

International Development Committee

Oral evidence: FCDO and disability-inclusive development, HC 107

Tuesday 23 January 2024

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Members present: Sarah Champion (Chair); Dr Rosena Allin-Khan; Theo Clarke; Chris Law; Nigel Mills; David Mundell; Mr Virendra Sharma.

Questions 43 - 86

Witness

I: Rt Hon Andrew Mitchell MP, Minister of State for Development and Africa, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office.

Examination of witness

Witness: Rt Hon Andrew Mitchell MP.

Q43 Chair: I would like to start this one-off session with the Minister of State for Development and Africa, the right honourable Andrew Mitchell MP. Minister, it is very good of you to come before us. We want to focus this session predominantly on two of our inquiries. One is on people with disabilities and how the FCDO is inclusive to their needs and drives. We are also coming to the end of our inquiry on the climate impact on small island developing states. That will be the focus.

I will start with a question on Yemen. Minister, you know, because you have campaigned on it for a long time since 2015, that the level of poverty, destruction and humanitarian need in Yemen has only been going in one direction. It is widely recognised as the worst humanitarian disaster on the planet, and I am very grateful that FCDO and this Government remain the fourth largest donor.

However, in the Chamber today, a number of MPs were calling for the Iranian army and the Houthis to be proscribed under the Terrorism Act. As 21.6 million people currently need humanitarian assistance in Yemen, proscription, as you know, is a blunt instrument and would almost inevitably impact our ability to get humanitarian aid to those people. I do not want to corner you or the Government on their decision-making on this, but could you give the Committee assurance that you would have a voice in decisions around countries' organisations being proscribed under the Terrorism Act?

Mr Mitchell: Thank you very much, Chair. Will you allow me just to start by thanking the Committee for their contribution and input into the White Paper? This is the first time that I have appeared before you since the White Paper was published. It is a terrific document. For those who do not want to read the full-fat version, a shorter version has been put together by Richard Curtis's team. I am extremely grateful to the Select Committee, and I just want to make two points in expressing that gratitude.

The first is that this is a cross-party document, effectively. It goes to 2030. The other major parties have all supported what it is doing, and it therefore gives a very strong platform for driving forward British international development policy over the next six or seven years. That is important. Who knows what is going to happen in future electoral events? I am very confident that the Conservative party will win the next election, but the point is that, whoever wins the next election, it is a rock upon which to build back British leadership in this area.

The second point that I wanted to make was around its launch. We launched it in a number of international centres as well as in the UK. The Prime Minister launched it at the Global Food Security Summit held here in London, and it had 50 countries inputting into it. It is endorsed by 20 heads of Government and heads of agencies. When it was launched in



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New York by Barbara Woodward, the permanent representative there, there was a very warm international reception. You might think that the UN is quite a cynical body, but it was very warmly welcomed as Britain putting its shoulder to the wheel, so I just wanted to thank the Committee very much for its help and assistance in making it what is a very strong document.

Q44 Chair: We support the document and we are very glad that the Committee's recommendations appear to have been accepted and incorporated. It is a very strong document. If I could bring you back to Yemen, 90% of food and medicines going into Yemen are on commercial vessels, and I am very concerned that the humanitarian situation is in the mix if debates are occurring around proscribing the Houthis.

Mr Mitchell: You are quite right that Britain is, effectively, feeding about 100,000 people in Yemen every year. As you said, I took a very close interest in this before I returned to the Government. Indeed, I think that I am the only west European politician who has been to Sanaa and Saada and met the Houthis there, which I did when I was on the Back Benches. Jamie McGoldrick, who was the UN leader and invited me to go at that time, is now the UN head in Gaza, so he brings very considerable experience into that situation.

On your specific question about proscription, we would not discuss that publicly in any plans, but you asked me whether I am one of those who is part of any debate that is going on, and I can give you the reassurance that I am. The Government have made it clear that we cannot stand idly by while a non-Government entity—or, indeed, a Government entity—takes potshots at international shipping on the high seas. Freedom of navigation is absolutely essential to preserve, and that is why we have taken the limited and proportionate actions that we have against the Houthis.

