria Response Hub based in Amman, Jordan. UNFPA is the United Nations sexual and reproductive health agency. We have been partnering with the FCDO in Syria since 2013, and we are currently the largest protection partner of the FCDO in Syria. We have a multiannual grant partnership with the FCDO of £21 million. With some top-ups that we receive, it totals £30 million. This is to provide gender-based violence prevention and response services, sexual and reproductive health services and to co-ordinate the whole gender-based violence response in Syria.

Chair: Thank you for making the time, all of you.

Q303 **Mrs Latham:** Gwen, has there been a gendered impact from Covid-19 and the pandemic countermeasures on the groups you work with?

Gwen Hines: Yes, there clearly has in many ways. We did a survey of children and families across the world. We had about 25,000 respondents. That was one of the questions we asked to unpack what was really going on. That included the UK, but it was around the world.

Violence in the home has gone up a lot. When children are out of school and girls are at home, we know they are more at risk of violence. That



has clearly gone up. We have also seen what happens anyway but on a much larger scale: poverty and hardship always affect women and girls. Again, the impact of poverty and hardship has gone up because of the secondary effects of the crisis.

We have done a lot of tracking, because we work a lot in healthcare centres around the world with community health workers. We work with about 500,000 community health workers around the world. We have used them to track what is happening. We know, for example, that people are not turning up to antenatal appointments either because they are scared of catching the virus or because the services simply are not there. Antenatal care, key injections for children and postnatal care are the kinds of things where we have seen a massive drop-off because of the disruption to services, because of the concerns and because of hunger and deprivation.

Q304 Mrs Latham: Jennifer, what has been the impact of Covid-19, including countermeasures, on the wellbeing of the people you work with, in terms of healthcare, livelihoods and food security?

Jennifer Miquel: UNFPA mainly focuses on women and girls. My answers will focus a lot on humanitarian settings. I will also focus most of my answers on providing examples from Syria. Covid-19 has certainly had a huge impact on women and girls in Syria. Syria is already in conflict and it has a huge economic crisis. On top of that, with Covid-19, similar to what Gwen was saying, we have seen an increase in intimate partner violence, gender-based violence and child marriage, of girls as young as 11 and 12. This is not new to Syria, but the intensity of it is being felt.

In Syria, an estimated 22% of households are headed by women. Often these women are widowed or divorced, with less social protection and legal protection. We can say that they have really felt the negative impact of Covid-19.

Q305 Mrs Latham: Lee, we have heard evidence and we know that there is an increased likelihood of violence against women and girls due to the pandemic. It is happening here as well as overseas. Is this your experience? Why is it the case? What are you doing to address it?

Lee Webster: Yes, that is right. ActionAid and the Gender and Development Network would really concur with that. All over the world, our partners have witnessed and reported huge surges in violence against women and girls and, particularly, intimate partner violence.

Between March and May this year, ActionAid monitored service users and referrals to women's shelters and hotlines in several countries across Europe, Asia, Africa, Latin America and the Middle East, and compared that data to previous years. To pull out a few of the things we found, in Bangladesh, a 10-fold increase was reported in sexual and domestic violence. In Gaza, there was a 700% increase in demand for counselling services. In Brazil, there was a 22% average increase in femicide, which



is the murder of women and girls, across 12 states. Colleagues in ActionAid Nigeria have called the increase in violence an emergency in itself.

The real tragedy is that, as demand has surged, services time and again have had to close down, particularly services that we access in person because of restrictions on movement. Women and girls are, time and again, forced back into, or to remain in, very dangerous situations in the home.

Q306 Mrs Latham: Jennifer mentioned child marriage. What effect have the pandemic and the countermeasures had on the incidence of child marriage?

Lee Webster: There is a real link here between the closure of schools and girls being pulled out of school, which then increases their burden of unpaid care and the work they do within the family to care for younger siblings and relatives, and the increasing risk of both child marriage and FGM.

Gwen Hines: We are all seeing much the same picture. Clearly, child marriages are going up a lot. As Lee said, it is very much linked to keeping girls in school. Where we cannot keep girls in school, we are doing a lot of work with communities and parents to try to keep learning going and keep them engaged in school.

The other issue is whether girls will go back to school once schools reopen. We know that poor children and girls from poor backgrounds are those most likely to drop out. We saw that with Ebola; we are seeing it now. Getting girls back to school, getting them that support and getting cash support to families in the meantime is incredibly important to stop this happening.

Even where girls are not married off, we are seeing rates of child pregnancy and adolescent pregnancy doubling. That is already from quite horrific rates in many of the places where we work.

Jennifer Miquel: I concur with that. UNFPA's programmes in Syria are also seeing an increase in young adolescent pregnancies as a result of child marriage. It is because schools are closing as well. It is very hard to get girls back into school.

Women and adolescent girls are also bearing the brunt of this pressure around Covid. They are the ones who are responsible for the wellbeing of the household. They are socially responsible for that. If someone gets Covid in the household, they are blamed for that because the house was not clean enough and so on. I would emphasise that, while we know that is the case for women, it is also the case for adolescent girls because they are not in school and because of that social norm.

Q307 Dr Poulter: We have heard consistently that supply chain disruptions, lack of transportation and lack of PPE have all affected the response to



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Covid-19 in relation to marginalised and vulnerable groups. What impact has Covid-19 had on your main partner organisations? Which difficulties are they facing in helping you to respond?

Jennifer Miquel: Covid-19 has definitely had an impact on the delivery of sexual and reproductive health services. At the beginning, not having enough PPE or not knowing exactly how to put infection prevention and control measures in place did affect services. In the measures that were imposed by Governments, certainly in Syria, to try to reduce the spread of Covid, gender-based violence and sexual and reproductive health services were not prioritised; they were not seen as an essential part of the health package. In Syria, a lot of these services are provided by NGOs. Government services were open, but the non-governmental organisations that provide those services had to shut.

After some advocacy, they have been reopened and we are seeing more of an uptake, but a lot of the services had to adapt. We now ensure that PPE is available and that infection prevention and control measures are available. We have reduced the numbers of people at service delivery points or added more sessions for services and things like that, so we can still provide the same level of services. A lot of things went online: gender-based violence hotlines, or even sexual and reproductive health and family planning hotlines. I want to concur with my colleague here. We saw not only antenatal care go down, but access to family planning, which obviously has a lot of consequences.

A lot of these things have worked. These measures have been effective, but not for everyone. For example, when you start delivering online services in places like Syria, not necessarily everyone has a phone. Who are the ones who have a phone? Older women have more phones than adolescent girls or young girls. They may not also control the usage of the phone or they may not have a safe space to be able to call and access these services. It is the same for people with disabilities. Older women may feel that they want to self-isolate, so they may not feel safe to go and access other services.

Q308 **Dr Poulter:** I would like to deal with the secondary impacts in a moment. Specifically on the issues of supply chain disruptions, a lack of transportation and a lack of PPE, could we look at those specific aspects first? How have they affected your partner organisations? What are the difficulties there? Could you deal with those before we come on to the secondary impacts in a moment?

Gwen Hines: If you wanted a good example where it has worked, we have been involved in running the isolation treatment centre for people in the Rohingya refugee camp. That is a good example where we have deployed a few international experts to work with Bangladeshi health staff and staff in the camps. That was the WHO, other UN agencies, NGOs like Save the Children and the British Government coming together with, of course, the Government of Bangladesh.



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I can tell you about the logistical challenges of trying to get PPE there, trying to get oxygen set up and trying to get treatment supplies, not just for the international staff going in, but so that they are there longer term and it is a sustainable operation. Credit to the British Government: when I sent my health experts out, they took a British Government plane that was repatriating Brits from Bangladesh. That is one example of the kind of thing you end up doing, but it was incredibly important.

