

International Development Committee

Oral evidence: UK Small Island Developing States Strategy, HC 1298

Tuesday 24 October 2023

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Members present: Sarah Champion (Chair); Mr Richard Bacon; Mrs Pauline Latham; Chris Law; David Mundell; Mr Viendra Sharma.

Questions 87 - 121

Witnesses

I: UnaMay Gordon, Former Principal Director, Climate Change, Government of Jamaica; and Cletus Springer, Chair, Caribbean Natural Resources Institute (CANARI).

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: UnaMay Gordon and Cletus Springer.

[This evidence was taken by video conference]

Q87 **Chair:** I will start this session of the International Development Committee where we are looking at international engagement with small island developing states. We are particularly looking at the impact of climate change and what the world could, should and is doing to mitigate it. We are very fortunate to have two guests giving us evidence. I will ask you both to introduce yourselves and your history in this field.

UnaMay Gordon: Good morning, everyone. Good afternoon where you are, members of the Committee and listeners, if there are any. I am UnaMay Gordon. I am a climate and development expert by profession. Previous to where I am now—and I speak to where I am now—I was the principal director of the climate change division of the Government of Jamaica for a period of about six years. In that position I managed the Government's climate change agenda to look at inclusive development of climate change and the development agenda in Jamaica. In that position I had the enviable position of articulating the policy framework and leading Jamaica's delegation in quite a bit of the work in the international, national and regional space. I was head of the technical delegation, since 2016, to a number of conferences and led the public interest and the Government's interest in this space.

Before I joined the Government, I was in international development as the representative on the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture. Just over a year ago I left the Government and I am now working as an independent expert offering my services to national, regional and international organisations, agencies and providing instruction and guidance for a number of Governments across the region on how to navigate the climate space, the international, multilateral space and build their own capacity to especially access climate finance. I will stop there, if that gives you a synopsis of who I am.

Q88 **Chair:** That is a phenomenal synopsis and we are honoured to be in your company. Thank you. Cletus, over to you. Tell us a little bit about yourself and the work that you are doing.

Cletus Springer: I am from St Lucia. I have been in the international sustainable development agenda since 1990. I had the honour of leading my country's delegation to the Conference on Environment and Development. Since then I have been involved in a range of negotiations on sustainable development, including the Barbados accord, the Mauritius plan of implementation, the Samoa plan and I may be involved in the Antigua and Barbuda effort as well. I now sit as chairman of the Caribbean Natural Resources Institute, which is based in Barbados. I rate it as the best civil society organisation in the Caribbean and maybe even in the western hemisphere. I also have the honour of chairing the board



of governors of the Sir Arthur Lewis Community College and we are just setting up a green economy agenda at the college. I also serve on the Panos Caribbean organisation as well as on the Cropper Foundation. I am an urban planner by profession.

Q89 Chair: It is an honour to have you here as well, so thank you very much for making the time. I will ask the first question to both of you but, UnaMay, if you could answer first. Briefly, just the headlines, what are the most important development challenges facing your country right now?

UnaMay Gordon: I think climate change itself is a development issue and, therefore, the debt burden that climate change has brought to Jamaica—and this is speaking from a Jamaica point of view—and the wider SIDS community, which I also represent on the international forum. With the cyclical nature of the debt that we are in we cannot move forward with the economic performance and economic sectors are impacted by climate change. Generally, people's lives are continuously at risk, and access to finance in development and climate financing is a challenge for us because of the strong hold that the cyclical nature of climate change has us in.

We are inherently vulnerable to climate change. We are in that space, that region. All of the SIDS region is vulnerable, and from a development point of view access to capital for development is probably one of the greatest challenges. The debt, that we have to borrow to rebuild, and that cyclical nature is a big part of the challenge that we face now.

Q90 Chair: Cletus, I will ask you the same question. I don't know if you want to answer in your role as chair of the Caribbean Natural Resources Institute or specifically about St Lucia.

Cletus Springer: I will answer broadly from my experience and say that in my view the major challenge to development in the region is the region's economic, social and environmental vulnerability. That is all-encompassing of the climate change issue. Climate change is having a compounding effect on the social, economic and environmental vulnerability of the region. You cannot consider climate change in the absence of the consideration of the vulnerability of the region to external shocks, energy price shocks, commodity price shocks, to the fact that the economies of the region are not sufficiently diversified, the fact that the economies of scale are features of the region.

Similarly, there is climate change's impact on the social psyche of the region, the social make-up of the region, the fact that we have high poverty rates, which is masked by the fact that a lot of the metrics that are used to assess the social standing of the region use GDP criteria that do not capture the large pockets of poverty that tend to exist in the rural areas in our countries.



Then there is the environmental vulnerability, the fact that our coral reefs are being impacted by rising sea temperatures, and their role in helping to attenuate the effect of wave action and so on is being affected by virtue of that. When the coral reefs die, our coastal zones become more exposed and more vulnerable and so on.

It is the social, economic and environmental vulnerability of the region that has created the ideal conditions in a perverse sense for climate change impacts to have the most serious effects.

Q91 **Chair:** Cletus, I don't know about the wave changes. Can you tell us a little bit more about that?

Cletus Springer: Coral reefs perform a critical role in helping to attenuate wave action. When they die the waves have no buffers, they have no impediments to hitting the coastal zones of our countries where more than 75% to 80% of our people reside. These environments are such that in most cases they are not properly mapped and their social and economic value and environmental value has not been properly quantified. In a decision-making context, decision makers are not able to measure the impact of, say, a hotel development in a coastal zone that might impact the coral reefs and in a more general sense what promises are made to protect the coral reefs and to protect their environmental and social functions.