I very much hope that the Houthi action will now stop, not least because, of course, some of the ships that are coming through that sea are bringing food and other essential humanitarian materials to Yemen. That is another reason why they should desist from this aggressive and illegal action.

Chair: Yes, exactly. Minister, thank you for your understanding and involvement in this. It is appreciated.

Q45 David Mundell: Our next inquiry is going to be on the UK Government's work in achieving SDG 2 and zero hunger. At your food summit, it was confirmed that France would hold a Nutrition for Growth summit in Paris. For the context of our inquiry, I wondered if you have any information as to when that summit might be held, and if you could tell us what preparations you and the UK Government are making for it.

Mr Mitchell: There is talk about this summit. Nothing is yet decided, so I cannot give the Committee any details, but, when the details are available, I would be very happy to write to the Committee. There is a lot



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of good work being done in this area, which the Prime Minister led at our Global Food Security Summit towards the end of last year. An enormous number of international agencies and countries were represented there. It was hosted not only by Britain, but also by the President of Somalia. It is a critical agenda, as David Mundell will appreciate. Partly because of the war in Ukraine, but for other reasons too, food scarcity and food shortage is getting worse. It is part of a number of meetings that are planned, but the Committee may rest assured that Britain will be taking a very strong leadership role in all of these international meetings in every way that we possibly can.

Q46 **Chair:** Minister, we have heard June this year through to this time next year for when the next summit is likely to be. Do you have any indication?

Mr Mitchell: I do not at the moment, but, as soon as we have any indication that we think is likely to hold, we will let you know.

Q47 **Chair:** Thank you for those divergences. The disability inclusion and rights strategy from FCDO has been widely praised by the sector, but some stakeholders have pointed out that the strategy lacks a definition of disability, so I wondered how you define it.

Mr Mitchell: It is a very interesting question. I am not sure that I do directly, but I was the whip on the 1995 disability Bill, which was one of the first big Bills that went through the House of Commons. I must say that I learned an enormous amount about disability from that experience. When I was at DfID, we certainly made sure that disability was written into a lot of the efforts that we made to alleviate poverty.

On one definition, 1 billion people—16% of the world's population—have disabilities. Of course, if you have a disability and you live in the developing world, you lose out twice over—once because you are poor and grappling with all the problems of poverty, and secondly because you are disabled. It is the fact that people lose out twice over that calls upon us to do more to tackle it.

I am not sure that I can give you a particularly brilliant definition off the top of my head, but, in a way, it is a bit like the wind. You may not be able to define it, but you know that it is there and you know its effect.

Q48 **Chair:** Once it is defined, you can then measure it, but I take your point that it is subjective in some cases.

Mr Mitchell: I published the equality impact assessment for 2023-24, which the Committee were pleased that we did. I did it because, although it does not make good reading, it is very important that we should re-establish one of the great jewels of DfID, which was the commitment to transparency and openness. That is why I published it, but it does underline the point that you are making.

Q49 **Chair:** Would it be possible to get the definition that that equality impact



assessment was measured against?

Mr Mitchell: Let me look at that and see if I can come up with something—not off the top of my head—that is meaningful for the Committee.

Q50 **Theo Clarke:** Stakeholders who have seen the delivery plan have told the Committee that the targets are too vague. Are you confident that you will get the data needed to assess progress?

Mr Mitchell: We will certainly try. It is quite a complicated area. The first Global Disability Summit, in London in 2018, published 1,000 new global commitments, all of which are available on the website. In 2015, we co-founded the Global Action on Disability Network, which is a network of donors and foundations. To some extent, that enables us to focus on the right things, because we have that depth and breadth of advice.