Just getting oxygen into the hospital in a place like that was incredibly important. Even normally, that is a massive challenge, and one of the good things about this crisis, if you can say that, is that it focused people's attention. If you do not have oxygen, never mind ventilators, a lot of these things are not possible. We are seeing a lot of interesting ideas around supply chain, solar oxygen concentrators and all sorts of things, which might have long-term benefits as well. Not to underplay the challenges, which are massive, we have seen some positive innovation as well.

Lee Webster: I can come in more on the secondary impacts, if you want me to kick off there.

Dr Poulter: That is my next question. If you want to start on that, it would be very helpful.

Lee Webster: The evidence shows that key to protecting and advancing women's rights, particularly in these times, are strong, well-organised and well-funded women's rights organisations, particularly working at local level. They are largely set up and run by and for the women and girls in the affected communities. They are often run by groups of marginalised and minoritised women. At the best of times, those organisations are often operating on a shoestring and they find it very difficult to directly access donor funding, including FCDO funding. They are often downstream suppliers to NGOs.

Particularly in times of crisis, it is really, really important that we invest timely, flexible and unrestricted funds, and send core funds as directly as possible to those grassroots organisations to keep the lights on and keep them going. There is a lot of learning from the Ebola crisis in West Africa. We know that rapid engagement and messaging at community level is really vital to stop the spread of disease and limit its impact. The more quickly we can reach those grassroots organisations, the more impact they can have. As I said, even in the best of times that can be difficult and it has continued to be difficult in this period.

In terms of how the FCDO has supported agencies, there was some initial slowness at the beginning of the crisis in March and April. It took a few weeks to negotiate changes to our programmes, but at ActionAid and across the sector programmes have adapted to the new circumstances, pivoted towards Covid response and directed resources, staff and partner time to community work to stop the spread of infection. The FCDO, as a donor, has been largely flexible around that.



In some cases, we have seen increased demands on reporting, which has put a strain on in-country and partner staff. If we can avoid that, especially when everybody is busy, it keeps things moving quickly. On the whole, they have been a flexible and supportive donor.

Q309 Dr Poulter: Picking up from what Lee was just saying, what measures have you taken to mitigate the secondary impacts of Covid-19 on your programmes and the people you work with? How do you rate the effectiveness of your own response to the crisis since the outbreak? Are there any lessons to learn from that response or more generally from the response to the outbreak?

Gwen Hines: There are lots and lots of lessons. We have done a real-time review, but we will continue doing that, because of course Covid has not finished. In many countries, including the UK but also elsewhere, it is still very live. Places like India still have massive cases. The secondary impacts will go on for months if not years.

What really worked well were the strong community links. When you think about things like supply chains, disruption and the violence that can happen in communities and families, this has really vindicated the importance of approaches grounded in communities, working with local families and local communities who can tell you what is going on. They know best what happens. Getting supplies, cash and support down to that level very quickly is incredibly important. We started on that from the beginning. We are very engaged on it. We took it as our main focus. For all of us, that is the last mile. We have seen in the UK that community-based approaches are working the best, and that applies even more in remote areas.

If you think about education, we run the girls' education challenge fund, which is funded by the British Government in three countries: Congo, Afghanistan and Mozambique. That is an example where we had to adapt incredibly quickly. We have set ourselves the target of making sure that everybody we were supporting to be in school before the pandemic worldwide, not just with UK funding, is back in school after it. That is a challenge of 150 million kids, so it is not small. Innovation and adaptation has had to happen.

As others have said, it is not the digital approach you see in the UK. Where that works, it is fantastic, but in many cases this is using smartphones and radios. In many countries, we had packs that we took literally door to door with local partners so that girls had those packs for themselves. In Congo, we took self-study packs to girls and their families. We worked to motivate the community and the local teachers. I was so impressed with how well people did and how well the teams did. Despite everything, despite Covid and despite the conflict, in the areas we work in, 85% of the girls still sat the exams and 91% of them passed, which is incredible. I have teenage boys who have been out of school; I know that learning has dropped off. To do that in the middle of DRC in the middle of this crisis is amazing.



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We have seen a very similar picture in Afghanistan, where, again, radio did not work. We did some discussions with partners and others around the world about the best way to do this. There, direct phone calls from teachers to students were what made the difference. They are still using their textbooks and their normal learning material, but that check-in with teachers was incredibly important.

As a final example, we are also thinking about the wellbeing of the teachers. For them, it is incredibly stressful as well. Many of them worried about whether they would be paid. Many of them wanted to help their kids. We really ramped up the wellbeing support to teachers, with mental health support but also things like training on Covid and what to look for. I can give you many examples. We did quizzes before and afterwards. You would have a cohort of teachers where 15% of them understood Covid before the training; at the end of the training, it was 85%. Those are really simple things that we and many other partners have been ramping up, working at that local level.

Q310 Dr Poulter: Presumably some of those things you have described would be just as effective in a non-pandemic world, when hopefully we get to that.

Gwen Hines: They are. As others have said, we all learned lessons from Ebola. Interactive radio came through in the heart of the Ebola crisis as something that was very powerful.

I led the British Government aid programme in Malawi for three years, and I know just how many kids were not in school before the crisis. We found that radio programmes, working with families, have massively stepped up family recognition of the importance of education and access to people who would not have otherwise been able to go to school. Beyond the pandemic, how do we take that to scale so that those who are waiting for classrooms and teachers to be provided over time can still access good learning in the meantime? It is the use of appropriate technology and local solutions that makes the difference.

Q311 Dr Poulter: That is great. Jennifer, what measures have you taken to mitigate the secondary impacts of Covid-19? How effective have they been and what lessons can be drawn for the future?

Jennifer Miquel: I touched on this before, but we have been able to be very effective in the adaptation. It is also thanks to the flexibility of the FCDO and its support to us. We have managed to adapt services. We have learned that we can keep everything open. While GBV and sexual and reproductive health services were deprioritised and closed at the beginning, we have found ways to keep them open, face to face, with smaller groups or online.

We need to carry on the flexibility of these approaches in the non-Covid world, hopefully soon. It has provided an opportunity for us to think outside the box. We have been able to capture a lot of the best practices.



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We have apps for referral pathways and we are integrating services more. Women and girls safe spaces are the main entry point for our specialised violence against women services, but you can also start providing sexual and reproductive health services there. When facilities are overrun with Covid, these are areas where it can be a little safer to do that.

Dr Poulter: That is very helpful.

Lee Webster: The role of NGOs and their long-term rootedness in communities are really what have facilitated this. ActionAid has worked in the same communities over a long period with the same partner organisations. When a crisis hits, we can have those conversations with partners we are already working with.

Gwen spoke about the shift from group work and safe space work with girls and woman to the innovative use of radio, mobile phones and door-to-door socially distanced one-on-one support, particularly to girls out of school and women at risk of violence. It is really key to ensure those services continue to be delivered and that women and girls can access them when they need them.

Q312 **Mr Sharma:** Good afternoon. UK NGOs have repeatedly told us that going through UN agencies when responding to crises can result in longer response times and slower disbursement of funds. Is that your experience in this pandemic and would more direct funding in front-line organisations improve the situation?

Lee Webster: It is always a mix. There is always space for multilateral action, but, essentially, the women and girls on the front line who set up and run organisations for the betterment of women's and girls' lives, and to protect and advance the rights of women in the communities they serve, are the ones who suffer when funds do not directly reach them. For instance, we know that they are often tied in to what donors want to fund, rather than their own agenda and vision for a better world or a better community for women and girls. We know they find it incredibly difficult to access funding, because of the requirements from large international donors, such as FCDO or multilateral organisations.

There is lots of good practice that can be put in place, such as applications at any time of the year or applications in any language, reducing the onerous burden of creating or crafting a bid in a particular way to speak a donor language, flipping that on its head and putting women and girls in the driving seat. Believe me: across Africa, Asia, Latin America, the global south, there are incredible and inspiring movements of women and girls. They have the vision; they have the mission; they have the answers. Yet they are operating largely on a shoestring.

