HOUSE OF COMMONS

International Development Committee

Oral evidence: The UK Government's work on achieving SDG2: Zero Hunger, HC 112

Tuesday 12 March 2024

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Watch the meeting

Members present: Sarah Champion (Chair); Mr Richard Bacon; Theo Clarke; Chris Law; Nigel Mills; David Mundell; Mr Virendra Sharma.

Questions 55 - 113

Witnesses

I: Rory Stewart, Senior Adviser, Give Directly; Dr Jyotsna Puri, Associate Vice-President, Strategy & Knowledge, IFAD.

II: Ruchi Tripathi, Global Lead on Livelihoods and Resilience, VSO; Dr Rachael McDonnell, Deputy Director General, IWMI, and Senior Program Director Water Systems, CGIAR; Dr Diana Onyango, Head of Technical Team, Farm Africa.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Rory Stewart and Dr Jyotsna Puri.

Q55 **Chair:** I would like to start this session by the International Development Committee on our next inquiry, which is the UK Government's work on achieving SDG 2: zero hunger. We are focusing on both nutrition and what we need in place to tackle climate change, which is leading to chronic food shortages across the globe.

We are very lucky to have two panels. The first panel is Rory Stewart and Dr Puri. Could I ask you both to introduce yourselves and tell us a little about your organisations and how they contribute to food security?

Dr Puri: Thank you very much for having me. I am representing IFAD—the International Fund for Agricultural Development—which is an international financing institution that gives loans to developing, low-income and lower-middle-income countries. We are also a UN organisation, which means we focus on leaving no one behind. Our main focus is on resilience, and I am hoping we will get to speak about that.

Rory Stewart: I have worked in a range of different development contexts, particularly in Indonesia, Iraq and Afghanistan. I was a Minister in the Department for International Development, and later the Secretary of State for International Development.

I am now the senior adviser for an organisation called Give Directly, which is a non-profit focusing on direct cash transfers to the extreme poor. It operates in 15 countries, has a budget of about $200 million a year, has about 800 staff, and has been the pioneer in not only cash delivery but also a lot of research around the impact of cash.

Q56 **Chair:** Dr Puri, I wonder if you could give us your thoughts on the FCDO's current strategy. How effective is it in improving food security and supporting sustainable agriculture?

Dr Puri: I think you are referring to the White Paper, which has been quite comprehensive in laying out important elements. The key elements that have stood out for IFAD have been the focus on resilience and on ensuring we are coming in in the medium and long term, as well as working with the MDB structures by looking at the evolution and how we can think about markets.

There are a few things I would focus on, especially because of the vantage point I am coming from. One is the big focus on resilience. Because humanitarian emergencies are so urgent, a key thing we forget is that we end up saving a lot of humanitarian dollars when we invest in medium and long-term areas; the analogy is prevention and cure. For every $1 you invest in resilience, which is a system-wide effort, you end up saving between $2 and $10 in humanitarian assistance. That is really important.

The second part is taking a systems approach. I know Rory is going to talk about cash, but the key thing is to recognise that we work with developing countries, and most developing countries do not want to borrow for cash transfers. Because we do a lot of lending, it becomes really important to think about how we can sustain a lot of those resilience structures in terms of systems. We focus on building, creating and catalysing new markets, which means a lot of infrastructure investments, investments in assets, and investments in training and livelihoods, as well as in financial inclusion.

Community-based interventions also become really important, and the White Paper lays out the focus on localisation very nicely. Over the past 30-plus years, IFAD has focused on context-driven and localised development. Through our impact assessment—a lot of the evidence and evaluations we do using counterfactuals—we found that that has been enormously successful in achieving resilience, market access, and agricultural productivity, as well as overall food security indicators and outcomes, which we can show with counterfactuals and good econometric analysis.

Q57 **Chair:** The White Paper is just a vision document until it is implemented. Looking back over the last four or five years, do you think the UK has been focusing enough on prevention and looking at what is driving food scarcity? Has it done enough to date?

Dr Puri: Neither the UK nor the international community as a whole has focused sufficiently on adaptation, for example. The White Paper lays this out, and the international community overall has recognised it, but we know there is a huge gap in terms of the overall resources coming into food systems. Even though you have new and additional climate financing coming in—more than $630 billion at the last count—the skew is mostly in favour of mitigation.

Agrifood systems contribute to approximately one-third of the overall greenhouse gas emissions we are witnessing, but we know you can do a lot more in terms of reducing food waste and loss; that is a low-hanging fruit. We are not doing enough as an international community in that space, and we are not doing sufficiently in terms of increasing the resilience of agrifood systems. Climate finance can do a lot, but it is currently not, mostly because we are concerned about very different indicators within the international lending system and the overall international system. The KPIs, so to speak, in that system are very much skewed towards leveraging, which we know comes from the market, but we cannot do that with adaptation financing.

Q58 **Chair:** Rory, you are in a very privileged position because you have been on the inside and are now on the outside. With that eagle view you have, are you seeing enough vision from the White Paper around transforming food systems and agriculture, and has the Government's eye been on this ball in the last four years?

Rory Stewart: I will answer those two questions separately and come on to the White Paper later. The fundamental problem, which is not a surprise to any of you, is that the UK is spending much less money than it was. It is a little concealed from the public because of this apparent shift from 0.7% to 0.5%.

We are seeing a staggering change in many bilateral programmes in numerous countries in sub-Saharan Africa. Countries that were spending £80 million to £90 million a year when I was the African Minister and later Secretary of State are now spending £10 million to £12 million.

I run a relatively small non-profit. In some countries in Africa, our programmes are now larger than those of the UK Government. It is a very big change to suddenly find we are going in and are bigger than the UK Government.

Q59 **Chair:** The argument we keep hearing is, where we stepped back, others stepped in. Are you seeing that on the ground?

Rory Stewart: As you are aware, the reality is that Germany has cut its development assistance, and France is cutting its development assistance. The United States has been carrying a lot of the burden, particularly around humanitarian assistance—85% to 90% of these programmes, particularly in the horn and east Africa—but the political pressures are moving against that in the US as well.

It is a very challenging environment. Some very dedicated civil servants and well-meaning Ministers—Andrew Mitchell is committed to what he is doing—have tried to make the best of what I am afraid is a pretty bad job with the White Paper. Morale is not good, because there is a lot of confusion about the priority of the Department.

When I was in DFID, it was very clear that the Department was about addressing poverty; it is now getting much muggier. People are talking about middle-income country investment, trade not aid, and different forms of rights investments. It is more and more difficult to make an argument around poverty, and it is unfortunately more and more difficult to make an argument around evidence.

DFID had a huge research and evidence arm, on which we were spending well over £1 billion a year. Five years ago, DFID was one of the most academic and theoretical of all international development organisations. As a Minister, DFID was frequently quite frustrating because it was so driven by economists, scientists and evidence that it was quite difficult to shift the boat at all; a lot of that seems to have now been cast aside.

The White Paper is full of very promising statements. I was at the launch, and a lot of charities embrace it and are happy with the language in it. The people who wrote it in DFID have produced a good summary of where we would hope to be. The Conservative party and the Labour party

both seem to be committed to restoring international development spend when the fiscal situation allows.

We have just been through two fiscal events, an autumn statement and a Budget where we had headroom, and yet that headroom was not used, nor do I have much confidence that an incoming Labour Government is going to use it to get back up to 0.7%; the whole thing is a fraud. They have dropped to 0.5%, and it is now difficult for me to imagine what fiscal event would encourage them to return to 0.7%.

Q60 **Chair:** The Committee has just received the OECD's "Mid-term Review of the United Kingdom," and it is saying the same: the reporting has dropped dramatically and the ODA money being spent by the Home Office and HM Treasury is considerably more now than it has ever been.