In terms of the things that we measure against, the inclusion and rights strategy, which I think is what you are talking about and which was launched in February 2022, partly as an answer to that question, and was very well received, focuses on rights, fundamental freedoms and voice, which is participation, representation and leadership. It focuses on choice, so that disabled people can have control over all aspects of their life wherever possible. It also focuses on visibility. The evidence and the quality of data and so forth make all of that greater.

I hope that, from what I am saying, you will feel that we are very focused on that. We have a very strong relationship with the sector. The biannual external disability board involves both experts and academics, so I hope that we can have some confidence that we will achieve what we need.

Q51 **Theo Clarke:** Will you commit to publishing the delivery plan for the strategy?

Mr Mitchell: Yes. I cannot see any reason why we would not do that.

Q52 **Theo Clarke:** How many staff within the FCDO focus specifically on mainstreaming disability inclusion across the work of the Department?

Mr Mitchell: All of them do that. David Rutley is the ministerial disability champion who ensures that disability inclusion is properly written into the system. We mainstream disability across all of our work as a Department. The strategy has galvanised the Department in the longer term and has been well received, because it is both strategic and empowering.

Q53 **Theo Clarke:** You said that all of them are doing it, but are there specific members of staff whose sole job it is to mainstream disability inclusion?

Mr Mitchell: I cannot give you that figure off the top of my head, but it is possible that the voice of God behind me may give me the percentage of staff, which is what you are after, in which case I will reveal it to the Committee. Otherwise, I will reveal it by letter to Ms Clarke. I want to



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emphasise that the question presupposes that it is not everyone's responsibility to do this; it is everyone's responsibility.

Q54 Nigel Mills: Could you just talk us through what an equalities continuum is? It is in the disability inclusion and rights strategy.

Mr Mitchell: An equalities continuum is a process that ensures that we take account of the necessity of equal treatment, and that it is a constant and not something that we pick and choose when we like.

Q55 Nigel Mills: What you used to have were minimum and higher standards. Is that not an easier thing to be accountable to than a continuum? You can say that you have complied with a continuum at almost any point on it, as opposed to having to hit some defined standards.

Mr Mitchell: They are both after the same thing, but the key thing is transparency and openness, so that people can see what we are doing and hold us to account.

Q56 Nigel Mills: How have your stakeholders reacted to the change? Have they been supportive or have you had concerns expressed?

Mr Mitchell: Stakeholders are extremely supportive of what we are doing, and we have an excellent relationship with the sector on this. There is a recognition that, through a very large number of our programmes, we are being careful to listen to the advice that we receive from experts and professionals. I mention particularly the bodies that are supported by academics and experts, and there is good reason to believe that we are on the right track. The strategy and the work dipped a bit at the time of the merger, but I hope that it is now back on track.

Q57 Nigel Mills: You have an external disability inclusion board, chaired by a senior FCDO official, with some academics and others on it. What is your assessment of the value that that board adds? Is it doing its job?

Mr Mitchell: Yes, it is. We are pleased with the work and, if we were not, we would change it. We are pleased with that.

Q58 Nigel Mills: Is it right to have a scrutiny board whose work you are pleased with, or should you be challenged by, at odds with or disagreeing with what it says about you? Being pleased sounds a little cosy.

Mr Mitchell: That is a very good point. You will recall that I set up the Independent Commission on Aid Impact when I came into office in 2010 at DfID, which is a very rare example of a Minister quite deliberately giving up power to an independent body to hold them to account. It is not something that Ministers are always willing to do. I did it because, in this sector, we are spending a lot of public money, with a commitment to 0.7% of GDP. We need to demonstrate to taxpayers that they really are getting full value and that, for every taxpayer's hard-earned £1 that we spend, there is 100p of delivery on the ground. Accountability and transparency in this area are incredibly important, so I see it in that vein.



Q59 **Nigel Mills:** We have heard from Sightsavers and Able Child Africa that the board's remit is maybe too broad, it meets too infrequently, it has too few people and its agendas are too packed, and that, therefore, it cannot really do the job that it is there to do. How would you respond to that?