Q92 **Chair:** Interesting. The warming sea is impacting on the coral reefs and there is the knock-on effect of that?

Cletus Springer: Yes, they do.

UnaMay Gordon: I want to add a little to what Cletus said about the development that takes place here also. In a lot of the region of small island developing states the topography also contributes to the demise of the sea, the coastal areas. Once we have development where what is taking place up in the reefs is also affecting others in the region, then we have that problem. As Cletus said, 70% to 80% of our population are coastal populations and their lives become impacted. They depend on the coastal zone and then it brings us into the space of the onset event that is exacerbated by climate change, which also destroys that.

On the wave action, there is not capacity development to even understand what is going on and to even characterise and categorise it so that we can think of it in building harder structures within the coastal zone. For us, as a reef population and a coastal population, that protection of our coastline, which is also part of our economic sector and economic development, becomes important.

Q93 **Chair:** To follow up on that, is research into wave action happening anywhere or just not happening everywhere?

UnaMay Gordon: There is a little bit of research going on in Jamaica. A couple of years ago we had some support from the Korean oceanographic



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association to do some measurement along the Kingston and St Catherine coastline. There was some support from the Association of Caribbean States in Trinidad, ACS, that was doing a project within the Caribbean itself and part of that was to build capacity to measure wave action and to collect data. As we like to say, data is almost the currency of climate change and without the data the development strategies are incomplete. A little bit of work is going on there and it was a project that was led by Government so it will be interesting to see how that work continues. Some amount of work is going on and some data now exists so that decisions can be made and supported.

Chair: Absolutely. Thank you very much.

Q94 **David Mundell:** Cletus, which are the main partner countries and organisations that you have worked with to address the challenges you set out? How have you worked with them?

Cletus Springer: I have worked with the Commonwealth Secretariat. I was a member of the taskforce that was set up in the early 2000s to develop a vulnerability index for SIDS. We worked quite extensively with the University of Malta, Professor Lino Briguglio, to develop that vulnerability index. From that, we managed to develop a resilience index for SIDS and that work was also led by the University of Malta.

I have worked with the ACS secretariat as a planning and development adviser. There we did a significant amount of work in developing a development charter for the ACS. Interestingly, my contract with the ACS was funded by the UK Government, the Department for International Development out of Barbados.

I worked with the Organisation of American States as the director of sustainable development and we did a significant amount of work with the region in helping to update their energy vulnerability, promoting renewable energy in the region, in helping to update the effects of natural disasters in the region. The last project we worked on was helping hotels and the private sector generally to develop a post-disaster continuity plan.

I want to come back to work that we did with the Commonwealth Secretariat and suggest to the UK Government and to you as a Committee that when you look at the organisations of which you are a member, of which you are a part, you can find significant opportunities that will bring traction to advance your national agenda of development assistance to the region. When I was at the OAS I did not see much of a presence of the UK Government because you are an observer country in the Organisation of American States, but I believe that in organisations like the Caribbean Development Bank and others, in future you might find benefit in looking into how you can utilise your membership in these organisations to advance your development agenda.

Q95 **David Mundell:** We understand that due to their small size, small island



developing states often face constraints in their capacity to absorb aid. How can international partners best support those states in overcoming capacity constraints?

Cletus Springer: The capacity to absorb aid is a function of many things. It is a function of incapacity in human resources. For example, since the 1990s we have experienced a significant decline in scholarships provided by the UK Government, Canadian Government and others, which has impacted our ability to increase our pool of skilled resources that would allow us, for example, to improve our project management performance. That is one element.

One of the ways we have tried to address this is to visualise the implementation of our projects as much as possible. We have utilised, in the case of the eastern Caribbean, the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States Commission. To give you an example of this, we will do an education project and design it across the region and through that project we will address the circumstances that are unique to these countries and have standalone elements in that project. We will regionalise the elements that are common to all of the countries. That has worked extremely well. The OECS Commission is an exemplar in the context to support small states to overcome their national capacity constraints.

There are many things that may lead into it. As I said, there are human resource constraints, the absence of evidence-based data, the absence of baseline data on which you might want to develop projects. One of the things that we experienced with the Green Climate Fund and the Global Environment Facility aid projects is that these projects all have very hard baseline data that help to develop the incremental impact that the project will create. Data is a significant weakness in our ability to absorb funding from international partners.

UnaMay Gordon: I want to add a little bit about the capacity challenge that small states face. Apart from the human capacity challenge, which is rooted in the ability of the technicians to manage, there is also the fragility of the institutions. There is that institutional challenge as well. Partnerships and Governments and the UK Government can support the building out of stronger institutions in the small states by looking at what I like to call the fragmentation challenge that takes place in a partnership and a coalition and that kind of thing where each partner comes in and they want their own piece of the pie. That creates a challenge to the institutions in the country.

That fragmentation of support is a challenge as well, and if we build out the partnership among donors, among countries, I think we probably would be able to have a better development trajectory in building stronger institutions where human capacity is strengthened but the institution that manages and governs is also strengthened. That is probably one of the ways that the UK Government can look at it. I am talking about national institutions. Cletus spoke about the Commonwealth Secretariat but I am talking about the strengthening of national and



regional institutions that are strong and then we would be able to move forward. That is a challenge for us when it comes to strengthening our partnerships.