Rory Stewart: Yes.

Chair: You are arguing around the political choices that have been made. Could you tell us a little about the impact of those choices on the ground?

Rory Stewart: This is maybe more for the public than the Committee because you know this stuff backwards, but the British public are not being told what is hidden inside the 0.5%.

We had made a lot of commitments to these big multilateral organisations—the World Bank, the IMF, and others—which resulted in Gavi and vaccine work. We then started putting a lot of money into looking after refugees in the United Kingdom. The result was that much less of the 0.5% was available to go into traditional development programmes in sub-Saharan Africa.

When I was the Africa Minister, I had a bilateral budget for Africa of £40 billion a year, and the multilateral money going into Africa was probably another £2 billion or £3 billion. It is impossible to get honest, clear figures at the moment, but, if I add up the amount I hear when I visit our different embassies around the world and try to package that together, I would imagine the total amount we are spending on traditional, non-humanitarian bilateral programmes has dropped from £3 billion or £4 billion to a few hundreds of millions. In many of these countries, it is probably a real-term cut of 60% to 70%.

Q61 **Chair:** Again, it is easy to get seduced by the figures, which a lot of people switch off on. Of the bilateral budget you used to have, that was probably going to the places most people assume our aid is going to, so feeding people, resilience, schools.

Rory Stewart: There are many different problems. One is the aid budget might be paying for hotel bills in the United Kingdom, which is less money. In some cases, the money is going into lower-middle-income countries rather than the extreme poor. Some is climate money, and a problem with climate money is—as Dr Puri was pointing to—if you are focused on trying to stop carbon emissions, your money tends to go to

middle-income countries that are emitting the most carbon. Somalia is at the receiving end of climate change, but it is not emitting much carbon; if you are putting most of your money into mitigation, it tends to go to places like Indonesia.

The public may switch off with figures, but we now have bilateral budgets in some of these countries of £6 million or £7 million a year. Anyone in Britain understands that is a very small amount of money over a year, even in a very poor country. You can no longer pretend you are making a significant difference in the development trajectory of that country with that kind of money.

With less money, this is the time for FCDO to be much bolder about cash because cash is very effective, efficient and transparent, and using direct cash is a very good way of getting results when you are short of cash.

Q62 **Chair:** From what you have observed in the last four or five years, are the UK Government closer to or further away from achieving SDG 2, zero hunger?

Rory Stewart: The UK Government are further away from achieving SDG 2, zero hunger, and further away from being a major driver of the sustainable development goals, simply because they are a much less significant player in the international development space.

Chair: That is sad to hear.

Q63 **Nigel Mills:** Can you talk us through cash transfers? You were just mentioning their attributes. The FCDO has used them quite innovatively in humanitarian crisis response but probably does not share your enthusiasm for them in long-term development approaches. Why do you think the FCDO is not on the same page as you?

Rory Stewart: You are completely right. FCDO has used it in humanitarian, and most people get the argument in humanitarian: if you have been hit by an earthquake in northern Syria or southern Turkey, the cash allows you to decide whether you need a tent or food and allows you to do it flexibly and to build up local markets instead of importing.

There is very strong evidence from randomised control trials—the exact equivalent of a medical trial in which you have a control group and a treatment group. It could be a random selection of 10,000 recipients not receiving cash and 10,000 recipients receiving cash so you can really compare. If you look in Uganda over 12 years at individuals who receive $350 and individuals who receive nothing, you can be pretty confident when you say the cash increased their savings by 35% on average if you have a big enough sample group.

Randomised control trials are very rarely done in international development. In international development, we generally tell ourselves nice stories. We say, "I gave money to this village, and a woman from this village went to university 10 years later." We do not ask ourselves,

"Am I sure it was my contribution that led to that outcome, as opposed to 100 other things?"

We also run benchmark studies; for example, benchmark studies against nutrition, which is very relevant to what we are talking about today. Benchmark studies against nutrition in Rwanda suggest cash is outperforming a traditional nutrition programme. It is very counter-intuitive, but the explanation seems to be that we have had a slightly patronising attitude to development in the past, and we have imagined people are fundamentally lacking knowledge, whereas they are generally lacking cash.

To give a couple of examples related to today, in nutrition, we traditionally would spend an enormous amount of money on teaching people what to eat; you might send out community health workers or nurses to tell people to have more calcium in their diet. Give them the cash and the benchmark, and you are literally giving the same amount of cash as you are spending on the training. They buy a cow and have some milk, and then you find they are improving on the key nutritional indicators; after one and a half years, there is a 32% increase in consumption and a 12% increase in dietary diversity, with impacts on child height and weight. After one and a half years, the nutrition intervention compared against a random sample showed no impact.

Another example might be in agriculture. In Rwanda, you will go into a community, and they will say, "We've received some terrific training on what seeds and fertilisers to plant and what to do," and you say, "That's great; are you doing it?" and they say, "No, because we've not been given money to buy any seeds or fertilisers." So our basic discovery—confirmed by the evidence—is that poor people generally have a pretty good idea of their priorities and needs and can usually fix those things much more cheaply than an outsider can.

I am talking too much but I will finish with one example. If you were trying to address poverty in the round in a village, and you commissioned a non-profit to go into a village of 100 houses and you said, "We want you to fix the housing, make sure everybody who hasn't got a latrine gets a latrine, all the children go to school, people are eating two meals a day, and people are getting vaccinated and getting healthcare," you would spend an absolute fortune because you would send in engineers to survey every house, procure the metal roofs, and send in educational enrolment programmes and nutrition programmes.

If you deliver £550 per adult individual or £1,000 per household, which we have done in Rwanda, you discover very quickly that almost every roof gets fixed, everybody ends up with a latrine, the children go to school, the number of meals eaten a day goes up, and health indicators go up. The total cost of this will be £100,000 for the community because they are getting their own tin roofs, their cousin is putting the roof on, they are working out how it costs to buy their own cow, and they are

getting their own food. It is much more effective and efficient, but also much less patronising. It is giving dignity to people in an age where we are worried about patronising colonial aid. It is saying, "You know more; we're trusting you to get on with it."

Q64 **Nigel Mills:** Three pushbacks on that are, first, that it creates dependency; secondly, that people might waste it on temptation purchases; and thirdly, that it discourages people from getting into work and having a long-term sustainable improvement. Presumably, your view is the evidence shows none of those is the case.

Rory Stewart: On sustainability, increasing the evidence is driving us towards single, large, lump sum transfers instead of a monthly dole payment, so a $1,000 lump sum. In comparison studies, we are finding that has more impact than giving the same amount of money stretched out over five or 10 years. If you stretch the money out to small amounts over five or 10 years, people tend to use it for consumption. If you give it as a lump sum, people tend to use it for investment purposes: fixing their house, starting a small business, and so on. You then find the savings and investments, the returns and the income, will be higher in three years.

There is very little anecdotal evidence on the question of people not working or wasting the money. The point about the randomised control trial is you can demonstrate the difference between the control group and the treatment group. You can demonstrate there are more businesses, savings, income, investment, and employment, for the communities who received cash than those who did not.

The final problem is the alternative of giving in kind does not solve those problems. For example, if you give somebody a bag of wheat or a tin roof, they often simply sell it to get cash anyway, so it does not get you around the problem. Your anxieties about dependency and misuse apply just as much to providing the things in kind; it is just much less efficient because they sell the bag of wheat or the tin roof for a fraction of the price you paid to get it to them.