Mr Mitchell: I am not sure that I would recognise that description, and let me tell you why. We have technical advisers embedded in the policy departments. We have a secondee from Sightsavers to help us with all of this. The strategy has galvanised the Department and made it more long-term. It has been well received, precisely because it is both strategic in its intent and empowering in the way that it delivers for the people who we are seeking to serve.

Q60 **Dr Allin-Khan:** Alarming, only just over a third—35.4%—of bilateral ODA projects had a disability inclusivity element, while fewer than 1% were focused primarily on disability inclusivity. This is in stark contrast to considering gender, for example. Why is this so low?

Mr Mitchell: What aspect do you think is low?

Q61 **Dr Allin-Khan:** With 0.7% being focused primarily on disability inclusivity and only just over a third of bilateral ODA projects having a disability-inclusive element. For example, if you compare this to the international women and girls strategy, which commits to a target that at least 80% of FCDO's bilateral aid programmes have a focus on gender equality by 2030, we are looking at a difference of about 45%.

Mr Mitchell: If you look at the work that we are doing on disability for girls, you can see that we have put a lot of effort into this. Only 5% of education budgets are spent on disability. Very specifically, for example, the Girls' Education Challenge fund has helped 1.6 million marginalised girls in 17 countries. Of those, 154,000 are girls with disabilities. They are also achieving those results in some extremely difficult countries—32,000 in the DRC, and 13,000 in Somalia.

Through training courses and the work that is done potentially in all 280 of our posts, through the disability helpdesk for staff and through the new equalities enabling fund, which will support 30 projects a year, we try to make sure that there is not that disaggregation and that we are really including girls and women. I just give you that specific example because it is about the way that we take account of this in the education of girls.

Q62 **Dr Allin-Khan:** I understand that, but given the number of people living with a disability, it is natural that you are going to have something of a catch-all in that when we are looking at including gender. As I mentioned, other causes across the FCDO's policy agenda, such as gender equality, are subject to specific targets. Why is disability inclusion not? How do you intend to increase the number of bilateral ODA projects that have a disability-inclusive element?



Mr Mitchell: The aim is that we should have as many of them as possible included in that way.

Q63 **Dr Allin-Khan:** That is not a very specific target. "As many as possible" is great; we would all love as many as possible. With respect, for those specifically with disabilities, there do not appear to be any targets. There does not appear to be the same ambition for that group of people as there is for gender equality, for example.

Mr Mitchell: Let me give you an example. There is a disability-inclusive development programme, which we extended to 2026. It spent £46 million specifically on this area, which I increased last year by £9 million. That reached 16.7 million people with disabilities by March 2023. It focused on public health messaging, education, health, livelihoods and tackling stigma. This is a space in which we are very conscious of the need to work well, and we are confident that we are seizing on the right aspects to drive it forward.

Q64 **Dr Allin-Khan:** Can we expect that, in the future, there will be much greater consideration of parity with some of the other groups that are disproportionately affected?

Mr Mitchell: There is great importance attached to that, but, when I next report to the Committee on this matter, I will try to bring you a very specific figure for both what we are achieving and what we are targeting to achieve.

Q65 **Chair:** Minister, can I push you a little bit harder on this? For me, the nub of it is what the money is spent on and where it is targeted. At the beginning, we explored why there was not a description of how the Department is defining disability. You gave the example of a billion people having some form of disability, which I do not doubt, but why is it that you do not try to have all FCDO or bilateral-funded projects being inclusive to everyone?

Because 34%, or a third, seems a very small amount. If you have a school, why would you not say, "Let us make sure that all children can access it"? If we are involved in building or retrofitting a school, we could make sure that, for example, there are ramps in there, that doorways are wide enough for a wheelchair, or that any publications that we do are in a large enough font for someone to read.