Research from the Association for Women's Rights in Development has shown time and again that those organisations are largely run by very put-upon volunteers. The median is still under \$20,000 a year. Compare



that with some of the larger organisations. They still achieve so much. They protect women and girls, they run services and they support women and girls to be the leaders they are. Anything we can do to shorten that gap between the donor funds and aid flows, and the priorities and agendas of women's rights organisations in the global south, is going to have a really wide-reaching impact on women's rights.

Gwen Hines: It has slowed things down. If you think about the sheer needs of this crisis, the UN's own appeal is very underfunded. The amount of funding that has gone to NGOs and civil society, both international and local, is really not enough. In a world where everything is underfunded, I would argue—I spent a long time at DFID working on value for money—that you could have got it quicker and with better value for money by giving it closer to the crisis.

Credit to the Government: they put in a lot of money through various things like the Start Network, but there could have been a lot more and it could have sped things up. If you think about the different layers that apply, when it goes from the UK Government to the UN, the UN does not deliver in many cases. I am not talking about UNFPA here. Much of the work that happens is then subcontracted to NGOs and to local partners. You could take out that middleman.

Often the argument is that NGOs cannot work at scale. We have very successful consortia of NGOs in places like Somalia and Yemen. They provide cash transfers to the poorest households and they also integrate nutrition. Scaling that up would have been an incredibly effective way to operate. We nearly saw a cut in the Yemen programme. We did not, but that is exactly the kind of no-regrets response you need, to deal with the Covid crisis and the secondary impacts. Poverty and nutrition is an ongoing crisis, and cash transfers are a very effective way to deal with that.

Jennifer Miquel: Obviously, UNFPA is a United Nations agency, but let me add my voice in support of women's organisations and women-led local organisations. This is something the UNFPA is very serious about. The grand bargain has a target of 25% of funding going to localisation. UNFPA is at 38%. We take the issue of localisation and women-led local organisations very seriously. We believe they should be driving the response.

Q313 **Chair:** Gwen, I have a quick question based on your previous role. Would DFID be looking at value for money of the delivery agent? I am thinking about the value you get for your pound from a small NGO on the ground versus one of the bigger multilaterals.

Gwen Hines: Of course, and you always need a portfolio of different partners. There is huge space for multilaterals. I am a big fan of multilateral development banks, because they can leverage every pound of grant money about seven times to turn it into long-term concessional loans, to do things like infrastructure or massive health-system reform.



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At the same time, as others have said, you have local women-led groups on the ground that just need a bit of money now. In some ways, that is really tough for DFID to do, because it is small, complicated and high-risk. For all of us, this commitment to localisation is incredibly important, but not enough progress has been made because the due diligence requirements that get passed on to us, never mind a small local partner, are massive.

It took more than 1,000 hours for one of my staff to fill in the DFID due diligence requirements. Imagine what that takes for a local partner. As I say, things like the Start Network, with Dutch Government funding, are piloting this work with smaller organisations, taking a little bit of money and showing that the risks are not necessarily that much bigger, but it is about being smart in how we do it.

For example, you do not say to them, "You have to have a fully written-out and published policy on something"; you test how good the systems are on the ground. We are looking very hard, and I know others are, at how we can be a partner that uses our position and our networks to fast-track and put local communities and local organisations at the heart of this. That is a big part of the future way of working

Q314 **Mr Bacon:** I have found this a fascinating discussion. I wanted to ask Jennifer Miquel about the UN specifically, but, first, I wanted to say that this is not a new problem.

I remember Suma Chakrabarti, who was Permanent Secretary of DFID for five years, before he went to the EBRD, and has very recently become the chair of the board of trustees for the Overseas Development Institute, acknowledging quite openly to the Public Accounts Committee, when I was on it years ago, that the DFID aid spend that went multilaterally through the European Union, which comprised 55% of the total spend, was without question less effectively spent and less good value for money than the money DFID spent itself, but that was just the way the rules were written and there was not really a lot that could be done about it.

It sounds like this tension between direct and indirect is as strong as it ever was. We had some witnesses a few months ago. When I was asking about this problem, they recommended me to read Dan Honig's book *Navigation by Judgment*, which talks about the fact that tight controls and narrow focus on reaching pre-set targets can prevent front-line workers from using their skills and creativity to solve problems on the ground. That is exactly what the witnesses have been talking about.

Is the answer to have a relatively light-touch regime combined with very eagle-eyed spot checking, including unexpected spot checking? I would invite Gwen to answer that question.

Gwen Hines: You are taking me back to my previous role. I would underline that a lot of multilateral spending is very good value for money. I led the multilateral development review in my last job at DFID. I can tell you the ranking we did and all the assessments we did. I do not want



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this to turn into UN-bashing. A lot of the UN spend is incredibly important.

What I did not realise enough, until I swapped over to implementation through the charity sector, was that you need to follow the money properly. Very few UN agencies—I am not talking about UNFPA here—or private sector organisations implement directly. Once it has been given by the UK Government to the multilateral, a lot of it is subcontracted to organisations like Save the Children. There are real questions about the value of that extra layer in the process and how much is lost.

It is very hard to compare. Often, crude measures are things like the back office cost and the percentages of indirect cost recovery. When you break that down, the joys of British Government accounting make that quite complicated. Once something has to go to the UN, it charges DFID a back office cost. Once that is charged to me, it becomes a direct programme cost and does not look like a back office cost, but the same costs and the same requirements flow right down the value chain to the community.

It is the same with the private sector. I am sometimes told that private sector agencies are better value for money and more competitive than charities, but those same private sector organisations are subcontracting to us, so they cannot possibly be cheaper, given the way the accounting is done.

Q315 Mr Bacon: You see that problem in many different domains. In fact, in domestic programmes as well, it is by no means always the case that the private sector programmes turn out to be better value for money. Quite often, it is the reverse. I do not want to do UN-bashing either. The United Nations is an extraordinary organisation that does an amazing job under more or less impossible conditions most of the time. The question I would like to ask Jennifer Miquel is not a UN-bashing question, but can you set out, as best you can, what you think the benefits are of channelling money through UN agencies, particularly through UNFPA in particular?

Jennifer Miquel: Let me focus on Syria. Syria is one of the most scrutinised responses globally, and rightly so. I have already mentioned how UNFPA takes localisation very seriously. The majority of our partners are local partners; they are local Syrian organisations. Where we come in is in providing that technical support, the capacity building, the monitoring and the institutional building in some areas. Areas like gender-based violence tend to be a bit sensitive, taboo or difficult to work in. In some places, certainly in some areas in Syria, a lot of organisations did not have the capacity to work on GBV.

This is where we came in, to support those local organisations. We also provide the extra layer of monitoring. The FCDO is one of our big partners. We have gone a little bit above and beyond in our monitoring, to reassure the FCDO, to support the organisations and to ensure we are reaching all the people we need to.



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For example, the FCDO does monitor us through third parties and so on, so there is always that extra level. There is a real partnership between the FCDO, the UNFPA and the local organisations. For us, the idea is to work directly with local organisations is about building capacity and sustainability. Hopefully we will not be there one day, and hopefully it is the local organisations that will lead the response.

In sexual and reproductive health and GBV, we are the UN agency that has been mandated to lead on these issues. It is not just our country office that has the expertise or our operations that have the expertise. The whole machinery of the UN is there, so we can not just respond, but use the information we have to push these issues at all levels.

Q316 **Mr Bacon:** What do those who are responsible for monitoring the UN's performance in this area bear in mind when assessing issues like the disbursement of funds and response times in general?

Jennifer Miquel: I am not sure I understand your question.

Q317 **Mr Bacon:** Those who are responsible for assessing the UN's performance in this area should presumably bear certain things in mind. I am asking which things they should be looking at and bearing in mind, particularly in relation to the disbursement of funds and in relation to response times, which are both areas where the UN has been criticised.