Cletus Springer: If I can do a quick rejoinder—

Chair: Cletus, can I pause you there and give a bit of reality? I have lots of members with lots of questions. We are only on question 3, so could you let us make a little bit of headway? The problem is we are fascinated with what you are saying but we will have to start getting into bullet-point territory now to get all the information of you.

Q96 **Mr Virendra Sharma:** UnaMay, tell us about an international partnership that has had a real positive development impact.

UnaMay Gordon: I can go to Jamaica and I will go straight to the heart of a Jamaica context where we have partnerships with almost every single international agency that offers support to countries. When I was in government, which was in the last six years—so I will go the heart of that—we had a partnership with FCDO and I will speak to the UK partnership because that is fresh in my mind. Coming out of COP26, the access to finance taskforce was launched by the COP presidency and Jamaica was chosen as one of the the countries to anchor the taskforce.

I think where we are with the taskforce now, the UK Government should not discount what we have forced the taskforce and the persons in Jamaica to do, the donor co-ordination in partnership. The Planning Institute of Jamaica, which is a best practice planning framework for Jamaica, co-ordinates Jamaica's bilateral interventions. The Planning Institute said to the members of the donor community, which at the time was very fragmented, "You go and co-ordinate among yourselves and come back to us to say what you can offer under this framework".

That led to a seminal piece of work that took place in Jamaica where the gaps in development were clearly identified and we could move from there, because that is what needs to be done. Now from a partnership point of view we are targeting the gaps in development and I think that should not be discounted. Then we have had significant contributions from US aid that speaks to the heart of communities and works in communities and impacts on the lives of communities, designing programmes with communities and making sure that adaptation takes place at the community level and, therefore, communities benefit.

We have been able to overcome the piecemeal approach that usually takes place with partnership and donor co-ordination by just strategically looking at where we are and then moving forward. I don't know if I have answered your question sufficiently.

Q97 **Mr Virendra Sharma:** What lessons could the UK and other international partners learn from this?



UnaMay Gordon: The basic lesson is that individualism does not serve the countries, the small island developing states. I talked about the individualism in donors' intervention and the piecemeal approach where each donor and everybody wants its own piece of the pie. I think that is the most fundamental lesson that we got out of this piece of work. We can have a situation where we build on successes. There are success stories happening in the country and a lot of time when donors come in it is as if nothing has happened and they want to start from scratch. This lesson is that we can build on successes and there is real evidence of some great successes that can be built on. That lesson came out of that piece of work.

Q98 **Mr Virendra Sharma:** Thank you. Cletus, how can SIDS international partners ensure that the projects they deliver have a lasting beneficial impact?

Cletus Springer: Thanks for that question. First, especially in the context of the Caribbean—and I think it applies to other SIDS in the Pacific and elsewhere—is the notion that SIDS are homogenous, that they all have the same issues but I want to suggest that that is not the case. Each country has its own unique set of challenges. There are challenges that are common of course but I strongly support a more targeted country approach.

The second thing is that international partners should work with the institutions that exist in the region and that have a mandate in the specific areas of sustainable development in the region. As UnaMay mentioned earlier, we are not starting from scratch in the region. There is already a significant foundation of capacity in the region that should be worked with instead of jettisoning external support on top of that, often without any interaction between what is coming in from outside with technical assistance and what already exists.

I will give you the example of the Caribbean Community Climate Change Centre. That centre has been in place for almost two and a half decades now and has done a significant body of work, knows the region, understands the region and the capacity. I see no reason why international partners coming into the region to assist with climate change adaptation and mitigation should not work with it.

I want to strongly encourage engagement with civil society organisations. Permit me if I put in a plug here for the Caribbean Natural Resources Institute because over almost five decades it has established its bona fides in participatory management of natural resources, bringing in civil society, bringing in rural folk and fisher folk and so on, and helping to address challenges at the community level. That organisation is struggling for resources because it has to operate mostly on a project set-up and does not have sufficient resources to do brainstorming, handholding, working with the Governments and helping them build their capacity.



These are the three areas that I suggest. Fourthly, as I said earlier, you need to look at your ecosystem of development assistance where you are set up and how best you can do this. I see in your strategy a plan to open embassies and consulates and so on in some of the countries. I want to encourage you to consider the model of co-operation agencies, the model of JICA, the association of agencies and so on for the Japanese. You have the same for Sweden and so on. I believe by doing this you can engage in a more co-operative partnership arrangement with countries because international development assistance and development of partnerships is a different modality altogether. The latter requires a more face-to-face, engaging kind of relationship with the countries and that tends to give a better result than the more direct approach.

Q99 **Chair:** Cletus, you mentioned civil society. How common is it for international partners to have a strong relationship with civil societies, listening to them, responding to them and making them leaders in the project?

Cletus Springer: Not common, very rare and there are a couple of reasons for that.

Chair: Briefly if you could.

Cletus Springer: There is a number of instruments through which international partners engage with the Governments and we do not have, unfortunately, a system of government in our countries that is sufficiently participatory, that brings in the civil society element in the decision-making process. There are lots of reasons for that. Some Governments believe that it weakens their power base when they try to become more consultative, that civil society organisations set the agenda or to affect the agenda. Where the relationship is strong, the benefits are very clear and I want to urge that—also the private sector is not often in the room when these decisions are made. The private sector is almost missing in action in the sustainable development agenda. There are a couple of companies that have a strong social responsibility and so on but generally the private sector is not part of the action and they need to change that.