I was also very struck by evidence that we received a few years ago around education in Pakistan. There were a number of children whom families would not consider sending to school because of either their mental or physical disabilities, so those children would not even get into the school to see if they are going to be classified as the third that have the inclusion.

When you recognise that it is 1 billion people and when you eloquently put that the people in the poorest situations then have that intersectionality of both poverty and disability, making them some of the most vulnerable on the planet, and we are targeting only 0.7% of the



money to them, it seems a little odd.

Mr Mitchell: We often do not capture the full extent of this work, but we are getting better at capturing it. It is work in progress. In terms of the 34% of all ODA programmes touching on disability, there is a signature on the DAC marker system for those. By the end of March 2023, the International Climate Finance programmes had reached 69,000 people with disabilities.

In terms of the specific points that you were making about areas where there is challenge around getting children into school, look at the Leave No One Behind programme in Ghana, with social protection support there for over 108,000 people with disabilities. In Uganda, 10,000 disabled children were educated between 2020 and 2023. In Sierra Leone, 2,270 visually impaired children were able to access education, and the scheme there is going to be rolled out to cover secondary school children as well.

In terms of supporting children with disabilities, let me just give you another couple of examples, because this is quite interesting. In Rwanda, we are involved in training 12,000 teachers on how to help in ensuring children do not lose out through a disability. That would, effectively, be one per school in Rwanda.

In Ethiopia, before the events of the last few years, the figures were very stark indeed. In terms of interventions on disability education, we reached nearly 78,000 children in 2013-14, and 320,000 in 2017-18. That was all moving in the right direction.

If I may be allowed one last example from a different part of the world, in Pakistan, we did, as you will recall, not least through the work of Sir Michael Barber, a huge amount in Punjab, where Britain made a real contribution to educating girls: 35,000 children with severe disabilities and 3,000 children specifically with hearing problems were got into mainstream schools.

I give you those quite granular and detailed examples because I hope that they will give the Committee confidence that this is an area where the Department is ensuring that real progress is being made.

Q66 Chair: What would give me confidence would be if you made a commitment that every one of the bilateral FCDO projects would include people with disabilities wherever practicable. Where it is not practicable, maybe we look at specific funded schemes. The example that you gave in Rwanda of training teachers up was brilliant, because that should impact every child.

The examples that you gave were all physical disabilities, and a number of parliamentarians will have gone to the autism event this morning, which looked at training all teachers to understand what autism is, so that they could recognise it and make accommodations for children. It would also be interesting, when you come back with a definition, to see if that is physical or mental—neurodiversity, cognitive, or whatever it is—



and whether we make provision for that.

Mr Mitchell: I can certainly write to the Committee about the extent to which this is embedded everywhere, and everywhere practical. The Committee conducted an inquiry in 2019 on disability, as a result of which most of the recommendations were accepted. That was the last one before this one. Assistive technology was ramped up with partners, and we have done really quite a lot with that, which I can tell the Committee about if they are interested.

In terms of education, the Girls' Education Challenge work inserted new child protections for vulnerable children in all its programmes, and organisations like CAMFED showed exactly how to do that to very best effect.

Q67 **Chair:** Would a child with a disability come under that definition?

Mr Mitchell: Yes. I gave the figures for the number of children with disabilities under the Girls' Education Challenge Fund who were being supported. BII—then CDC—had a toolkit with a specific section on disability inclusion in the work that they were doing. What was not accepted at the time—you may think that this is something that we should revisit—was a mental health marker, a link between universal health care and disability, where we thought there would be too little impact in that, and making certain restrictions and elements compulsory for then DfID suppliers.

Practically everything else that the Committee advised has been embedded, and some of the figures that I have been giving you today underline how well that has gone. You will have to judge, when I send you the extent of implementation throughout all our programmes, whether we are doing as well as we should.

Q68 **Chair:** It would also be very helpful, when we have that data, if we could have your opinion on whether you are doing enough or whether there is more that we could do. We do appreciate your commitment to this.