Jennifer Miquel: This is where they can look at us. I will not speak on behalf of all UN agencies, but let me just focus on UNFPA. This is something that we have looked at very seriously around disbursement, flexibility and being a more agile humanitarian agency. We are largely a development agency, but our humanitarian portfolio is growing, and it is about 30% of our overall budget now.

We are really trying to be a much more agile humanitarian agency that responds a lot more quickly. We are looking at our internal systems. The FCDO does look at our systems, and we do go through the due diligence processes. We have been evaluated by the FCDO as having one of the best monitoring systems in the world. I welcome the scrutiny, because it also holds us more accountable to the people we serve. It makes us try to be as good as we can be.

Q318 **Brendan Clarke-Smith:** Good afternoon, everybody. The first question is about donors' response. If you could ask the FCDO or the UK Government for one change or further improvement to the approach to the secondary impacts of Covid-19 on women and children, what would it be?

Lee Webster: Protect the 0.7% aid commitment. That feels quite pertinent this week. Within that, it is really imperative that we acknowledge, understand and maintain the UK's global leadership on women's rights. This Government are a global leader, and they are well known, particularly on their prevention of violence against women



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programmes, for instance, and their role on the global stage in global equality.

That funding really needs to be protected. We need to be moving forwards and not backwards or standing still on gender equality. More and more, we need to be getting funding right down to grassroots women-led local organisations and fulfilling our commitments to localisation.

Gwen Hines: I definitely agree with that. The one issue I am not hearing enough about that should get more attention is around nutrition, cash transfers and social protection-type support. There is an assumption in some quarters that the impact depends on the number of cases. We have not seen the kinds of numbers of cases that we expected in many countries, but the poverty impact, the nutrition and the numbers of people falling into hardship are horrendous. That requires a long-term approach.

With credit to the Government for the new envoy on famine and the £190 million that has been committed, the UK Government's global commitments on nutrition now expire because of the Global Nutrition for Growth Summit. I am really hoping to see a strong leading commitment from the Government as chair of the G7, in a way that recognises that these are win-wins for things like climate resilience as well. This is long-term flexible funding that gets down to those communities. Whether it is the shock today of Covid, or a drought or an earthquake, it also enables them to build their own livelihoods and jobs in the future.

Jennifer Miquel: My points are very similar to Lee's. The UK FCDO has been a great partner in advocating for the rights of women and girls in humanitarian settings. That has made a difference not just financially but on visibility. It encouraged other member states and donors to also work on this. In leading the call to action on gender-based violence and so forth, years ago, in 2013, it has made a difference globally. We would like to see the UK remain one of the main actors on this.

I would also advocate for the funding. Practically, for UNFPA, we might see a drop of 80% to our core headquarter-level funding. This is the core funding that allows us to be more flexible and respond more quickly to emergencies. Without funding, we are not able to respond, adapt and meet the needs.

Q319 **Chair:** Jennifer, I know the UNFPA has said there is not enough money to deal with the increase of gender-based violence as a consequence of Covid-19. Could you give us any examples of where the gaps are being felt particularly acutely and, if you have it, an idea of the funding that would be needed to bridge that gap?

Jennifer Miquel: That is correct. We have estimated that globally there could be 30 million more cases of violence against women and girls



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because of Covid. We need the funding to meet very specific needs and to adapt the programmes.

Q320 **Chair:** Lee or Gwen, I wonder whether you can tell us a bit about what is not being done because the money is not there.

Lee Webster: As Jennifer was saying, yes, we can adapt existing programmes. Yes, NGOs and delivery partners around the world have been doing that to mitigate the impact of Covid, to stop the spread and to support women and girls who are disproportionately affected, but still too small a portion of the overseas aid budget is focused on gender equality and women rights, and preventing and responding to violence.

If we want to have a transformative effect on the lives of women and girls, it is about upping that focus. It is about going back to the excellent principles of the strategic vision on gender equality, which was led by a former DFID gender equality team back in 2018. It was a really consultative process. It built on years of knowledge and experience in the sector and in women's rights organisations in the south. It recognised the role of women's rights organisations and local partners in delivering change. If, going forward, we can ensure that that remains at the heart of the Government's delivery on women's and girls' rights and gender equality, it will stand us in good stead.

Gwen Hines: The key thing is that we need integrated approaches. We cannot deal with any one of these issues on its own. If you think about something like violence in the home or children and girls being married in their teenage years, that is a product of poverty, a lack of opportunities and all sorts of other stresses and strains that go on.

One thing we have seen in the UK Government in the last couple of years is more siloed aid. We need to get away from that and have integrated approaches, recognising that we all work in partnership. We all talk now as our own agencies, but in reality, on the ground, we work very closely together.

I would like to see the British Government encourage that partnership but also speak up on the issues. As G7 chair in 2021, speaking up on the rights of women is incredibly important. The UK can play a real leadership role there. Credit to UNFPA: it tackles issues like unsafe abortion and violence against women and children in countries where that is incredibly difficult. It desperately needs the British Government's backing, because the UK has been the strongest partner for UNFPA for a long time.

Chair: We have the Minister in front of us after the session with you. I completely agree that a holistic approach is needed to change the culture to make the real difference, so that when we are investing in schemes they have a lasting impact rather than being a temporary fix.

Thank you very much. It is really good of you to come and share your knowledge and experience. We are looking to get our report out in about a month's time. We may come back to you for some very quick

clarifications or some more information, but thank you for being so open and forthcoming in the information you have given us today. Thank you very much.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Wendy Morton MP, Matthew Wyatt, Rachel Turner and Darren Welch.

Q321 **Chair:** I would like to turn to the second panel. We are very grateful to have the Minister, Wendy Morton, in front of us. I know you have had a very busy day today, Minister, coming from the Chamber and FCDO questions to our session. We are really grateful that you made the time, but we are very honoured to have you here, because you are a former and much loved member of this Committee. I know you are very committed to development. Thank you for making the time for us.

We have a commitment towards the global distribution of the Covid vaccine, something that we should all be very proud of. I wonder whether you can just update us on how that distribution is going.

Wendy Morton: I know there are still some members of the International Development Committee who were on the Committee when I was there. I have fond memories of being a member of this particular Select Committee. It is a bit different sitting here in this role.

Before I touch on your question, I have some of my officials here with me, if you need to draw upon their knowledge as well. I have Rachel Turner, Matthew Wyatt and Darren Welch. They are with me today. I will come to your point about vaccines and equitable access, but I wondered whether I could first take this opportunity to say a few words.

Thank you for inviting me to give evidence as part of your inquiry today. We all realise and appreciate that Covid-19 is a crisis of almost unprecedented complexity and scale. It knows no borders; it knows no barriers; and yet it is changing the lives of everyone around the world in ways that we never ever imagined possible. We know all too well that the most vulnerable people, those already facing humanitarian emergencies or already marginalised, which includes women and girls, will be hit the hardest by this.

I wanted to reassure you that the FCDO continues to be at the forefront of the international response. We have now committed up to £1.3 billion of new ODA to tackle the health, humanitarian and socioeconomic impacts of Covid-19. This is in addition to the £119 million that we have geared towards famine prevention and alleviating extreme hunger for over 6 million people. Over 300 bilateral programmes are pivoting to tackle the impacts of Covid on the ground. We are working very hard to engage with the multilateral development banks and their shareholders to support over \$200 billion of financing commitments.



If I move on to think about vaccines, a really good example of where we have shown success and real leadership is in Gavi. The Global Vaccine Summit that we hosted brought together the development and the diplomacy expertise that we have in the Department. The summit really did exceed its target to raise £8.8 billion.

Turning to your question, which was based on equitable access to a vaccine, we all know that no one is safe until everyone is safe. That is a line that we have heard from the very beginning—and how true it is. The Prime Minister made very clear in his speech at UNGA that equitable access is an integral part of our approach to vaccine development and distribution, and that world leaders have a moral duty to support these efforts.