Q100 **Chair:** That is disappointing to hear. UnaMay, do you want to add something briefly?

UnaMay Gordon: Very briefly, I completely support Cletus about the civil society moving and greater effort to be made to remove the antagonistic behaviour between civil society and government. When agencies come in, their point of contact is government or they go directly to civil society. Again, there is that fragmentation and the mechanism that civil society, Government and the private sector are at the table at the same time becomes important. Part of any strategy for development has to take this into consideration.

Chair: I agree.

Q101 **Mr Richard Bacon:** UnaMay, you mentioned the way in which



fragmentation often gets in the way. Some commentators have attributed the increased interest internationally in small island states—in our own case following the merger of DfID with the FCDO but also elsewhere in the world—to the fact that small island states comprise a significant number of votes at the United Nations, and increased geopolitical competition between the US and its allies and China has prompted this interest. To what extent do you think that is true? If so, is it a benefit or a hindrance? Does it make the participants more likely to work together rather than in the fragmented way you were describing?

UnaMay Gordon: Thank you for that question, Richard. The negotiating space with G77 and China is an important bloc. To some extent it is true and I just came back from the TC meeting in Aswan where a lot of that played out. That is for another conversation.

It is true that because of this bloc where the small island developing states—there is the Alliance of Small Islands States and that filters up into the G77 and China bloc. The Caribbean is 17 members of the OAS and therefore 50%, so we are a significant voting bloc. People individually will go to countries to offer what we call spoils and create this fragmentation or they will go to a bloc. One of the things that the region and the SIDS have been doing in the last couple of years is to say, “We are a bloc and while we are are not homogenous”, as Cletus said, “there is more that joins us together than divides and, therefore, look at the issues that join us together that can support our development forward than look at the things that divide us”. To some extent it is very true but fragmentation of the blocs and the issues are a real concern for us.

Q102 **Mr Richard Bacon:** I don’t have much experience. I did live in the Caribbean but it was Grand Cayman and not for development but when I worked there it was for the water project office and there were a lot of people who did not have flushing toilets but were, by the standards of the region and the world, quite wealthy. The way in which Africa has developed—and I have more experience of Africa, and the way that aid partners have been working—it has become quite commonplace where it is not necessarily officially multilateral for partners to agree that, for example, the Germans will do this, the Swedes will do that, the Norwegians will do that and the British will do the other, and they co-ordinate quite closely. They all know each other, they all have their own country officers and in practice there is not fragmentation. In practice there is rather good co-ordination. I have seen this for myself in places like Tanzania, Rwanda, Kenya, Sierra Leone and elsewhere.

To what extent does that happen among small island states, say in the Caribbean, of which there are quite a large number, who all have their own agendas and very different needs? I met recently the high commissioner in the UK of one very small island state that cannot get development assistance because its income is too high. It is an upper middle income of about \$24,000 a year, but it has huge needs. The biggest need is for an extra 30 MW of electricity and they can’t get to the point of people talking seriously about investing so that they can get it.



How can aid partners work in a more co-ordinated way with a range of different islands who have different needs in a way that does not induce the fragmentation you were talking about?

UnaMay Gordon: We just had this discussion in Aswan and I will tell you frankly. When a hurricane strikes—it was passing through Antigua last week—and 10,000 people are impacted, that is a huge population that is impacted; it is completely different from when a million people in Africa are impacted. If you look at the scale, it probably is the same because of the small size of the country and this is also being held against us. I don't like to say the Caribbean is divided by water; we are joined by water. We are individual islands in the Caribbean sea and, as Cletus mentioned earlier, there are impacts on each island. Barbados has not been impacted by a disaster for the last however many years but Barbados at this time is almost considered the centre of the universe because of the geopolitics that is taking place in the climate agenda.

Therefore, as development partners we have to look at not individual islands but the entire Caribbean as a whole and where we can make these interventions. Developed countries are investing in populations that they have an interest in or that speak to their own national interest. The US will invest in Jamaica because Jamaica supports its interests at the Security Council but it will not support St Lucia because of the geopolitics of that. We have to start to look at the entire region as a region, the development of the region, the contiguous nature of the development—and when one island is left behind, all islands are left behind because of who we are.

Q103 **Mr Richard Bacon:** Cletus, would you like to add anything to that?

Cletus Springer: Absolutely. I agree with UnaMay. The islands share a common vulnerability in some of this, as I said much earlier. It affects the trading arrangements in the region, the intra-Caribbean trade arrangement. When one island is affected, all islands are. Here again I want to come back to the point that I made earlier. You mentioned about many of the islands being middle income and I want to suggest that that is a misrepresentation of the realities in the region when you look at it through the lens of vulnerability.

Barbados is just emerging from a very dicey situation where at one point its foreign exchange reserves were reduced to less than two weeks of foreign exchange reserves as a result of a number of things that had happened—price increases, the impact of the reduction in tourism and so on. Barbados's role in the overall economic ecosystem of the Caribbean is significant. It is the gateway for a lot of our air traffic, for example. When Grenada was impacted by Hurricane Ivan in 2004, that caused damage to our trade in nutmegs, and things of that sort really suffered. Many countries could not export nutmegs for about another two years after that event occurred.



But I want to come back to the question you posed to UnaMay and suggest to you that if you look at the Rome declaration on harmonisation of aid to countries, there you have very clearly set out the considerations that apply to interventions in development of the region. It is very clearly set out to ensure that development assistance is delivered in accordance with party country priorities, with the UN in identifying ways of amending individual country policies and so on, working to reduce donor missions and reporting, and UnaMay alluded to that, managing conditionalities and simplifying and harmonising documentation. These are the things, and I have just cited three of them, that make a big difference.