Mr Mitchell: You would expect me to give you my opinion, Chair.

Q69 **David Mundell:** While recognising the positivity of your examples, it is a fact that a number of organisations of people with disabilities, or OPDs, have told this Committee that they feel as though they were used as part of a box-ticking exercise by FCDO, with their views not sufficiently considered. Why is consultation with OPDs not a formal requirement when setting departmental policy?

Mr Mitchell: We widely consult through the mechanisms that I described earlier.

Q70 **David Mundell:** Do people's and organisations' input make a difference to the final outcome?

Mr Mitchell: Yes. They certainly do.



Q71 David Mundell: Is there an example of that?

Mr Mitchell: I have given several already today. By the way, Chair, can I just say that the voice of God behind me has made clear that we do not have a percentage of staff overall who are involved? We will see if we can do some more work on that. I thought that we did not, but that has now been confirmed.

In terms of Sir David's comments, we have increased the disability capacity building programme. It has £5 million in grants to drive policy change at national and local level. I have seen evidence of clear policy change, some of which I have talked about already, both locally and nationally. In terms of the level of consultation, people will sometimes say, if they do not get precisely what they want, that they think that it has been a box-ticking exercise. Sir David, in his extensive experience as Scottish Secretary, will no doubt have come across this from time to time, but I am confident that we are good at listening to the people who we need to listen to, because the concept of "no change about me without me" is extremely important.

Q72 David Mundell: Have you, Minister, contemplated directly funding some of these organisations of people with disabilities in order to help them help you meet development goals?

Mr Mitchell: Through different means and through Bond, which is the collective of all of these, we fund quite a lot of these things. You will have seen in the White Paper the reference to the Bond Disability and Development Group, which is very helpful. As a result, the White Paper is very strong on referencing disability and inclusion rights. We certainly have access to that information and, if we did not, we would make sure that we went out and got it.

Q73 David Mundell: Delivery partners have also told the Committee that FCDO does not ask about plans to safeguard disabled people. How can you assure the Committee that the correct safeguarding policies are being followed?

Mr Mitchell: You are quite right, Sir David, to emphasise—

David Mundell: I am very grateful for my knighthood, but it has not yet been notified to me.

Mr Mitchell: It is only a question of time, Mr Mundell. Safeguarding and disability inclusion is, as you rightly say, incredibly important. I am disappointed that people do not think that we do enough of that. Those with disability are disproportionately at risk from sexual exploitation, and the White Paper reinforces commitments to safeguarding.

In terms of the Foreign Office's priorities, strengthening the understanding and management of safeguarding is extremely important, as is providing guidance for disability-inclusive policies and for strengthening practice, learning and advocacy. We fund two co-chairs of



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safeguarding working groups that produce disability-inclusive child safeguarding guidelines. I hope that Mr Mundell will be reassured by that that we are on top of this.

- Q74 **David Mundell:** Witnesses told the Committee that DfID's 2019 approach to value for money can discourage delivery partners from implementing disability-inclusive safeguarding policies, as they are not always compatible with meeting value for money objectives. Are you familiar with that concern and addressing it?

Mr Mitchell: First of all, it would always be my duty as a Minister to ensure that taxpayers are getting value for money. David Mundell will remember that, when we were first in Government in 2010, it was a driving ambition of everything that we did on development.

Having said that, I suspect that Mr Mundell is focusing on not being so obsessed with value for money that you do not, from time to time, take risk in order to find ways of doing what you are doing better. There is a balance to be struck there, and I have always tried to make sure that we get that balance right, but providing value for money must always be a driving ambition of Ministers who are responsible for how taxpayers' money is spent.