Dr Puri: The evidence coming out from a lot of the RCTs Rory is talking about, and in systematic review—putting a lot of RCTs together—is that cash also works in conflict situations, where markets have been decimated but you are able to create a multiplier effect of 1:2 when you are giving cash. That essentially means you are creating a greater income of $2 for every $1, even in conflict and disrupted areas where there are no markets initially; that has been brought out quite strongly.

There is also an idea that cash will be wasted on temptation goods, but the evidence does not bear that out. In a lot of the impact assessments we do at IFAD, using the same methodology Rory spoke of, we look at comparison areas, at where IFAD is going in, and at packages of interventions. We are also looking for other outcomes; not just the hunger and food security outcomes, but poverty and market access

outcomes, because they are a pathway to getting to better and higher welfare.

For every dollar of investment you are putting in, we are finding you are able to not only co-finance—with respect to co-financing $5—but you are also able to get impacts of 20% increases in market access and food security. The Food Insecurity Experience Scale goes down by more than 10%, and this is measurable primarily because we are using these counterfactual base studies. They are imitating randomised control trials, but we are going in with packages of interventions and you can measure the change attributed to a lot of these interventions. We do not see any evidence of wastage of the kind you are talking about.

The other part I want to support with respect to cash is the idea that one-time intervention leads to greater investment than multiple; the idea of multiple dosages, which is what it is called in RCTs, only leads to more livelihood expenditure but not so much asset creation.

The last point I am going to make is about the clarion call for evidence. FCDO would do a lot of good and would create a global good if it not just nudged itself but also nudged the international community to invest in better evidence—how can you implement these programmes? What works? What should the implementation structure be? What are we doing on the ground? What frequency can you use to deliver a lot of these programmes for hunger and poverty? We need a lot more evidence in that space, and we do not have it.

Q65 **Chair:** Dr Puri, collating evidence tends to make consultants fat, and Rory is talking about trusting people. Is that the main dichotomy here?

Dr Puri: The last part again, please?

Chair: You are advocating evidence; Rory is talking about trust. I am putting words in your mouth, Rory. Is there a middle ground on this? I do not want another consultation period and more evaluation costing £500,000 when people are starving.

Dr Puri: Respectfully, it is a false choice. If we want to do more of SDG 2, or any of the SDGs, we need $3.9 trillion on one side, but we also need to figure out what will work to get us to those SDGs.

With respect to hunger and food security, what is the first choice you would make? If I ask you what the most important thing you should be doing is, the answer is completely different if you go to Rwanda or Kenya, so you need to know what will work and what the magnitude of those changes is going to be. Again, respectfully, Chair, I do not think it will cost you $500,000. We now have GIS technology and artificial intelligence; a lot of this can be done extremely cheaply, as can RCTs and quasi-experimental evaluations.

Q66 **Chair:** Is that research not there now?

Dr Puri: No. There is quite a bit of research on cash transfers; you can also say the impacts of cash transfers go from three to seven years depending on the overall outcome. I would not advocate for more RCTs for cash transfers, but I would advocate for more RCTs and quasi-experimental evidence on looking at interventions that are going to create markets. If you want to put out and catalyse a new market with respect to a green loan, put out a 0% loan and create a market for completely new spaces; I would definitely advocate for evidence there.

The other thing I would advocate for is thinking a lot more about how to combine cash with asset transfer, livelihood training, livestock, financial inclusion and land security. A lot of emerging evidence says this works and it works in the long term. We have the methodologies today to try to test that, but we cannot use a systematic or critical amount of evidence.

Chair: You have completely thrown me, thinking research is not in place to justify the billions—if not trillions—that have been spent over decades and decades.

Q67 **Mr Sharma:** Rory, it is nice to see you back. Does the FCDO's current approach to food security programming empower people to make decisions about their futures?

Rory Stewart: There is a lot of good rhetoric around this. The FCDO has a phrase in their International Development programme saying, "Success means unleashing the potential of people in low- and middle-income countries to improve their lives." In practice, a lot of their programmes are not really doing that.

One example is they are still very reluctant to use large lump sum cash outside a particular humanitarian context; they want to control the choices people make much more closely. That will be comprehensible to everybody on the Committee because it is partly a political problem; there is partly a problem of selling to voters the idea you might be giving cash.

If you think about welfare at home, we have moved away from thinking the way to help people in the United Kingdom is to give them food vouchers or to specify that they should buy clothes for their children, for example. We give them cash because we know it is very bureaucratic, wasteful and cumbersome for the Government to try to guess with every family whether you need a new skirt for your daughter or food.

The genius of cash is it acknowledges that each individual in a village is different. You might want to open a small business; I might want to put a roof on my house. You might have an aunt who is ill or you might be trying to get two kids into school. You might not have children at all; you might want to open a bakery. You may want to open a bicycle shop or you may want to invest in your cow.

Instead of somebody going house to house with a clipboard, asking everybody what they want and then trying to get all those things for them, you save 90% of the cost by giving them the cash and letting them get on and make those decisions themselves. Even if some people waste it, the amount of money they waste is tiny compared with the amount the bureaucracies of big agencies and non-profits are able to waste in trying to micromanage the system.

Q68 **Mr Sharma:** Dr Puri, how do different development interventions, such as traditional agriculture programmes and cash transfers, complement one another to work towards achieving SDG 2?

Dr Puri: I would turn the question around a little. I do not think we should go to every country in the world and say, "We have the formula for you." I would be a little humbler and say, "Cash is not the answer to everything." You need individual-level interventions; cash is a good example of that, but you also require the more public, community-level interventions, for example, training and nudging the system in completely different ways. A lot of those investments will be climate-resilient, low-emission; that is not going to happen by itself, and we need the government systems in place to nudge these markets in a very different way.

It is also important to think about agroecological interventions. That is not going to happen by itself and it is really important for that nudging to occur from a more supranational or community-wide institution that comes in and says, "These are the non-financial incentives we can put in place." Again, we are getting a lot of good evidence on that. The key is that the communities need to be together in a lot of this decision making.

We know from the RCTs that the same intervention is going to have a far greater level of satisfaction when you bring communities together to make decisions. Even if you are getting the same monetary outcome, the level of satisfaction is going to be far greater when you involve communities. That is the localisation agenda, but I think it needs to be far more intentional with respect to inclusion and participatory methods, and you need to think of them as a package.

The other thing is focusing on how you create those institutions. You have the non-banking financial institutions. When you are looking at agrifood systems, a lot of these are informal systems, so it is the non-banking financial institutions coming in. They need to be nudged to go towards, say, the women, the vulnerable, and those who do not have collateral. How do you nudge those? You have to bring them all in. While individual and household-level giving is important, institution building that needs to occur at the same time is supremely important.

Q69 **Chris Law:** Could either of you tell me with a straight yes or no if the FCDO-funded food security interventions reach the most vulnerable and marginalised communities?

Rory Stewart: Not enough.

Q70 **Chris Law:** Okay, Rory, a quick question for you to begin with then. How could it reach those communities? And then, Dr Puri, how effectively does the FCDO recognise the relationship between climate vulnerability and gender in its programming?

Rory Stewart: On the plus side, FCDO has financed social safety net programmes. You will have heard about the Benazir Income Support Program in Pakistan and programmes in Kenya. That is part of DFID's wheelhouse; it traditionally did a lot of work on extreme poverty.

It is more complicated around climate finance investment, such as the Green Climate Fund. Quite a lot of that money is pretty slow; quite a lot is going into middle-income countries, and not to the extreme poor. As Dr Puri was saying, we are now in a situation where we can use AI on remote targeting to be able to identify the extreme poor much more rapidly than the way we were able to in the past.

For example, in Togo, during the first stages of covid, they used metadata from mobile phones for the urban poor, who tend to own phones, and by looking at who they called, who the people they called had called, where the missed calls were, and where they were located, they were able to get information on household poverty equivalent to a 60-minute household survey and were able to distribute electronically to 150,000 people in a few hours. This programme would have taken traditional agencies many months to do, so some things are changing.