We are working with our international partners. We have helped design the international structure that is supporting the provision of vaccines to low and middle-income countries, the COVAX advance market commitment or AMC. We are the biggest bilateral donor, committing up to £548 million to help provide Covid-19 vaccines for up to 92 developing countries.

We are therefore contributing to the supply of 1 billion doses of vaccine in developing countries in 2021, which will mean the vaccination of up to 500 million people. Obviously, it is subject to the vaccines securing the relevant and very stringent regulatory approvals, but that is the work we are doing to support the access to vaccines.

You touched on the G7 and the UK's international role in your opening comments. Through our international engagement in forms such as the G7 and G20, and the role we can play in global governance structures such as Gavi, CEPI and the World Bank, we have promoted a multilateral approach to the research, development, scaling-up of manufacturing, which is also really important, procurement and distribution of the vaccines.

FCDO is championing equitable vaccine distribution, promoting the needs of developing countries and very vulnerable communities, and ensuring that international organisations can effectively co-ordinate that distribution downstream and in-country.

Q322 Mr Bacon: Wendy, welcome to the Committee. It is a pleasure to have you here. May I first place on record my gratitude to you personally for everything you did as a Minister a few months ago when lockdown started? I had constituents stuck on a cruise ship many thousands of miles away. I attest that your work and service—you were on the end of a phone whenever required—were above and beyond, and I am enormously grateful to you for that. Thank you very much. I just wanted to place that on record.

Wendy, your submission highlights a £1.4 billion pledge. This is to the Global Fund. I should declare an interest that I went on a visit to Rwanda



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funded by the Global Fund mainly to look at tuberculosis. Part of your £1.4 billion pledge is for mitigating impacts not just on HIV and malaria but on tuberculosis. Can you describe the mitigations that are being implemented? How much of the total of that £1.4 billion has been allocated to them?

Wendy Morton: I may ask Darren Welch, one of my officials, to help us on that with more of the detail, Richard, but you are right to flag the work the Global Fund does on tackling TB and HIV. If you are happy, I am going to ask Darren to come in on this one with more of the detail.

Darren Welch: I will just make a few remarks. The commitment we have given to the Global Fund to enable it to continue, where it can, providing those services has been critical throughout this period. They have managed to repurpose quite a bit. Where they have not been able to run normal services, they have been able to pivot towards Covid. They have made up to \$500 million available to countries through the funding they give for specific Covid activities. They have been really flexible in the technical assistance and the funding they can provide.

TB is obviously another respiratory infectious disease, so some of the infrastructure you would use for that has been useful in the Covid response as well. In other parts of their mandate, around malaria, for example, they have changed quite radically the way they provide services. Rather than have everybody come and collect bed nets, for example, at a central point where they might become infected, they have now changed. They are having volunteers go and deliver those bed nets out to individual families. There has been quite a change of their approach, and we are continuing with our strong level of support to them. They have done a fabulous job, actually.

Wendy Morton: It shows the way in which we have been able to re-pivot and work with organisations on the ground to adapt, where we can, to the Covid-19 situation.

Q323 **Mr Bacon:** Are you getting your suppliers to adapt as well? The last answer from Darren reminded me of once visiting a bed net factory in Tanzania, to which DFID was one of the partners contributing funds. Are you making sure the partners on the ground, the manufacturers and the other suppliers, are doing all they can to help with the mitigation?

Wendy Morton: We are certainly working to adapt our programmes down at the supplier level. I am going to ask Darren whether he can give me that level of granular detail. We are certainly adapting our programmes to mitigate the impact, as Darren also showed. Darren, are you able to give any further in-country detail?

Darren Welch: We have worked really closely with all our suppliers. There has been a massive effort to see how they can recast their programmes and change their activities and deliverables to respond to the situation. To give one example, we are supporting Mercy Ships in



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Senegal. When the crisis struck, they had to move their ship away from the port. They were instructed. They could not carry on with what they were doing. We have helped them to switch to providing their services on land instead. That takes a bit of adjustment and a bit of time.

That has freed up some resource that we have been able to then put into the very direct Covid primary response. We have talked to all our partners. A lot of work has had to be rescheduled or done in different ways, but that has enabled us to free up some resource for the very considerable sums we have put into primary response.

Q324 Mr Sharma: Thank you, Minister. You wrote that £30 million, with an addition £50 million commitment, has been provided by the Global Financing Facility for reproductive, maternal, new-born, child and adolescent services in 36 countries. What form would a typical intervention take?

Wendy Morton: That is a really good question. We have provided two tranches of funding for the Global Financing Facility. The first £30 million runs from 2017 to 2021 and the second £50 million has just been approved and will run from 2020 to 2023. The work the Global Financing Facility, or the GFF, is doing is providing general health system support to improve the health of women, children and adolescents across 36 countries. During the Covid-19 pandemic, the GFF has focused on three areas of support: technical and financial assistance for countries to shift to maintain essential services; knowledge and learning to help partners identify the shifts needed and carry out data analysis monitoring; advocacy to drive evidence-based prioritisation.

It is worth highlighting that, at a recent meeting, a number of countries cited the GFF support as critical to helping them prioritise and flex during the pandemic. One example is Uganda. Uganda has approved a community health worker strategy, triggered by the pandemic and the need for a strong community response. Hopefully that gives you an idea of how that fund is working.

Q325 Mr Sharma: FCDO evidence says that the UK's £400 million to the Global Polio Eradication Initiative has enabled countries to respond to Covid-19 through polio-funded surveillance, laboratory and community mobiliser networks. This sounds like a diversion away from polio immunisation. What is really happening?

Wendy Morton: I can assure you that polio funding has not been diverted. It remains dedicated to eradicating the polio virus. Polio workers on the ground have resumed vaccinations. They have combined their efforts to support the growing need to protect communities against the pandemic. As part of their role, polio workers help with Covid-19 testing and the training of health workers on infection prevention and control. They are a group of people who are already working in communities and across communities.



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Q326 Brendan Clarke-Smith: Thank you, Minister. With regard to food security, what is the role of the UK special envoy on famine prevention and humanitarian affairs?

Wendy Morton: This is the new role that was recently created. Nick Dyer is the UK's first special envoy for famine prevention and humanitarian affairs. In practice, this means that he is driving action under the Foreign Secretary's call to action to prevent famine. His role is focused on mobilising funding and political action to unblock humanitarian access, protect civilians and, importantly, help improve data and co-ordination across the various humanitarian responses.

In the first phase of this initiative, our envoy, Nick, is building consensus with implementing partners and donor Governments about the seriousness of the situation, as well as pressing others, for example national donors and the IFIs, international finance institutions, to match the UK's generosity in the face of the deteriorating food security situation. He is also visiting some of the most affected countries to gain that deeper understanding of the situation on the ground, how to best ensure access to those people who really need help and how to improve the co-ordination of responses. I think he is travelling this week, but he recently travelled to South Sudan and to Nigeria.

Q327 Brendan Clarke-Smith: Would you say this new role is the result of new thinking within the merged FCDO? Is this part of a new approach?

Wendy Morton: We have always taken our humanitarian work very seriously. The Foreign Secretary has set out this call to action and this shows that we are really serious about the work in the space of preventing famine. We are also seeing that, in the initial phases of Covid, we were dealing with that first line of action. We were conscious some time ago that Covid was going to have secondary impacts as well. It is important not to lose sight of those in our global attempt to tackle this pandemic.

Q328 Brendan Clarke-Smith: Following on from that, which countries and regions are most at risk of food insecurity at the moment? What is the UK doing to mobilise action in response to the threat?