- Q75 **Chair:** We had quite a lot of evidence that, if a school—I go back to this because it is the easiest example—is to be fully physically inclusive, that costs more money. It might require additional equipment. The school might need to help with transportation. It might have to have a more extensive outreach programme to get parents to agree for children to come in. Rather than getting £100,000 and being able to educate 500 children, if they make it properly inclusive, they might be able to educate only 400 children with the same amount of money. Therefore, when worrying about getting the tendering, saying that they are going to educate 500 is better and more likely to go through.

It is those kinds of things where there is not a priority to reach those marginalised children who are difficult and expensive to get in touch with, and who are then knocked off when value for money is the overall driver, whereas, if delivering inclusive education in a value for money way was the driver, that might have a different feel to the people tendering.

Mr Mitchell: It is a very interesting point. If you look at the WHO and UNICEF definition of disability, it is far larger than the figure that I gave of a billion people. It is 2.5 billion. The reason is that that includes, in theory at least, people like you and I who wear glasses. The AT2030 fund seeks to focus on things like wheelchairs, prosthetics, orthotics, hearing aids and glasses. It is a very good fund. It increased by £31 million in June last year, and it will reach a large number of people directly as a result. I am not confident of the figure, but I think that it is 9 million.

- Q76 **David Mundell:** How is the FCDO delivering on the commitment to support global deinstitutionalisation and to ensure that vulnerable children are not locked up in institutions? Are there mechanisms to report



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and set out outcomes in relation to that aim?

Mr Mitchell: You are referring to the importance of children being able to grow in mainstream ways and not be institutionalised.

Q77 **David Mundell:** Yes, indeed. You are very familiar with a number of countries where people with disabilities are simply locked away rather than having any role in society.

Mr Mitchell: The whole thrust of all of our work on disabilities is to enable people to grow as tall as possible and to advance in every way feasible. That means that everything that we do is designed to move away from that very old-fashioned, out-of-date and wrong approach.

Q78 **David Mundell:** Have you any mechanism for measuring or assessing whether that is happening and whether there are fewer disabled children within institutions today than there were five or 10 years ago?

Mr Mitchell: It is an interesting question. The way in which we would do it is through published data and research to see what the trend was. I am not aware that we have ever done that, but I will see whether it is something that we could consider doing in the future. What we do know from our measurements of our programmes is the progress that is being made, some of which I have set out today.

David Mundell: It would be good if you could write to the Committee in that regard, because, as you say, it is a fundamental objective to achieve and it is important to understand whether there is progress in that regard.

Q79 **Dr Allin-Khan:** What steps does the Department take to make sure that people with disabilities are not forgotten in humanitarian responses and climate change policies? You just spoke about people with glasses, but, if you rely on glasses, for example, and you have had your home bombed and lost everything, that is going to have a significant impact on you and, in many cases, just as much as any other form of what would be considered a more serious disability. I would be interested to know the answer.

Mr Mitchell: Do you mean in humanitarian situations?

Q80 **Dr Allin-Khan:** Yes, in humanitarian response and climate change policies.

Mr Mitchell: The Green Climate Fund, which we may well be talking about in the next session, has a strategic plan running from 2024 to 2027. At Britain's request specifically, it has written in requirements for addressing disability on the climate side.

On the humanitarian side, in Ukraine, for example, where there is a £10 million civil society fund funded by Britain, we insist and check that it provides funding and grants specifically for disability. I hope that those two things—one, something that we got written in, and the other a fund that is part of our humanitarian work in Ukraine, which the Foreign



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Secretary is keen that we should increase back to the levels when we had the 0.7% fully being spent—are some comfort that we make a point of doing that.

Q81 Chair: Are there any examples other than Ukraine where, in humanitarian responses, disabilities have been considered as significantly?

Mr Mitchell: Not just in the Foreign Office but in all Departments using ODA, we try to include the disability policy marker. It is a requirement to try to do that. In bilateral programmes, that is extremely successful.