The fundamental question for FCDO is whether it is prepared to put the question of the poorest, the most vulnerable and marginalised, back in the very centre of the mission statement to the organisation, or whether it is going to be endlessly tempted by charming ex-diplomats to drift the money off to things that sound as though they might be development-suitable or OECD-suitable but could be looking after refugees from middle-income European countries in Britain, who are in a lot of need but not the poorest people in the world. They are not people living on under $2 a day and frequently cannot eat more than once a day, or perhaps even once every two days.

Dr Puri: In terms of targeting, FCDO and a lot of other institutions can do a lot better; Rory spoke about this. Drawing on a lot of the research from this space and from IFAD, we have type I and type II errors. A type I error is not targeting people in real need, the poor and the vulnerable that you are speaking about; committing that error is unforgivable and indefensible. A type II error is bringing people who are relatively well-off into your overall target area; I am less worried about that. You have to try to see the cost-effectiveness of how you deliver your intervention.

The challenge is that most institutions do not spend sufficiently in figuring out how to target well. You do not want to leave out the poor, vulnerable, voiceless, or disempowered, and that is the indefensible part of what

institutions forget to do, because they think, "Let's just spend money that's going to be sufficient, and it'll make itself available to those who need it." We know trickle down does not work, as Thomas Piketty and others have told us. Targeting well so we are not committing type I errors is very important.

The second part of your question is with respect to climate finance. FCDO is committed to IFAD, IFAD has climate goals, and we are committing to 45% of our overall investment being climate finance. It is also committed to additional climate contributions that are going to be 100% climate, but there is a meta-level question here: what counts as climate?

It comes back to the point Rory was making: as an international community, we need to be far more credible on what we are calling climate finance. A lot of washing goes on, and we know currently we are just looking at what gets tagged as climate. You are either using the RIO methodology or the MDB methodology, both of which are very coarse and are only looking at what is tagged as climate, but you really want to see what is happening on the ground and what is the outcome. No institution takes it far enough; even with the current ESG reporting systems we do not get to see the overall improvement we are making in climate resilience, or even just resilience.

Q71 **Chair:** Why?

Dr Puri: Because we are not pushing them far enough. I am going to hop back to the 1930s. Just before the great depression, the entire commercial world was being told, "We need to look at our assets and liabilities in the same way we need to have a standardised system of understanding the health of our firms." We did not do it and we got the great depression, which is when the world essentially woke up and said, "We need to have this double-entry accounting system," and an entire cadre of chartered accountants was then essentially created, even though it was considered too expensive in the late 1800s and early 1900s.

That is exactly the point we are at now; we are essentially closing our eyes and saying, "Yes, we are going to believe that every dollar going in is probably going to make a big difference because it is climate-tagged," but we do not know.

Rory Stewart: To follow up on your question, Chair, part of the problem is, if something sounds nice on the surface, nobody is incentivised to look very carefully at what the impact is, particularly when it comes to international development. If you set up a huge fund for healthcare in the United Kingdom, the recipients of the funds are your voters, your media is looking at it, and there is direct accountability and taxpayers paying.

Push the money out to Somalia, none of those mechanisms are operating. The Somalis receiving the money do not have access to the British media, they are not taxpayers, it is not their own money coming, there is no accountability mechanism, and there is nobody they have

elected. We spent $1.3 trillion in Afghanistan, and Afghans consistently would say, "We're not seeing anything; this is rubbish," but there was very little incentive anywhere in the system to look at and measure it seriously.

A criticism I sometimes get on cash is people say, "But it causes envy between villages." If the next-door village gets cash, all the other villages want to know why they did not get it, whereas the other villages do not care if the next-door village gets a traditional development programme. Why do the other villages not care? Because they do not believe the development programme is making much difference to that village.

Q72 **Chair:** You were a Secretary of State; what did you do to challenge this?

Rory Stewart: Not remotely enough. And why not?

Q73 **Chair:** Is it that you were busy?

Rory Stewart: It was not that I was busy. It was partly because I could not work out how to sell cash; I really struggled.

Q74 **Chair:** So you think cash is the answer, not accountability?

Rory Stewart: Accountability is part of the whole thing. If you were accountable to the community, and you said to the community, "Would you rather get cash or would you rather a bunch of people from an international NGO turn up and do a training programme for you?" What would they say?

David will experience this with his own constituents. If you say to a farmer in the Lake District, which was my constituency when I used to be an MP, "Would you rather somebody gave you £45,000 cash to spend on your farm, or would you rather spend £45,000 on a consultant who's going to turn up and tell you how to farm?" They would be pretty clear about what they wanted to do.

Dr Puri is right: cash is not the answer to everything; there are other things you need to put around it. If you think again about agricultural policy in Britain, you cannot just allow the farms to do whatever they want; you have to have regulations and incentives in place. You want to encourage them to plant trees and make environmental and eco-investments, and you design systems around that.

International development is not like that; it is a crazy world that does not exist in the developed world, where we are far more patronising. We have in our heads that we have to go around the world teaching everybody how to fish when the reality is they already know how to fish but do not have the money for a fishing hook, or they do not want to fish; they want to open a bakery.

Chair: Or they need a fridge to put the fish in.

Rory Stewart: Yes, they want a fridge.

Q75 **Chair:** Sorry to labour this, but you gave the example of Afghanistan; was it $1.3 trillion?

Rory Stewart: Yes, from the US and its allies.

Q76 **Chair:** And you are implying that went on the wrong projects?

Rory Stewart: It is absolutely staggering. There is some wonderful stuff; The Special Investigator General for Afghanistan Reconstruction has produced a document—

Q77 **Chair:** I am leading you into your pet area, which I should know not to do. When we are looking at nutrition and ending hunger, are you also saying the money is being spent in the wrong place?

Rory Stewart: Often: 770 million people cannot meet their basic needs; maybe 440 million in Africa, up from 180 million in 1980, so you have to be really efficient with your money. We are never going to have enough money, so you have to make your money go as far as you can. It is criminal to have a $600 million programme that only has $300 million of impact because you could have helped twice the number of people.

A lot of our programmes are of that nature. It is not that they are doing nothing; there are lots of well-meaning people and a lot is happening, but nobody is asking the tough questions such as, "If I took that $600 million and spent it in a different way, would I not get a better outcome and help twice as many people?" Which is why cash is a really good benchmark.

Q78 **Chair:** And you are not saying there is fraud within the system; you are saying it is focused on the wrong thing?

Rory Stewart: No, it is bureaucracy and well-meaning waste, generally. Nutrition programmes are happening, starving children are getting Plumpy'Nuts, and food and cash are being delivered, but we often cannot even see the numbers. If you were to take UNDP and try to work out how much money goes in one end and the outcome at the other, you would find it impossible to do.

Q79 **Chair:** We have been trying to do just that and you are correct.

Rory Stewart: They do not even measure it like that; they do not know how to measure it like that. They will account for their staff on the ground as programme cost; they will say part of their output is muddled up with the number of people they are employing. But measuring these programmes in the way you would measure a medical trial is generally not happening.

Dr Puri: IFAD does measure its outcomes and impact in exactly that way; we look at what would have been the counterfactual had IFAD not been there. For example, all the measurements we have on resilience—improving resilience by more than 20% for more than 30 million people—we measure it and we say, "What would have happened to that resilience had IFAD investments not gone in?" We imitate RCTs, but we use what

are called quasi-experimental methods on market access, agricultural productivity, overall income, resilience, nutrition, and women's empowerment.