I know that you have a united front within the EU set-up in your support through the economic forum and so on but I believe a lot more can be done to streamline development assistance to the needs of the countries.

Q104 Mr Richard Bacon: Who are the most important partners for the UK Government to work with closely? Are they international, regional or local partners? Where can they do the most good? I am very conscious of your comment that these island states are not homogenous, so obviously a one size fits all is not going to work necessarily.

Cletus Springer: Absolutely, but if you work through the regional organisations to begin with I think these organisations have a very clear understanding of the nuances and can better target the resources based on the specificities in the countries. I don't think you can go wrong if you work with the agencies that already exist in the region. You perhaps might want to consider some sort of capacity assessment of the countries or these agencies to determine how best you can help them to help the region because while they have their strengths, they have their weaknesses. It would save you a lot of effort in duplication if you come in with that approach because it would reduce the amount of effort you are required to make at the national level.

Secondly, you want to also target the national space. There are institutions and agencies at the national level, non-Government, that are doing some good work especially in the social dimension, helping to reduce delinquency, improving the function of the judiciary, all of these things that are critical to strengthening the competence in the countries. I want to emphasise the competence in the countries for sustainable development is weak and requires a lot of attention.

UnaMay Gordon: To follow up on what Cletus said, we have a number of regional institutions especially in the Caribbean region and across the small island developing states and they already have a mandate. A programmatic approach across development would be useful for the UK Government to do. Then there are national strong institutions in some countries. I mentioned very early in the game the Planning Institute of Jamaica, which has built up an international reputation that we can use as a national institution for peer learning not only across the region in the Caribbean but across the SIDS, even into the Pacific where the institutions, as we know, are very weak.



There is no reinventing of the wheel here. There are institutions with mandates. I mentioned earlier the capacity of these institutions—when we target development and transformation we also have to target not only the human capacity but the institutional capacity. That is probably what I was alluding to at that time.

Q105 Chris Law: In about the last three years there has been a number of international meetings, obviously COP27 and the Paris summit. How satisfied are you with the progress particularly on topics concerning small island developing states? Do you feel that there has been any progress in the last 12 months on priorities for small island developing states? I see you shaking your head straightaway. I will move on to the next question.

UnaMay Gordon: I have been involved in the negotiating space for a very long time, as has Cletus in another way, and in the last 12 months I think the priorities—I don't think we are being listened to, in the simplest terms. I really don't think we are being listened to. The issue of the middle-income country that is not afforded climate finance or finance for development is ludicrous. We are all vulnerable states and I don't think that we need to sit around any table into the future to be begging for you to listen that we are vulnerable.

Q106 Chris Law: Why are they not listening? In a nutshell, what is going on?

UnaMay Gordon: As I mentioned earlier, there is some amount of consideration about what should happen. I think Cletus mentioned earlier that the approach means that country priorities are not being taken into consideration. There is all the priorities that this is what we should do and so on—the Paris agreement was very clear, taking into consideration the country's priorities. Countries in the region have clearly defined their priorities and needs but every single time that has happened the continuum or the line moves a little bit. You end up in this cycle of preparing a document, redefining what this is, explaining what this is.

I really think we are not being listened to. I can't put it more starkly and more vehemently and so it comes back to what I said about a programmatic approach where there is a long-term vision of where we go, not a one-year or a two-year. I understand that the financing—I am speaking to the heart of financing now—comes from the taxpayers of the developed countries. We make no bones that we know that, but it is a reality that we are vulnerable and that support has to come for us to be able to develop but I don't think we are being listened to.

Q107 Chair: UnaMay, could I interrupt? Do you think that the SIDS Governments, across party politicians in the SIDS, are speaking with one voice on this? Is it the international community that is not listening or is there still division within local governments that means that there is not that clarity?

UnaMay Gordon: I think for the most part we are speaking with one voice. There is quite a lot of commonality in the voices that speak as well but, as I said, when it gets down to bilateral fragmentation as opposed to



the multilateral fragmentation that is where the difficulty comes in. We might have some divergent views but I think for the most part we are speaking with one voice.

Chair: That is good to hear.

Cletus Springer: I stopped attending COPs in 2009 and the last COP I attended was in Copenhagen, because I could not find much justification to get on a plane and spend two weeks in each one of these countries every year talking about or negotiating really around the survival of my country, and this is what it is about. In Paris, we came up with the slogan that captured our dire circumstances: “1.5 to stay alive”. Now it is very clear that 1.5 will not keep us alive in the Caribbean and the IPCC and other research witnesses have made it clear that there are enough nasty gases in the atmosphere to make that target impossible. In fact, we exceeded the target a couple of weeks ago.

How do you negotiate around that? How do you sit down with people who say, “Your survival is at stake so in another five years we will give you however many million to help you adapt” when the threat is ever present with us every day? Every day coral reef die. Every day fishers have to go out to sea to get their catch. Every day we lose our biodiversity that can’t survive in extreme temperatures. Every day things are happening in our regions.

I have advocated for a long time that we should step out of the negotiating forums and go the route of climate justice, take these issues to the courts and try to have them resolved because it really is a waste of our time to get into these negotiations.

Q108 **David Mundell:** UnaMay, how effective has the UK been in supporting the developing states’ priorities in international forums?