Wendy Morton: There are quite clearly a number of countries at risk. There is the globally accepted food security classification, which is a standard that classifies acute food insecurity in five phases. We know that there are around 30 million people globally already in the emergency IPC 4 and at very high risk of further deterioration. Of these 30 million, 20 million are in 11 countries. Those are Afghanistan, Burkina Faso, Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Nigeria, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Syria and Yemen. Our assessment, shared by the UN, is that, of these 11 countries, probably Burkina Faso, north-east Nigeria, South Sudan and Yemen face a really credible threat of famine unless the international community acts.



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I have given you rather a long answer there, but it is important to put it into context. Yes, there is the scale of the problem, but it is focused on a certain number of countries.

Q329 Brendan Clarke-Smith: Thanks for elaborating on that. Following on with that, what are the UK's main levers in trying to increase this food security and preventing famine in the face of the Covid-19 pandemic at the moment?

Wendy Morton: The appointment of the special envoy, Nick Dyer, is a really important part of our toolbox of levers. At that time, we also announced funding of £119 million. That was additional humanitarian funding. His team now is using various mechanisms. There is mobilising finance for humanitarian assistance in those 11 priority countries. That is by broadening and deepening the international donor base. There is also seeking to secure complementary development support from the international financial institutions, so we can try to prevent escalation. That includes urging the World Bank to double its early response financing.

There is trying to catalyse political action to unblock humanitarian access and protect civilians. That is another part of this. It is another lever. I touched on data earlier. There is driving the need for data, garnering improved data and co-ordination, so that we can mobilise and prioritise the resources and political efforts for the countries and people most at risk. The other lever is strengthening longer-term resilience to food crisis through engagement in the international policy fora and programmes in fragile states. There is an issue here and now, but that longer-term piece, trying to build long-term resilience, is so very important.

Q330 Brendan Clarke-Smith: Finally on that point, what balance is being struck between the contributions via, say, the larger multilateral organisations, funds and instruments on the one hand and adapting the bilateral in-country programmes on the other?

Wendy Morton: We work with a number of mechanisms to fund the programme of work that we do. It is important to recognise that, making sure that we are driving action, we are using our levers, our influence and the expertise we have to leverage in as much support, at as many levels, as possible. Yes, we do a lot of work at multilateral level. It is also about having good, strong bilateral relationships and working with the NGOs and the other organisations on the ground.

Q331 Chair: Minister, can I pick up on that funding issue? The previous panel told us how the median spend for women and girls organisations on the ground is about £20,000 and how much direct influence they are able to have with that spend. Save the Children said that it spent 1,000 hours doing the auditing and accounting for an application that it put in, which obviously is prohibitive for most smaller organisations. Advocating going forward, would you be supportive of more easy-to-access, small, targeted grants? The lottery fund has Awards for All, where you can very easily



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apply for £5,000 with hardly any accounting alongside it. Is that something you are considering?

Wendy Morton: I am not going to be drawn on anything we are considering specifically. Darren or Rachel can probably give you a bit more of a breakdown of funding, which I think is what you are looking for. For me, it is always about making sure, whatever we are doing, it reaches those people who need it. Crucially, the transparency and accountability is so important. It is not my money or your money that we are spending. I am sure Darren or Rachel might be able to give you a bit more flesh on the bones as to the breakdown.

Darren Welch: Shall I say one thing first about the number of hours that Save the Children says it spent? We try to have a system that is proportionate. Under our small charities challenge fund, there are much lighter processes for the smaller organisations that are bidding for smaller sums of money. You would expect us to have robust procedures in place to make sure that we have done our due diligence and we understand the organisations we are funding. Where the sums are smaller, we have smaller requirements. That is already in place.

On the support to women and girls organisations, that continues to be really important. We are using a number of funding channels, which we could provide more information on if that were helpful. I see no diminution in our commitment to that area of work, working to support women and girls and really understanding the differential impact that the Covid crisis has had on women and girls, who are often caught up at home in environments that are not always most conducive for them.

Chair: One of my concerns, and I know a concern of this Committee, is getting value for money. It seems somewhat frustrating, to use the previous panel's language, that the money goes to the big multilateral initiatives. There is then the administration of the middleman organisation and then they go down and commission those organisations on the ground with a lesser pot of funding, but expecting the same. That is in place and is a consideration going forwards, so thank you.

Q332 **Mrs Latham:** Thank you, Minister. It is good to see you. Is this poacher turned gamekeeper, or gamekeeper turned poacher?

Wendy Morton: I do not know. Maybe you can answer that one.

Q333 **Mrs Latham:** We will see. Before I go on to my specific question on this, I would like to say that I am not a particular fan of the *Daily Mail*, but I have read it today, or bits of it. I want to ask you about China, because we have covered this before. Clearly, our Committee does not have a specific remit cross-departmentally. This was not DFID funding. It was DFID money, or money allocated to overseas development aid, given to BEIS, which spent it. The problem is that, when it is not spent by DFID, that is when the Government get into hot water, as they have in the past when it was FCO money that was spent, and we get headlines in the



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Daily Mail.

I am concerned that we are likely to be abolished, or that is the talk. If we were to have a different committee, with a cross-departmental remit to look at the way that money is being spent by FCDO or put into different departments, we could do that instead of the *Daily Mail* having to do it. We do not have that remit at the moment. The sort of money we are talking about is £81 million. We are hearing that we are going to lose the funding from 0.7% down to 0.5%. £81 million would be incredibly important in that formula, which I do not agree with and will vote against anyway.

If we do have that happen, it brings international aid into disrepute. I have emails from people, as I am sure you do, saying we should not be spending this money. We should be spending this money, but not in this way. I wonder what FCDO is planning to do to rein in the extravagances of some Departments with their vanity projects, and how it is going to spend it appropriately.

Wendy Morton: You raise quite a few really important points. I will try my best to cover them all off. I have to admit that I have not read the *Daily Mail* yet. I was busy preparing for FCDO orals, so please forgive me. I will go away and have a read of it. It is a question that needs to be asked of BEIS. At the FCDO, we operate within the guidelines and rules of ODA and DAC.

To your broader point about the Select Committee, I know the incredible work that the IDC does, having sat alongside you, Pauline, on the Committee. I have many fond memories of the work and I was very proud of the work that we did. The Prime Minister has been very clear in terms of the Select Committee. It is a House matter, whether the IDC continues, but he was quite clear in what his view of that was. We will have to wait and see. We are transparent in what we are doing here.

You also touch on the issue of 0.7%. You mentioned 0.5%. I am not going to speculate on anything. You probably guessed that I would say that. It is a matter for the Chancellor. It is a spending review matter, so we will have to wait and see. The issue of accountability is always one that we should have in our minds when we are spending what, in effect, is taxpayers' money.

Q334 **Mrs Latham:** Exactly, as you said earlier, it is not your money. It is not our money. It is taxpayers' money. I have to say to my colleagues that this Minister is the person I have known to go away for eight days with the tiniest single suitcase. I could never manage it. She was amazing.

Anyway, I will get on to my proper question. Obviously it is now FCDO. It is reporting that the UK's FGM prevention programme continues to respond to protect increased numbers of girls at risk, particularly with WISH. I am not sure what WISH stands for, but it is the FCDO's flagship £200 million sexual and reproductive health and rights programme. It is finding innovative ways to keep delivering desperately needed services



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and supplies during Covid-19 in 27 different countries. Can you explain why the pandemic has increased the numbers of girls at risk of FGM?

Wendy Morton: It is a really important point. With Covid-19, we are seeing an exacerbation of gender inequalities, something that risks reversing decades of what I see as being progress towards securing universal access to sexual and reproductive health and rights. I know this is something you have taken seriously and followed for a number of years. Country surveys done by the WHO and UNICEF report disruptions of 32% to antiretroviral therapy services for HIV, 68% to family planning services, 56% to antenatal services and 34% to facility-based births. Covid is having an impact in so many different ways.