Q80 **Theo Clarke:** Rory, you mentioned that cash transfers are a very good way to get money to recipients, but technology is very challenging in certain countries. In countries like Kenya, M-PESA is a very good system, which was originally funded by ODA. How do you think the British Government can get this money to recipients in countries that do not have the technological capabilities that somewhere like Kenya has?

I am also interested in refugee camp settings. I visited some camps in east Africa, and they have a large number of very small farms, but a refugee camp is an even more challenging setting to get access to cash.

Rory Stewart: There is a technological challenge, but it is getting easier. You can now buy a simple Nokia phone for $7 or $8, on which you can run your mobile money account and get basic data about whether you can sign up for an insurance policy. Because it is a very good mechanism for delivering social payments—better than moving cash—you can have quite good co-operation with Governments, even in a very poor place like Malawi. In Malawi, phone penetration is probably running at about 60% among the extreme poor; you could drive that up quite easily to 85%. You need to build masts and have a market proposition that works for mobile phone companies. For example, in Liberia, a non-profit co-operating with the mobile phone provider has been able to build masts right out into the most remote areas and issue phones to people. We are moving quickly into a world where that becomes more and more doable.

There is then a whole interesting question about data infrastructure. Once lots of people have phones, Governments can do a lot to help them: they can gather information on them, and provide educational, health and agricultural nudges. There are also co-ordination issues. I agree with Dr Puri: if you can co-ordinate the cash with other forms of intervention, it is often much more effective.

If you know agricultural extension workers—the people who are training you in planting—are going out to a community and you can get the cash to arrive at the same time, that is good. If you know the Government are building a road out to an area, or new market investments are taking place at the same time—an irrigation programme or an electrification programme—again, the cash can go further. The technology is much closer to allowing us to do it than it was 10 years ago, but not universally. Again, not to put David or Chris on the spot, places in your constituency may not yet have mobile phone coverage, but it is getting better.

Q81 **Theo Clarke:** Is access to bank accounts not an additional challenge? We have heard evidence on previous Committees that the very hardest to reach and most marginalised do not have access to bank accounts at all.

Rory Stewart: That is why mobile money in Africa has been transformational, because you no longer need a bank account; you just need a SIM card. This obsession with bank accounts is not necessary if you are talking about people in remote areas of South Sudan. You can receive money, pay for things, and get cash on your SIM card.

Q82 **David Mundell:** Dr Puri, small-scale farmers receive only about 1.7% of FCDO climate finance, and only 6% of international climate finance targets go towards nutrition objectives. Is small-scale farming receiving adequate attention and funding from the FCDO?

Dr Puri: Those numbers are quite eloquent by themselves. In terms of climate finance for small-scale farmers, the number is less than 1%. It used to be 1.7% of overall new and additional climate finance; it is now 0.8%. This is indefensible, primarily because small-scale farmers are producing one-third of the overall food we consume, and very few large, commercial, private sector entities invest there. Especially on increasing their resilience and with respect to climate; 96% of the investment you are seeing in small-scale farmers is essentially coming from public entities, so that needs to be upped.

I am not saying FCDO needs to be doing all the investment, but it could be creating exactly those platforms where you can have more risk-taking and more ability to build the kind of infrastructure you are talking about—the digital and public infrastructure that is required—on which apps can be built.

With digital, you have to be a little concerned about the last mile; the poorest and most vulnerable. Even now, as we look at the 600 million living in extreme poverty, we have to consider they do not have access to the technology or even broadband we require for digital money, so it is important. If we can invest there, the one-time investment could be extremely useful to then create greater coverage; we have seen this in Uganda. RCT is also done in that context; it has also shown us.

Coming back to climate finance, it becomes really important to see what kind of investment needs to go in for small-scale farmers and their adaptation. I feel like a broken record, but adaptation resources are important because we are going to be seeing a lot of agricultural production be affected, for example. In eastern and southern Africa, 20% to 80% of overall agriculture is going to be adversely affected, and we will see a lot of mortality unless we ensure a lot of those adaptation resources are going to small-scale farmers.

Rory Stewart: On my own broken record side of cash, a great strength is that it allows much more flexible adaptation. It can allow a small farmer to decide to cease farming and open a bakery or set up a bicycle shop or a tailoring shop, and diversify. It can allow people to use the cash to move to the city, away from the community.

With resilience, it allows you to compensate if there is a climate disaster and to adapt very quickly to what has been killed. Has your livestock been killed? Has your house been knocked down? Has a relative been injured?

Dr Puri is making a very good case for the incredible importance of the enabling environment, the regulations, the environmental policy, and the nudges to try to make those agricultural investments more effective and more sustainable. But I do not think she is advocating for going back to a world of in-kind, specialised contributions where you are going house to house saying, "You need to plant watermelons, you need to put wheat in, you need to be growing coffee, and here are your coffee beans," and, God forbid, "We're subsidising your fertiliser," which is still happening. You want to know how money is wasted? Sadly, billions of pounds are spent on subsidising inputs into agriculture that do not benefit the extreme poor in many countries in sub-Saharan Africa.

Chair: We would be very grateful if you could write to us on any of that; it would be helpful.

Q83 **David Mundell:** What would better align the FCDO's programming on food security, nutrition, and sustainable agriculture?

Rory Stewart: I would like to see FCDO acknowledge where our strengths and weaknesses are as Britain, looking at another person's country. There is a lot we do not know about other people's countries; our staff and money are limited, so we need to focus on where the evidence shows we can do best, and we also need to acknowledge there are other players.

Do not try to replicate what China or the World Bank are doing. If those people are able to make the big loans to build roads, dams and infrastructure, that is not necessarily what you want to be using cash grants from UK citizens to do. Focus on where we have evidence, where we think we can make a difference, and probably limit the number of countries we intervene in because we are never going to have enough money to spread ourselves thinly across the whole world.

Dr Puri: While I am advocating for a systems approach, looking at cash and other parts—legislation, training and asset transfers—the one other thing we have not spoken about here is women. We have a huge wage gap, especially in agrifood systems, and we want to get agrifood systems to turn the corner and think about getting us the kind of nutrition targets we have set for ourselves.

We found this in our research and our impact assessments. We did not even target nutrition; we just targeted women because we wanted to see the empowerment indicators and the goals to be reached. Magically we got our nutrition goals as well, primarily because we were going through women and going through the overall empowerment pathway, which is really important.

So my three big takeaways are, first, systems. Please think about systems and not just single interventions, and think about communities being integrated into that decision making. Secondly, evidence. We have to think more about how we are pushing the international system, FCDO, and any other organisation interested in international development to tell us how much of a difference they are making; we do not know. Thirdly, we have to focus on the poor, the marginalised, and, separately, the women.

Chair: That is a fantastic and appreciated summary. Thank you both so much for your time. You have given us loads, which is great. Please can we pause while we bring up the next panel and invite in the next panel members?

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Ruchi Tripathi, Dr Rachael McDonnell and Dr Diana Onyango.

Q84 **Chair:** Welcome to our second panel. If I could ask each of you to briefly introduce yourselves and tell us a bit about your organisations. Dr Diana, could I start with you? Tell us who you are, who you work for, and what you do in this field around nutrition and ending hunger.

Dr Onyango: I am the head of the technical team in Farm Africa. Farm Africa is a charitable organisation working in east Africa: specifically in Ethiopia, Uganda, Tanzania, and Kenya. We are also planning to start a programme in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

We work under three main pillars: agriculture, markets, and environment. Our work is centred around the improving or increasing of agricultural production in smallholder farms in a sustainably managed environment, and increasing access to markets for these farmers. This touches on increasing food security and improving nutrition outcomes at the household level and for the community. That is us in brief. Thank you.