UnaMay Gordon: I speak directly to the climate space in which I am integrally involved. The UK assumed the presidency of COP26 and I think there was a change in the narrative. The COP President at the time did what I call an effective engagement and a listening tool that understood the needs of small states and it was almost a turning point there. Since then we were fortunate that Jamaica in the NDC partnership with the UK at the time was able to represent the issues of developing countries at that level with the UK. I think there was a turning point and moving from COP26 into COP27 there is that great collaboration and the vision of the UK was captured in their strategy quite well.

I speak specifically to even the work that we did in Jamaica at the time to prepare the population and the region at the level of the high commission for the COP and the team at the UK FCDO listened. It was one of the lessons coming out of that engagement that the team at the time listened. If I have to make a recommendation to you it is to listen and then strategise because that worked for us and is still working.



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Q109 **David Mundell:** The next question I was going to ask is what more should the UK do, and that answer appears to be: do more listening.

UnaMay Gordon: Yes. It cannot be a top-down development if we are to get transformation because what we are looking for is transformation in the development. We are looking to do things differently. We are looking for these options so that we can move forward. Part of what we did going from COP26 to now is that there is a lot more listening taking place, not only with the UK but with some other partners. As I mentioned in the earlier part of the discussion, it was also a part of the forcing of the listening with the development partners when the Taskforce on Access to Climate Finance was established.

Q110 **David Mundell:** With COP28 and the fourth SIDS conference next year, is there anything else specific that the UK could do to support your agenda?

UnaMay Gordon: Yes, that is important because we are preparing for COP28 now. We are preparing for the pre-COP that is taking place. One thing that the UK could start to look at is how we can get programme matching in our interventions and to ensure that interventions are not one-off but they have longer-term value to the countries, taking into consideration the country needs, so we get these building blocks as we go along.

Also the devolution of finance needs to reach the communities. A lot of the time when we make interventions, as Cletus said earlier, we intervene at the level of Government and we think that it will get to the communities. We have to make a greater effort to ensure that the resources are getting to where the impact is felt. I know that somewhere along the line as well there is a disconnect that we are not making enough effort to ensure that it gets to the impact level, down into the communities.

Cletus Springer: I want to make a very simple suggestion that the UK considers a region—that is the Caribbean and SIDS generally—biennially on a very clearly designed programme of work that would enable the UK's typical support, development support, to reach the targeted communities to get the desired results. That will be very helpful because in many activities of climate change there is a climate change development plan, a climate change plan. That was developed by the Climate Change Centre. That exists and was adopted by the Heads of Government and so you sit with the Climate Change Centre and with the stakeholders in climate change in the region and you pick off bits of that plan that are synchronous with your capabilities, plans and so on and look at the region in implementing those agreed aspects.

David Mundell: Thank you. That is very helpful.

Q111 **Chair:** UnaMay, you kept saying in your answer to David that the international community should listen. Who should they be listening to



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and are the UK Government listening to who you believe are the right people?

UnaMay Gordon: I like to say in the work that I do as a development officer that there are different stakeholders at different times in this space. Unless we have them all at the table at the same time, where there is general agreement, we will never have the right development taking place.

Q112 **Chair:** Who is “all”? You said we need them all at the table.

UnaMay Gordon: We have the Government, which is the bilateral partner to any development partner but we have the constituent partners—the women, the youth, the indigenous people, the community leaders, the private sector, which is sometimes very absent from where are. Unless we have a framework where they are all at the table—all the stakeholders at the table, all the actors in the space at the table at the same time—then I think we will continue to have this conversation again.

A lot of times, we engage the private sector because there is a private sector strategy or we engage youth because there is a youth strategy and we engage the government because that is our partner in-country. Really, however, there has to be a comprehensive strategy that when we are talking about development, we are talking about the development of people, about the survival of the country, the people and communities and therefore everybody should participate in the decision that takes place.

Q113 **Chair:** Do you feel that in developing its SIDS strategy the British Government did that when it came to Jamaica? Are they doing that when they deliver on their strategy?

UnaMay Gordon: I think there was quite a bit of consultation because I was involved so I can speak a little bit to it. I was involved with the commission and the teams there in making sure that a number of the persons were at the table at the time. I cannot say any wider but as the climate chief at the time, whatever happened the youth were at the table, they were asked to engage the youth. The private sector was at the table. The community leaders were at the table. They were all there at the same time and I can categorically say that happened for Jamaica. I am not sure if it happened all around.

As the chair of the board of governors of the Caribbean Community Climate Change Centre, which Cletus keeps mentioning, I know that the UK signed an agreement with the CCCCC about one month ago, when the Minister was in Belize. We also made sure that there was quite a bit of consultation as to what this entails so that the CCCCC itself can represent the region. So, yes, in a nutshell, some of that is happening and we are using that for the engagement of all the partners. I do not speak for the Government any more because I am not in government and that should be appreciated.



Chair: It is reassuring to hear that the UK is doing its bit so thank you for that. Cletus, you wanted to add to that.

Cletus Springer: Yes, I wanted to give you a very clear example. This interaction we are having with you today, I do not know that this interaction takes place with parliamentarians in the Caribbean anywhere. I do not know that the parliamentary committees that are set up—bipartisan, parliamentary multipartisan and multipartite mechanisms—work. I do not know that we have interactions with witnesses or people invited to provide oral evidence. I say that because there are examples of good practice within the UK system that the UK Government may attempt to encourage Caribbean countries and CIS countries generally to adopt. I quite like this.