In terms of humanitarian need, where you go in to help where there has been a disaster—whether it is a flood, an earthquake or a drought—that humanitarian work will always sweep in people who are suffering from disabilities, because those humanitarian crises will be much worse for those people. In a humanitarian situation, I would be quite surprised if it was measured as specifically as it would be in some of the education examples that I have given you.

Q82 Dr Allin-Khan: You are talking about people with disabilities being swept up as part of a wider response, but I am asking about what steps the Department is taking to make sure that people with disabilities are not forgotten, so an active rather than a passive approach to people with disabilities.

Mr Mitchell: If you think about the way in which a humanitarian emergency unfolds, the Department is empowering, principally financially, professional organisations, which may be NGOs, charities or UN agencies, to go in and address the effects of these humanitarian emergencies, and that will always include disability.

Q83 Chair: I am interested that you chose the example of Ukraine, because we had evidence from civil society very early on of older people with mobility issues literally having to be left on their own because it was impossible to move them.

Mr Mitchell: Sorry. Where was that?

Q84 Chair: It was in Ukraine. They just could not flee their homes, and those people were suffering from hunger and isolation. It would be interesting to see if the fund that you mentioned was in response to that initial oversight.

When I am thinking specifically about humanitarian response, I am thinking about things like—and I cannot think of a politer way to say it—adult diapers and those sorts of very practical things. We have fought hard enough to get sanitary towels in humanitarian kits, but is there consideration to adults who need sanitary products as well? Would it be possible to write back to us on that sort of thought processing?

Mr Mitchell: From the example that I gave you of the way in which we work with specialist humanitarian organisations, they would,



undoubtedly, specify what they require, as they always do. We either have them in store or we go and procure them, and so, if we were asked as part of a humanitarian effort, that would certainly happen.

It is well worth saying that, in respect of the United Nations, our 2023-2026 UN core funding contains disability inclusion indicators throughout. I am confident that, when new and inventive technologies, as well as these traditional things that you have just described, are required, the charity, the agency or the UN humanitarian organisation would specify that and we would support it.

- Q85 **Chair:** Another example that springs to mind is that this Committee went to Jordan and the Zaatari camp for long-term refugees, which has been there a good 10 years. We went shortly after it had been raining and it was impossible for one of the younger girls who we met, who was a wheelchair user, to physically get to her school, because the tracks were so dug up that they were impassable. Then, of course, when it dries, the ruts continue to make it impassable.

When we are making a humanitarian commitment, if things like access for people using wheelchairs could be considered and factored in, or if people retrospectively came to you because situations are changing due to climate change, is that something that you would look sensitively towards?

Mr Mitchell: Yes. When I was in Zaatari, it was not raining and it was very hot. The Committee may recall that, in 2012, when the crisis started, Britain put an immense amount of money into setting up a camp in Zaatari, because we understood the pressure of people leaving Syria that would need to be met. Britain has been a very strong supporter of Zaatari and I would be very happy to raise this point with the camp management if the Committee wishes me to do so, because it is important that people are not left behind in that way.

- Q86 **Chair:** That would be fantastic. Part of the problem and the reason for our report looking at the impact of long-term refugees on host communities is that the international community, including the UK, has stepped away from a lot of the pledges that it initially made. If that was something that you could look into, this Committee would be very grateful for that.

Mr Mitchell: We will make a note of that and do that. Can I just add to what I said before? In terms of the various funds, some of which have been alluded to, we have been on the case of making sure that they properly reflect disability.

For example, disability issues are mainstream throughout the Partnership for Maternal, Newborn and Child Health—PMNCH—as a result of Britain's effort. Mainstreaming of disability is in all activities of the Social Protection Technical Assistance, Advice and Resources Facility, or STAAR. Activity by the Safe Abortion Act Fund seeks to properly fund disabled people in that respect. The Women's Integrated Sexual Health—WISH—



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programme works with specialist organisations to ensure that disability is properly enshrined in the work that they do. I hope that that too will give some reassurance.

Chair: It does, and it is also a nice positive on which to end that section.