Q85 **Chair:** Ruchi, could I ask you to introduce yourself?

Ruchi Tripathi: It is a pleasure to be here. I lead the VSOs global work on resilient livelihoods. VSO is an international volunteering for development organisation, working with some the most marginalised communities around the world. It is strengthening their agency and voice, as well as working on system strengthening. We do this by placing volunteers within the system. We now largely work with community, national and international volunteers. We work on health education and livelihoods, and I lead the livelihoods work which is focused on informal workers and women farmers. It is bringing the world of work and food systems together to strengthen the most marginalised.

Q86 **Chair:** Finally, Dr Rachael, could I ask you to introduce yourself?

Dr McDonnell: Thank you, Chair. Thank you, Committee. I am the deputy director general of the International Water Management Institute and senior programme director for water systems at the CGIAR, which is the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research. We are a research and innovation organisation that has the world's biggest publicly funded research network with 10,000 staff across the world, working through 15 research centres in nearly 80 countries and more than 3,000 partners.

We work on many different disciplines: genetics, soil and on-farm practices, aquaculture, nutrition, diets, and markets as well as on policies and the political economy, which impact our food systems.

We have been at the forefront of agricultural research and innovation for more than 50 years, and our innovations have been responsible for significant yield increases in most of the commodity crops and in livestock and fisheries. Our micronutrient biofortification of crops such as sweet potato has led to a nutritional input for millions.

We know the challenges facing our food systems are multifaceted and very complex, as stated in the White Paper. Now our mission shows there is a need to move beyond agricultural production to more systems thinking, as stated by Dr Puri. Our mission is about science and innovation that advances the transformation of food, land, and water systems in a climate crisis.

Q87 **Chair:** Dr Puri discussed the lack of evidence about what works. Is that something you recognise?

Dr McDonnell: As a scientific organisation, we cover three main areas: finding evidence, testing solutions, and testing ideas so that our farmers are not exposed to ideas that are not already well tested. It is also about policy, but evidence is critical. It is how we stimulate policy changes and investment.

Q88 **Chair:** Exactly, which is why I am asking the question. With respect, do you recognise what she said about the lack of evidence on what works?

Dr McDonnell: The world is changing. There is not enough evidence today that captures the conditions that the farming communities are having to face. We hear about conflict, but it is the extreme events from climate change that are changing the data we rely on.

Q89 **Chair:** I am going to try it one more time: is there enough evidence?

Dr McDonnell: No.

Chair: Thank you. Nigel.

Q90 **Nigel Mills:** Can I start with you, Dr Diana? What challenges do agrarian communities in low-income countries face when it comes to climate change?

Dr Onyango: There are many challenges. Direct challenges are being faced as a result of the extreme weather events that we are seeing: we have had prolonged droughts because of the failed rains experienced between 2020 and 2023 and we have had floodings in some areas. This directly impacts agricultural production and can lead to the loss of farmland in the floods with some livestock being washed away, or the loss of livestock due to drought and a lack of pasture.

There is also the challenge they have in accessing markets. It may not be a direct challenge as a result of climate change, but it is an indirect challenge caused by the poor productivity they may be facing. They are not able to meet the market demands for the different value chains they are engaged in.

The other challenge that farmers have is a lack of accessibility to new knowledge. Due to the absence of an extension service delivery, information may not reach them. They also may not be able to access new information due to a lack of training, especially when we look at knowledge around climate and market information, and information around sustainable agriculture practices in the face of climate change.

Another challenge they have is a lack of market infrastructure, which contributes to post-harvest losses. Farmers are not able to access storage facilities. Poor infrastructure such as roads or a lack of markets also impacts on them negatively.

Q91 **Nigel Mills:** Thank you, that is very comprehensive. Dr Rachael, could you educate my ignorance on what agroecology is? How does it help address the issues that Dr Diana raised for us?

Dr McDonnell: We have seen, from the many reports that have come out, that agrifood systems, our agricultural systems, are causing damage to our biodiversity and contributing to climate greenhouse gas emissions.

Agroecology is a way of thinking. It is linked to regenerative landscapes: we know we still need to produce food, but we want to be able to produce food and also look after biodiversity. Take recycling manure systems as an example; we can reuse nature and parts of the agricultural system and still grow food. We are trialling a lot of this at the moment because we want to make sure that it is good for the environment and climate. However, it is also a framework to ensure that it is a locally framed way of working. We want to make sure that there is no drop-off in yield, and there is no impact on incomes for farmers. We are looking at and trialling it in many different areas at the moment to see if it can work.

Q92 **Nigel Mills:** Is that compatible with efforts to genetically change seeds so that they resist certain blight and do not need the same insecticides? Are these two things hand in hand or are they competing with each other?

Dr McDonnell: We can use them. Breeding has been a very important way in which we have been able to increase yields. It is not necessarily

the seeds of a new species that we are creating, it is how we are managing them. It is about whether we can we use natural pesticides. We do not have to necessarily bring in fertilisers that are based on hydrocarbons as we can use other forms of fertiliser. Therefore, it is a case of using our seeds and balancing the way we undertake production and the way we manage water irrigation. Can we add more carbon manure from the farm? Can we put it into the soil so that the soil holds more water? It is balancing across without losing production, income, or nutrition.

Q93 **Nigel Mills:** Ruchi, do you think the UK is doing a good job on this? Are we boosting it or are we in a different field?

Ruchi Tripathi: The UK can definitely support: jump on board and join the agroecology coalition which many organisations are a part of, including the EU and us at VSO.

We have developed an agroecology assessment framework which helps donors, Governments and projects assess how agroecological their projects and portfolios are because agroecology is quite context specific. It does not have a blueprint, but it has principles. It is really important to assess how closely we are advancing the principles of inclusion and diversity. Finally, to add to the definition of agroecology, for us in the civil society movement it is really important. It is a science, as Rachael said, and it is a practice which millions are involved in right now. It is also a movement. Let us not forget that food systems and hunger are also a governance failure. Placing those who are facing hunger at the centre is absolutely essential when talking about agroecology.

Q94 **Mr Sharma:** Ruchi, the International Development White Paper sets out several commitments on agriculture. How can the FCDO best fulfil these commitments?

Ruchi Tripathi: We were very pleased to see the White Paper and I would focus on three things. First is look at all the principles. The UK Government are committed to aligning their aid and spending with the Paris agreement. In the women and girls strategy, we have focused on supporting women and girls, and we have a commitment to nutrition sensitive agriculture, hopefully focusing on extreme poverty. We need to combine principles rather than look at them as silos, and look at a holistic transformation of the food system with these principles. Secondly, we need a laser sharp focus on who we are talking about. What is the strategy, especially if we are looking at SDG 2? Who are we trying to address? Are they the people living with hunger, living in poverty, informal workers, and farmers? Thirdly is what. What are we trying to do? For us, the what is agroecology which really addresses climate crisis, livelihoods crisis, food security, and nutrition. If we can focus on these, we would be doing a good job.

Q95 **Mr Sharma:** Dr Diana, to what extent are these commitments going to contribute towards the SDG 2 target?

Dr Onyango: To add to your previous question, the support provided by the FCDO has supported farmers mainly at the production level. Focusing on experiences of Farm Africa, and the projects that have been funded by the FCDO, the focus has been on improving agriculture practices by introducing and promoting climate smart agriculture practices. However, there is an opportunity to go beyond agricultural production, to scale up and look at the agrifood system as a whole.

To add to the point about agroecology, we also have to consider the social and cultural issues around the communities that we are working with and the context around the traditional norms and gender balances so that, when we are designing and scaling up these programmes, these are taken into account.