Some years ago, I facilitated a workshop on climate change in Belize with parliamentarians from the UK system and I give that example to show that the amount of work that is required to bring the governance arrangements for sustainable development in our islands is just not where it is supposed to be. There is too big a disconnect between the governance, those in power, and the governed. The voices are not rising sufficiently in any systematic way that would ensure that these voices are heard, that the interventions are captured and that they help to amend policy or influence policy in any way. I cannot see us making any serious headway on the challenges of climate change and sustainable development, deforestation and so on if we do not address our governance arrangements.

Q114 **Chair:** Cletus, can you have sustainable development unless you address climate change?

Cletus Springer: No. Absolutely impossible. Quite often, our leaders see it as an existential threat.

UnaMay Gordon: It is the challenge of our time.

Cletus Springer: It is no longer a threat. It is a reality. That is a fact in practically every sector of the economy and society.

UnaMay Gordon: It is.

Q115 **Mr Virendra Sharma:** UnaMay, how would you rate the UK's wider international leadership on climate change mitigation?

UnaMay Gordon: That is a very difficult question to answer at this time, a really difficult question at this time. As climate change negotiators and climate change professionals, we are really not pleased at this time with the direction of the UK Government. We thought we had a breakthrough after COP26 but things have taken a turn for the worse. I am being very frank with you.

Mr Virendra Sharma: Thank you very much for your very diplomatic response.



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Cletus Springer: And this happens all the time. We should not be accustomed to this but we are. It is the impact of it and the effect it has on continuity.

UnaMay Gordon: Exactly. Exactly so. It is very distressing to the Caribbean. I was asked a question about that just yesterday on a panel and I probably gave the same response. I thought we had made significant progress after COP26 and the leadership of the UK after COP26. It is just very distressing at this time.

Q116 **Chair:** UnaMay, I notice a lot of international leaders are very proudly saying, "Oh, yes and of course I signed up to Mia Mottley's Bridgetown initiative", but when pushed, they do not seem to know the details on that. It feels almost like it is a badge that they are wearing to show that they are taking climate change seriously. Is that a fair criticism?

UnaMay Gordon: I do not think so. I do not think it is fair because, for one, I think something had to happen like the Paris moment, out of which came the Paris agreement—we were just talking about this yesterday, how Lima set up a good framework for Paris to happen. I think the Bridgetown initiative, as we look to build it out—and I wish Avi was here to speak about it—will set up a moment for the reforms to take place. And the reform does need to take place. There needs to be some amount of disruption in the system if we are to take a lead.

Q117 **Chair:** My point is—I agree with you—have you seen any action come out of that or is it just a badge that they are wearing?

UnaMay Gordon: No, I do not think it is a badge. If you understand it, you move forward with it, I think at COP28, where we know a lot of the information will be provided to countries. I really do not think it is a badge. I think it has moved beyond the badge wearing to people really understanding what the Bridgetown initiative is about, where it could take us and where it could go. It has moved beyond.

Initially, at COP27, I would have answered you, "Yes, it was a badge", but I think we have moved past where we were then to a clearer understanding of what the initiative is about. When we went into the Paris summit, there was a clearer understanding and I think it is beginning to define itself as to what it is. I really would not agree with saying it is a badge.

Chair: Reassuring, but Cletus was smiling while you were talking.

UnaMay Gordon: I know.

Cletus Springer: I do not want to disagree. I do not often disagree with UnaMay. I do not think we ever disagree on anything, UnaMay, but I want to disagree with you on this one. I think part of my problem is that I have been in this system so long, with the oscillations, the highs and the lows and so on, and I am at the point now where until I see a manifestation of strong interest, abiding interest, direct interest, I am



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prepared to go with the badge wearing. We have been through this so many times.

The British Commonwealth accord does not say much differently than what was said in the Barbados accord. How much more different has it been, is it?

UnaMay Gordon: But what I said, Cletus, was that we had the convention and then we got to Paris, which was a call to action. What the Bridgetown agenda is doing at this time is another call to action aligned in that way. I am not saying that it is a perfect mechanism.

Cletus Springer: Another call to action. How many calls to action are we going to have?

UnaMay Gordon: I am not saying it is a perfect mechanism but we needed a disruption and the Bridgetown agenda provides that disruption at this time.

Cletus Springer: Okay. I hear you.

Chair: UnaMay, we are both delighted and somewhat relieved that you are not in the room together.

Chris Law: I was thinking exactly that.

Chair: This could really start kicking off. Unfortunately, I am wading in on the side of Cletus and I hope that we are both wrong and that you are right.

Q118 **Chris Law:** It sounds like some significant progress is being made—not. Anyway, I wanted to ask you, on another cheery note, about the transitional committee of the UNFCCC's new loss and damage fund, which has just collapsed again after its fourth meeting, and the UK is a member of that transitional committee. What are your hopes for a fifth meeting and what do you think the priorities should be?

UnaMay Gordon: As you know, I was in Aswan. I am not a member of the transitional committee so I just went as an observer and I think there are such deep divides in that committee about what is required. It went back to what we spoke about, the listening to the developing countries as well. The issue at the TC was twofold.

One aspect was about the costing arrangements, which I think you have heard. The developed countries want the TC to be hosted by the World Bank. The development countries are of the view that the World Bank does not serve developing countries and if developing countries are to progress, we need adaptation finance in grants. The World Bank business model is a loan model. In one sense, it speaks absolute nonsense to put a fund in the bank without this reform taking place, which is linked to the disruption that we are talking about. That was one issue.