We continue to be a champion of sexual and reproductive health and rights. The work we are doing is reaching 25.4 million women and girls between April 2019 and March 2020 alone with modern methods of family planning. In September last year, we pledged an extra £600 million for reproductive health up to 2025. We remain committed to ensuring that the work around sexual and reproductive health, and rights as well, because that is important, is prioritised in the Covid-19 response.

It is an important and essential part of our commitment to ending preventable deaths of mothers, new-borns and children. We are working with partners to ensure services are prioritised and rights are protected. I know we are supporting our delivery partners to flex programmes. That includes our flagship women's integrated sexual health programme, which I think is what you are referring to, which is WISH. That is continuing to deliver comprehensive services in 27 countries. I do not know whether one of my officials can give you any more detail. I certainly know that it is continuing. We are continuing to work with our delivery partners on the ground.

Darren Welch: We remain the biggest donor on FGM. We have a £50 million commitment. You are right that it is quite a dangerous time for many girls at the moment. They are out of school, where they may have some protections. They are back at home. Families are suffering from economic hardship and girls are much more at risk. We think there will be an increase in FGM. We are concerned about that, but there is some good news as well. We heard just this week that, in a country where we work, in Sudan, the Government have officially launched their new law criminalising FGM, so there are some positives that we should take account of too.

Q335 **Mrs Latham:** Criminalisation is a good step forward. The problem will be whether there are actually any prosecutions. We have criminalised it in this country but there has only been one prosecution. Minister, could you also provide any good examples of innovation in the delivery of reproductive health services and supplies during the pandemic, including FGM strategies?



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Wendy Morton: Darren, would you be able to share a couple of examples with Mrs Latham?

Darren Welch: Some of our partners are using innovative media platforms. They do not reach everywhere of course, but community radio is being employed to get messages out there and try to change community behaviours. We have TV broadcasting. Youth social platforms are also being used to get messages out about some of these issues. We are trying to continue the level of awareness, even in these really difficult times. It is not easy; that is for sure.

Q336 **Mrs Latham:** Finally, Minister, can you tell us what the effect of the pandemic has been on the incidence of child marriages?

Wendy Morton: I know that this is another topic you have taken a very close interest in, protecting children and young girls. Keeping children and girls safe while they are out of school is a priority for the FCDO. That is another challenge. Because of Covid-19, so many children, but particularly girls, have been out of education. Getting them back into education is really important. All our bilateral education programmes have pivoted to support children's wellbeing, protection and nutrition. Where possible, we are using remote learning and low-tech approaches as well. The girls' education challenge programme has also been adapted to help girls.

We know Covid-19 is exacerbating the drivers of child marriage. The UNFPA estimates that there could be an additional 13 million child brides by 2030 as a result of Covid-19, with at least 4 million in the next two years. These are additional to the 120 million child marriages that were already expected to take place over the next 10 years. I am really pleased that you take an interest in this.

Making progress on ending child marriage not only remains a key focus for the FCDO but is part of the Prime Minister's commitment to champion 12 years of quality education for girls. When I talk about education, it is because I see and recognise that link of why 12 years of education for girls is so very important. When it comes to the UK spend on this particular area, over the last five years we have spent £39 million to support international efforts to end child marriage. This has included the UN global programme to end child marriage, which I am sure you are familiar with. That has reached almost 8 million girls, with initiatives to prevent and respond to child marriage.

Q337 **Mrs Latham:** We have to set an example by ending it in this country first.

Wendy Morton: I believe you have had a Private Member's Bill on this topic. In fact, I think I remember seeing it when I was at the MoJ.

Mrs Latham: Yes.



Wendy Morton: The Government are listening carefully to the debate on the legal age of marriage. We continue to keep it under review. The law is clear that all couples, regardless of their age, must enter into marriage freely, as you will be very aware. Tackling forced marriage is one of our key priorities. I am, like you, proud that we made forced marriage an offence in 2014. We will not hesitate to take action where necessary. We have issued more than 2,600 forced marriage protection orders.

Q338 **Mr Bacon:** I have one very short follow-up to Pauline Latham's questions. It was specifically about FGM. You mentioned 2014. That was the year in which it was reported that there were 137,000 people suffering from having had FGM in this country, but, as Pauline Latham mentioned, there has only been one prosecution.

If you are overseas and being encouraged by various agencies funded by the UK, including DFID itself, to take FGM more seriously, you would be correct if you said, "They are not even taking it seriously themselves. Look at their numbers". You would think that it was not something you needed to attend to. Surely the connection between the lack of prosecutions here, with the clear signal that sends that the prosecuting authorities here do not take it seriously, and what has not happened in the developing world cannot be denied, can it?

Wendy Morton: On what is happening here at home, that is probably an issue that needs to be directed to one of my Home Office colleagues.

Q339 **Mr Bacon:** I knew you were going to say that. The point is surely this: I understand that you are not responsible for prosecuting policy. You are not responsible for taking decisions about prosecutions. Neither are Ministers in the MoJ or the Home Office. We know that, in this country, that is a separate decision, but Ministers of the Crown and Departments of State have influence. They can suggest to the prosecuting authorities that an issue should be taken much more seriously. How can you possibly have 137,000 cases of something and only one prosecution, and it not be regarded, both here and overseas, as something we do not take seriously?

Wendy Morton: As I say, that probably needs to be pursued with my colleagues in the Home Office. To be absolutely clear, in the work the FCDO is doing, it is making progress on ending child marriage. It remains a key focus.

Mr Bacon: It was FGM I was specifically asking about.

Wendy Morton: Sorry, yes, you were talking about FGM. I beg your pardon. Tackling FGM is an important part of the work we do. I have to come back to the point that, if it is tackling FGM in this country, while I am listening to what you are saying, it is for colleagues across Whitehall to answer to the Committee as to what actions they are taking and what the position is. In all fairness, it would be wrong of me to try to answer for them.



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Q340 **Mr Bacon:** I am not asking you to answer for them. You could be saying to them privately, "Your failure to take this more seriously in the United Kingdom is making our job in international development work against FGM more difficult". That is what you could be saying to them.

Wendy Morton: We remain focused on tackling these issues. I am conscious, where it happens across the world, of the work we are doing in the international development space. Just because it might be happening here at home, it does not mean to say that we, in the development space, should not do the work we are doing and keep it as part of our focus.

Mr Bacon: No, I do not think that at all. You definitely should keep it as part of your focus.

Q341 **Mr Sharma:** Minister, I do not think we are forcing you to respond today. We want you to facilitate that and to take on our concerns, as you were a highly respected member of this Committee while we were working together. If you speak to them privately, saying that you went to the Committee and the concern was expressed, they could take it a step further. That is the only request that I see and hear that we are making on behalf of the Committee: that you, as an influential member of the Government, can take it further to the other Ministers to say, "This Committee is very concerned on this subject". That is all.

Wendy Morton: I am certainly listening to what you say as—I sincerely mean it—very respected members of this Committee. My final point on FGM is that the work we do overseas on prevention is really important for me. Prevention is better than prosecution. I hear what you are saying about the things at home.

Chair: I have had personal experience of people coming back, particularly around child marriage, who are appalled that children can get married at 16 in this country. We are advocating the legal age of a child being up to the age of 18 internationally. It makes us look like hypocrites, so we appreciate your help on that.

Q342 **Dr Poulter:** In its submissions, Bond told us that many UK charities working internationally are experiencing a perfect storm at the moment, with a drop in public fundraising, uncertainty over Brexit, the economic downturn and cuts in the aid budget. It also warned that only 52% can see themselves operating after 24 months, which would jeopardise the aid they deliver to local organisations in the global south. Of the £200 million the UK provided in the form of an aid package in April 2020, why was only 10%, £20 million of that £200 million, for NGOs, via the rapid response fund?

Wendy Morton: It is an important point. I am going to ask Rachel Turner. I am sure she can give the Committee the breakdown that you are looking for.

Dr Poulter: We are not looking for a breakdown. I have given you the



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breakdown.