The other consideration that we should look at in terms of the food system as a whole is the biodiversity approach: going beyond the farms or agriculture and looking at the environment in which these communities are living in. This creates an opportunity for the FCDO to look at supporting programmes around sustainable land and forest management. Basically, the sustainable management of natural resources because these are the environments that communities are living and working in. If we can go beyond supporting agricultural production and look at the environment, it will build upon the food security and climate resilience of these communities.

Q96 **Chris Law:** Ruchi, shockingly there has been no UK Government international agriculture strategy in almost 20 years despite the SDG 2 being set in 2015. I want to ask you how important it is to have a strategy, and what should the key components be?

Ruchi Tripathi: It is time to update the strategy. We need to look at agriculture and food systems together as a lot has changed since the last strategy. There is a climate crisis right now, a hunger crisis, and a livelihoods crisis. We know that agriculture employs a large number of people. The agricultural policy should take into account all the areas that need to be addressed, not just production or consumption, but employment, resilience efforts as well as nutrition and the impact on the most marginalised. Again, going back to hunger being a governance failure, putting the agency and the voice of those affected by poverty and hunger at the centre would be crucial.

Q97 **Chris Law:** Dr Diana, how should the FCDO update the conceptual framework on agriculture for 2024?

Dr Onyango: Looking at the last conceptual framework, the focus was on scaling up or diversification. It was more focused on agriculture, but now we need to look at the agrifood system as a whole. We need to look at what other areas or opportunities can create sustainable agriculture-based communities, so beyond agriculture production. We need to look at other challenges that they are facing: issues around financial access,

market access, and access to information. We can structure programmes that address these challenges.

The other issue is around women and youth inclusion. Especially in African communities, the women and youth are disadvantaged because of social/cultural norms. They may not have access to the resources they need to ensure that they are in a productive agribusiness production system. We need to look at how we can empower the women and youth to actively engage in agribusinesses that are sustainable and consider also the social cultural norms around it.

Q98 **Chris Law:** Dr Rachael, is the government's climate policy putting sufficient focus on sustainable agricultural practices?

Dr McDonnell: We know that we have no choice; being sustainable is not a nice to have. The FAO's "The State of Food and Agriculture" 2023 report highlighted the trillions of costs and the externalities that are not being included such as the loss of biodiversity and the pollution of water. These are not things that we can brush under the carpet and move on from. We have to be able to have agrifood systems, and it is possible to have agrifood systems and the production that we need if we bring in best practices. These best practices often used to be there, but now, with the scale of production, we need to be able to take on board the impact on greenhouse gas emissions and biodiversity, and develop practices that reflect that.

Q99 **Chris Law:** My last question is to you, Dr Diana. What interventions are most effective in helping farmers to adapt and become more resilient to climate change, which Rachael has just touched on?

Dr Onyango: Climate smart agriculture interventions look at issues such as promoting regenerative agricultural practices. These are practices that will allow farmers to continue producing more in the face of climate change. They will be able to farm in situations where there is less water availability by using practices such as mulching which uses less water. They will also be able to get the yields they need by using products such as drought-tolerant seeds.

When we look at pastoralist communities, promoting livestock breeds that are more drought-tolerant or survive better in a drought situation, such as camels and goats, will ensure that they become resilient in situations where there is a prolonged dry season or drought. Basically, looking at such practices will ensure that farmers are able to adapt to the challenges of climate change. It is also an opportunity to look at research around new innovations or approaches that can be integrated into these systems.

When we bring in research findings, we have to consider the traditional knowledge that may exist in the community and community practices. How can we integrate it to make sure that we are able to come up with practices, methodologies, or approaches that address the need for them

to be able to buy into it, rather than just feeding them information or knowledge in a top-down approach that does not really address their needs? A participatory approach in coming up with solutions that address the challenges is essential.

The other way that you can support communities is access. I mentioned three main areas of challenge and one is finance which the previous panel also talked about. Some communities are not able to access credit facilities, so how can we get these facilities in a way or form accessible to these communities? M-PESA, as was mentioned before, is a way to channel funding to these communities.

Access to information and extension services is still a big challenge in many communities in Africa. Farm Africa has piloted an extension service delivered by village-based advisers where community members, who are more knowledgeable than others in particular areas, are supported and trained to provide this extension service to their fellow community members. They are also supported technically by Government service delivery agents. It makes sure that there is a communication delivery channel for weather and market communications that trickles down to communities.

The other is linkages to markets. That is still a challenge where we need to bring in the private sector because we have private importers and exporters. They need to be brought onboard to work with organisations such as Farm Africa and other charity organisations to link farmers to markets.

Chair: We still have quite a few questions, but we are getting tight on time. Could I ask people to give us succinct answers, please?

Q100 **David Mundell:** Dr McDonnell, against a backdrop of rising food demands and predicted failing crop yields, what do you think the role of scientific research is in supporting food security?

Dr McDonnell: The prediction is that, because of climate change, yields are going to drop between 20% and 80%. We need new types of crops that are at ease with the conditions, whether it is changing the length of a growing season or the availability of soil moisture or salinity. It is very much about being able to breed and test new crops, new practices on farms, and new markets. Science has to be involved because our current systems will not be able to sustain the yields that are there at the moment.

Q101 **David Mundell:** As it came up in the previous evidence session, what do you think farmers' approaches to these new types of crops are? Are they open to them?

Dr McDonnell: As a research organisation, we reflect what Dr Diana was saying. We are research for development, so we work with Governments and farmers. They are part of defining the research we do and a part of the research and trialling. We then work with small and medium

enterprises in scaling up those findings, so seed distribution and things like that. Farmers are very much there, as Dr Diana was highlighting. There is a need for knowledge.

One of the ways in which we have been able to spread the knowledge of some of these innovations in Zambia is through a reality TV show called "Mondo Makeovers". On a Sunday afternoon, 650,000 listen to on-farm practices and learn about technology, not only from our organisation but others, too. It is about knowledge sharing, reaching farmers and being able to show evidence that it does work in Zambia or in this particular context. Locally developed innovations are going to be critical.

Q102 **David Mundell:** In that programme, do you makeover a farm?

Dr McDonnell: Yes. In similar programmes in the UK they do up a house, but here they do up a farm, bring in innovations, and show how they work. There is a similar programme in Kenya but this is the TV company that we, CGIAR, took our innovations to and worked with. Many watch this TV programme; we estimate about 2 million people.

Q103 **David Mundell:** Dr Diane, do you think that that approach will encourage people to change practices? Overall, what do you think farmers and communities are looking for from scientists?

Dr Onyango: Farmers would actually love to get research findings. There is a bit of a disconnect in some situations in the trickling down of information from the research and packaging the information in a way that farmers understand. For farmers, what is their goal? They want to increase their yield and increase their income. If there is anything that can address these two issues, they will welcome it. However, they are also risk averse. They will not jump on a new approach, methodology or seeds, without seeing how it works, what the impact is, and what the cost is. Is there an additional cost paid for it? We then go back to knowledge and information around this: how do they use it? What more do they need to know about taking on this new practice?

In such situations, we use farm models through those village-based advisers. Basically, if there is anything new that we would like to introduce we trial them on these farms and the farmers can compare their yields with the yields from the model farms which are also used as a training ground. Farmers are then able to take on these new approaches and methodologies.

Q104 **David Mundell:** Do you encounter much resistance from people who just want to pursue traditional practices? In Scotland, we encounter people who say that things have always been done in a particular way and they are not very open to doing it differently.