The World Bank team that was there did not make it any better for themselves because one of the issues for developing countries is direct access to financing. I like to say that when we talk about access, we are talking about money in the bank. If the money does not hit the bank account, there is no access. It is as simple as that. Once we get access, then the delivery or the devolution of those funds down to where they are needed becomes important. It does not serve the country, so that was one of the sticking points.

Then comes the sources. Where will this money come from? This speaks to the heart of the Paris agreement, article 2.1(c), that the sources should meet the needs and priorities of the developing countries towards low-emission development. When we talk about low-emission development, it means we talk about net zero on one hand, we talk about low-emission development and these mean different things to different people and different countries all the time.

There is a deep divide at the transitional committee. We started that meeting very well on the first day; it broke down on the last day because there was just no agreement. For TC5, we are hoping that good sense will prevail. We need to get to the COP with a set of recommendations that will suit the needs of developing countries.

Q119 Chris Law: That is very helpful. If I reflect on last year's COP, the division was about the big nation states, huge nation states such as the US not even being interested. The argument then was that small island developing states, particularly Pacific states, could not agree on what loss and damage are but the solution was an agreement first of all between the smallest states, in particular small island developing states, that could then start to leverage other countries like New Zealand. We got the Netherlands on board and Canada.

My question is this. If we get to COP28 in a similar position, do you think the US and others will do the same trick as they did last year, which was to say, "If you cannot agree, we are not going to get involved"? And will it mean that the small island developing states and others need to club together to get agreement quickly so that negotiations move to force the hand of those who are getting in the way—in other words, the biggest funders?

UnaMay Gordon: If I had to give one piece of advice to the UK Government, which is probably where we are, we have to start to recognise that there are some parties, some developed countries, that really do not want an agreement to take place. That is fundamental. We have to get to that place where parties agree that this is what is required, this is the issue for developing countries and, as Cletus said, this is our survival. However, we are of the view that there are some countries that just do not want an agreement to take place.

Q120 Chris Law: Can you name them, please, UnaMay? Can you tell us who they are so we know where to put pressure? That would be helpful.



UnaMay Gordon: Well, as you know, at COP27 the US did not want the fund to take place and I am not sure who was in the room when it went. There is still also that great divide. Now we have got the fund, what do we do with it? Should we just continue to stall so that we are going to set up the fund but there will be no fund?

Also, there is a divide among the developing countries—SIDS, small island developing states, and even Africa, which is part of that developing-country model. There are SIDS among the LDCs and then there are the African countries. The impact potential should govern how the fund is allocated. Another big question will come about the allocation and who gets allocation. You can look at the Green Climate Fund and see. SIDS gets 2% of the entirety.

All of these compounded issues will come about and I think there needs to be a clearer focus on the part of the developed countries as to what they will support and how they will move it forward and the part of developing countries—sometimes it is comparable—as to how they negotiate and what they negotiate for. It is about our needs and our survival.

Q121 **Chris Law:** Very helpful, UnaMay. Thank you. Cletus, I know you wanted to come in there. What were you about to add?

Cletus Springer: What I was going to say in response to UnaMay's intervention is that until we have a fund, we do not have a fund.

UnaMay Gordon: Exactly. Yes, we said that at the TC.

Cletus Springer: The asymmetries in the negotiations process in the COP have just been too clear, too stark and too consistent to expect any equity or equitable arrangements to emerge from the negotiations. That is just a reality of the asymmetry as I understand it.

I want to encourage the UK to work with other partners in a sort of coalition of the willing or a coalition of the committed to take as many of these actions outside of the COP process as possible because as long as we continue to rely on the COP to achieve progress and the COP achieves no progress, nothing happens. But there are opportunities, I believe, for the UK to spearhead and exercise leadership in working with other countries that are committed to move in a particular area to provide the tangible assistance that the SIDS countries need to move forward on these things. We do not have time and these negotiations are taking up too much time; we do not have the time.

UnaMay Gordon: Let me just add, Cletus, that is fundamental to what we are doing now. I am also assisting with the climate and development process, which we are now defining as a process. It came out of the COP26 and we have continued to help and guide the process even in my own capacity here. That process, we believe, also can provide a framework that is outside of the COP process—the ministerial is going to



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take place at the pre-COP and then at the COP with the support of the UK Government, the UAE presidency, Vanuatu and Malawi—to guide that process. We have some decisions that are taking place outside the negotiating space.

In our meeting yesterday, I said to them that we do not want this process to be corrupted by the negotiations and I would urge the UK Government to look at it in that way. The team has been very engaged in articulating. We have just developed a vision for what SIDS and LDCs would want adaptation finance to look like, finance for access and delivery, then a set of actions that we could take so that we can move the process along and that is outside—while it is linked but outside—of the negotiating process. I wanted to put that on the table. I am also supporting that process as an expert and hope that it becomes almost a standalone process that we can use to build trust and transparency in the system.

Chris Law: That is very helpful. Thank you.

Chair: Thank you. You have both been amazing witnesses and we are incredibly grateful for the breadth of experience, knowledge and information that you have brought to us. Thank you. Please, if there are other issues, do keep on bringing them to us because this is something that the Committee is very concerned about and we want our report to be as impactful as possible. We are delighted that the Government have brought out their strategy on SIDS but we need to see it implemented, we need to see the international community taking it seriously and, most importantly, we need the money to be in the hands of the people who understand the problems and are most likely to deliver the solutions in the most efficient way. Thank you so much for your evidence.