Wendy Morton: Let me ask Rachel for more details on this.

Q343 **Dr Poulter:** You are the Minister. Can I ask you first to address the headline point, before we come back to the official? It is actually a political question to some extent, as to why only £20 million of £200 million was given to NGOs via the rapid response fund.

Wendy Morton: The answer is that Rachel will have more of the detail, because I am not quite sure of the exact fund you are referring to here and I want to make sure we get this right.

Q344 **Dr Poulter:** Okay, so you do not know.

Wendy Morton: I am going to ask Rachel for some details.

Rachel Turner: Minister, I think this is about our humanitarian response. Matthew is our humanitarian director, so, Matthew, this is one for you.

Matthew Wyatt: I am very happy to come in on this one. The £20 million that the honourable Member refers to is not the full extent of all the support we are providing through NGOs. In addition to that, for example, we are also matching pound for pound up to £10 million the Disasters Emergency Committee appeal. That money will go to British NGOs. We have also provided a considerable amount of funding for NGOs—I think it is about £37 million—through the partnership with Unilever on hygiene.

It is perhaps worth saying that much of the funding we have been putting through the multilateral agencies has also been reaching NGOs on the ground. When you add that all up, it is a lot more than just the £20 million. The other point to make is that, to be able to work at the kind of scale and pace that we needed to, we need to use a broad range of levers. The multilateral agencies have the ability to work at scale across a number of places, so we need to be able to provide funding through that route too.

Q345 **Dr Poulter:** On that, you mentioned initially a number of other funds that were not the fund I was specifically asking about. It seems to me an extraordinarily small amount of funding being provided directly for NGOs from £200 million. Given generally a very positive approach taken to NGOs in other funding streams, recognising the benefit they can bring, I am still a little hazy as to why that was not recognised in this rapid response fund. Given their perilous financial position, surely that would potentially jeopardise their future workstreams or even the viability of many of these NGOs to continue doing the work they are doing.

Wendy Morton: I absolutely recognise the work the NGOs do, in delivering programmes on the ground for us. Yes, we fund through multilaterals as well. Darren might have a bit more detail for you.



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Darren Welch: The Covid funding that went through NGOs is one issue. We have large programmes of support that are delivered through the NGO community anyway. We have tried to work really closely with them to make sure we can be flexible. Even though they were not able to deliver maybe what they had contracted to deliver with us, we sat down and worked through new milestones for them. We have worked through changed payment schedules. We have moved from output to input-based payments. We have allowed their personnel to work from different locations and in flexible ways. Through those arrangements, we have adapted our contracts to try to keep giving support to the sector. There is no way around it: it is a very difficult time for them when public donations are also not at the levels they were at before. We try to be as flexible as we can be.

Matthew Wyatt: This is not directly about the RRF itself, but in our dialogue with the multilaterals, in particular the UN, we have been pressing them to make their systems more conducive for the NGOs to be able to access funding and be more flexible in the funding they do have. Obviously they cannot do some of the things they wanted to do because of the Covid pandemic, but that allows them to flex to do other things.

As a result partly, I think, of our influence, UNICEF and UNHCR have changed their guidelines. They have become more flexible on funding. The central emergency response fund run by the UN, to which we are, in most years, the biggest donor, has for the first time had a separate window to be able to fund international and national NGOs directly through the International Organization for Migration. We are working on that front as well.

Q346 **Mr Bacon:** The Foreign Secretary has told us of the £2.9 billion cut to UK ODA for the financial year 2020-21. What are the risks to the programmes we have been discussing today on global health, on economic support and food security and on safeguarding women and children? What are the risks of those things being cut in the near future?

Wendy Morton: Earlier in the year, we went through a budget reprioritisation process, as you know. Our 0.7% ODA spending tracks GNI. With GNI being contracted, therefore we had to look at our spend. I want the Committee to know that we are absolutely committed to supporting international development and helping the world's poorest people. It is legitimate to consider where we have to look at repurposing or reprioritising at that point when there was a huge strain.

Looking beyond that, it would be wrong of me to try to speculate. We know we have a spending review coming up. I have tried today to set out where a lot of our priorities are and the work we have been doing. Looking to the future, I am not going to speculate ahead of the spending review. It would be wrong of me to do that.

Q347 **Mr Bacon:** Can I invite you to focus narrowly on things like poverty reduction and the protection of the most vulnerable and marginalised



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groups? Will ODA spending for those groups be protected?

Wendy Morton: We are absolutely committed to supporting international development. As the Prime Minister said last week, we should be really proud of what Britain has done to help support people around the world. Let us not forget that the UK is and remains one of the biggest contributors of aid of any country on earth. I come back to the point that I do not think you would really expect me to comment further ahead of the spending review or, indeed, of any such fiscal event, but I admire your tenacity and endeavours.

Q348 **Mr Bacon:** I did not expect you to comment. I expected you to give the answer you just gave, but I thought it was nonetheless worth a try.

Wendy Morton: It was definitely worth a try. The Committee would not be doing its job if it did not ask the question.

Q349 **Chair:** The Chair would not be doing her job if she did not follow it up with another one. You have told me twice today you are not going to speculate on the review tomorrow and I respect you for that. We all really value the development work that this Government and previous Governments have done. It is more looking to see that commitment going forward, rather than the specific costs. You mentioned the 20% cuts that happened over the summer. I wonder whether an impact assessment has been done on that, to make sure that one particular country or scheme was not adversely affected. It was perversely ironic that the first scheme that lost its money was a Rwandan girls' project, when girls' education is very clearly the Prime Minister's passion.

Wendy Morton: We had to make some really tough choices and it was a huge piece of work for reprioritising and repurposing. I know you have raised the point of the Rwandan girls' project. I have answered that one in orals.

We have had to make some very tough choices, but I come back to my point that this Department does some incredible work in the international development space. This Government is absolutely committed to supporting international development. At the risk of repeating myself, that means helping the world's poorest people and what we class as the bottom billion. It is legitimate to consider where savings can be made when public finances are under such huge strain. I come back to the point that we should be really proud of what we have done as a country and what we are doing to support people around the world. We are one of the biggest contributors to aid of any country.

Q350 **Chair:** As I said in my opening, I completely agree and I am very proud of what we do as a country. It is our moral duty and something the whole UK should be proud of. I am asking about the impact assessment specifically.

Wendy Morton: I will turn to Rachel, who might have a little more detail for you. I can assure you that it was a very rigorous process, going



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through the budgets as part of the repurposing and reprioritising. Rachel, are you able to come in with a little more detail?

Rachel Turner: To reinforce what you said, Minister, in terms of the very clear steer from Ministers about the programmes to protect, there is a very strong focus on protecting the poorest. For example, we still have, I think, 25 social protection programmes that we are supporting, which we have managed to surge and make sure they are appropriate for Covid support. We have continued to deliver support for small farmers affected by breaks in input supply and access to markets. We have continued to innovate in supporting some of the new urban poor. We have particularly tried to protect the people who were immediately and seriously affected, as their livelihoods unravelled during the crisis. I hope that is helpful.

Wendy Morton: It is probably worth also saying that the package of reductions we worked on was based on a reasonable worst-case scenario for the impact of Covid-19 on GNI this year. Savings were identified to protect our priorities in responding to the impact and the most pressing challenges of Covid-19, as well as helping to deliver on our manifesto commitments.

Chair: Thank you very much. I hope the rumours circulating about the cut of our foreign aid commitment tomorrow remain as just rumours. If, unfortunately, that is true, could I urge the Minister—and I know the Foreign Minister is actively trying to push back against this—to look at having that impact assessment, with a really clear strategy that is influenced by need but also value for money and the long-term benefits it is going to give to the recipients? That is something we would really welcome. We understand that you are in an incredibly difficult position. As we have said, we are very grateful for the work you do, but also the development work this country does. I believe it gives us our global standing, so we hope we are able to continue that long into the future.