Dr Onyango: Yes, that happens. It still happens quite a bit in different farming practices but fortunately there are farmers who take on the risk and are willing to try new things. We use them as examples of whatever practices we are promoting, and to continue to educate farmers who are

stuck in their traditional ways. However, the change in weather patterns does not allow for farmers to stick with the traditional ways because that does not work anymore. They are not able to realise good yields from their agricultural production so they have to pick new things, such as using drought-tolerant seeds, because for the last three years we have had below average rains. They had to take on seeds that were performing better in dry conditions, and they had to take on new practices that allowed them to farm with less water availability. So climate change is also driving them to change their practices.

Q105 **David Mundell:** Ruchi, do you think there are any pitfalls around the use of new technology and research?

Ruchi Tripathi: It depends on who controls them. Often, when scientists ask women, their choices are different so it depends on what problem the technology is trying to address. That is really important. What we found is that farmers learn best from each other and in their own circumstances, so not in model farms or lab conditions.

Through FCDO-funded programmes in Zimbabwe, we have been supporting an agroecology school in Masvingo where farmers have come and learned from real-life examples. This mixture of indigenous knowledge and scientific knowledge, as well as knowledge from the elderly and young is so important to address the current crisis. Technology is not neutral. It depends on what problem it is trying to solve and who controls it.

Q106 **Chair:** Ruchi, could I just follow-up on that? It concerns me that there is a lot of money to be made in this field. F1 seeds came in 30 years ago in the UK and there was a lot of marketing around them. Dr Rachael talked about fertiliser and there is a lot of money and emissions around that too. Do you have any concerns that there are commercial interests in this field that could impact on the long-term sustainability for local people?

Ruchi Tripathi: It really depends on what the purpose is. If we are trying to address hunger and food security, then we need to invest in people who are living with hunger, which is smallholder farmers and women, and we need to address the underlying barriers that they face.

If we are trying to look at growth, then we can invest in large businesses, agribusinesses, and companies. It depends on the purpose. VSO, again with FCDO-funded programming, has been working with the Tsuro Trust in Zimbabwe which has been saving indigenous seeds. It has set up a seed bank because, once farmers lose control of their seeds, they are dependent on the market and lose indigenous knowledge. There are definitely pitfalls that we need to address.

Q107 **Theo Clarke:** Ruchi, to what extent do you think the FCDO's agricultural programming supports nutritional outcomes?

Ruchi Tripathi: The FCDO has been a champion around nutrition for a while. What I would say is let us look at nutrition holistically because you

have direct nutrition interventions and nutrition sensitive agriculture which, for us, would be agroecology. You need diverse seeds for diverse diets—which are in the hands of farmers—rather than looking at only nutrition-sensitive approaches. The holistic approach is really important for us.

Through FCDO-funded education programmes, we have been setting up agroecological kitchen gardens in schools in several countries, so we have integrated it as part of our education because an understanding of nutrition and the eating of diverse diets is so important. That is why I go back to seeds. If you lose diverse seeds, you lose the opportunity of having diverse diets. Our diets are becoming ultra-processed. We are dependent on just a few handfuls of crops globally. So, for us, the nutrition debate has to be opened up. Again, FCDO is a champion in this area, but we need to come back and look at agroecology and nutrition as a whole, including investing in women's empowerment.

Q108 **Theo Clarke:** Rachael, to what extent do you think the FCDO and other Government Departments are consciously aligning food security policy to work together, or are they not?

Dr McDonnell: We talked about systems right at the very beginning, and you cannot look at the food system by itself because there is a climate system, a water system, an environment system and, of course, an energy system. We have not mentioned the energy system; building a dam to generate hydroelectric power can influence irrigation and aquatic food systems downstream. What we see is that the FCDO is a great supporter of CGIAR. They are the third-biggest funder—that has been important—and they have really catalysed a number of the innovations that I have been speaking about today.

Can we think more broadly as a system and link in the funding for water, energy, and the environment? There are ways that we could do that. We are delighted to work with UK research institutions, and we are beginning to do that with a new amount of funding. There is a lot of overlap that we can bring in terms of our understanding of the global south, and the ability to link it to global north innovation, but some new thinking is needed if we are going to really address the big problem for SDG 2.

Q109 **Chair:** Do you see FCDO filling that gap and leading on that thinking?

Dr McDonnell: It can be part of the catalyst, as Dr Diana mentioned. There are investors out there. One of my memories from last year was going to an investor forum in Zambia where there was a lot of money available to invest in agricultural systems, where we have already shown that new technologies and ideas are going to work. We see the FCDO working with us on blended finance and on ways of scaling through because the FCDO or USAID—whoever is investing—is not going to get us anywhere near where we need to go. However, tested solutions can then be taken out through the agricultural extension agencies and other areas like that. We see it as a critical role.

Q110 **Theo Clarke:** Diana, what do you think the impact has been of the ODA cuts on smallholder farmers, but particularly women?

Dr Onyango: I have first-hand experience on this. I was managing a Farm Africa four year project that had to end one year earlier than we had intended as a result of the cuts. In that particular project, we were looking at supporting pastoralist women to recover from drought through a good distribution initiative which also had a strong component on household nutrition and nutrition for children under five.

Fortunately, because of some activities around hygiene behaviour and improving household nutrition, most of those activities were done earlier in the year and we had very good impacts and outcomes on those activities. However, one of the things we had integrated in the project was the development of good business enterprises around goat rearing and that is what suffered the most. We had already created the foundation to support these communities to improve on their nutritional outcomes however, we were not able to finish the sustainability aspect: the businesses and the enterprises that we continue to support and sustain. This has had a long-term effect on the nutritional outcomes of the communities that we were supporting.

Unfortunately, these are pastoralist communities, so they suffered other challenges after the project depletion which continued to impact them negatively. Based on that experience, we can see that the cuts did have an impact on the communities that were being supported by those projects in terms of the impact on the food security, nutritional outcomes, and enterprises that were being supported through the implementation of activities happening on the ground.

Q111 **Theo Clarke:** Finally, Ruchi, do you think the FCDO is ensuring its programme design is leaving opportunities for women's voices to be heard?

Ruchi Tripathi: We are really pleased with the women and girls strategy. Now is the time for it to run, particularly in the area of food security and hunger where we see women as being the most impacted. However, women are also farmers. They are the holders of indigenous knowledge, of seeds, and of so much promise. We would love to see how the women and girls strategy, and the food systems or agricultural strategy, come together to strengthen women's own agency, their voice, their access, and control over their incomes and resources. As soon as you work with women farmers, you have to invest in their capacity and address the underlying barriers they face, be that violence or their unpaid care and domestic burden. Integrating SRHR economic justice programming is what we are looking towards.

Q112 **Chair:** Thank you very much. Is there anything any of you would like to add?

Ruchi Tripathi: Just a small point. Ensuring food security and livelihoods is really important for ensuring peace. Some of our programming is in a

fragile context, including in post-conflict Mindanao in the Philippines where we have made a small investment in agroecology. It is bringing the community together and keeping the peace. It is also changing the image of the camp—these are ex-combatant camps—so do not to forget the peace dividends.

Q113 **Mr Bacon:** Dr McDonnell, you mentioned that you are starting to co-operate with some UK research institutions; which ones?

Dr McDonnell: The John Innes Centre.

Mr Bacon: I thought you would say that because it is in my constituency.

Dr McDonnell: I did wonder.

Mr Bacon: I was going to point out that they are probably Europe's leading plant and nutrition science research institution, but you are co-operating with them already.

Dr McDonnell: Scotland Rural College, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, and University of Leeds. These are early-stage areas, but we are going to be working with other ones as we expand this programme.

Chair: Witnesses, thank you so much for your time. We now have loads to start chewing away at and seeing what we can come up with. If you have additional thoughts that you could put into written evidence for us, either after this session or as we go forward, that would be very welcome. Thank you for all you are doing in this field; it is deeply, deeply appreciated. I would like to now end this session.