

International Development Committee

Oral evidence: The UK Government's work on achieving SDG2: Zero Hunger, HC 515

Tuesday 4 February 2025

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Members present: Sarah Champion (Chair); Monica Harding; Laura Kyrke-Smith; Noah Law; Alice Macdonald; Brian Mathew; David Mundell; James Naish; David Reed; Sam Rushworth; David Taylor.

Questions 165 - 210

Witnesses

I: Rt Hon Anneliese Dodds MP, Minister of State for International Development, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office; Jen Haugen, Deputy Director, Global Food Security, Agriculture and Land Department, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office; Chris Carter, Deputy Director, Head of Human Development Department, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Anneliese Dodds, Jen Haugen and Chris Carter.

Q165 **Chair:** I would like to start this session with the Minister for Development. Thank you very much for making the time to be with us here today. This is our final session on nutrition for growth. It is something that this Committee really cares about a lot. We have taken evidence over both the last Parliament and this one, so we are going to give you a lot of quickfire questions to try to get information out of you. I wonder whether you want to introduce the team that you have brought with you as well, please, Minister.

Anneliese Dodds: Yes, I would be delighted to. I have Jen Haugen and Chris Carter, who are both working at a senior level on nutrition in the FCDO. I am really looking forward to this discussion. Thank you very much indeed for having me, Chair. Do tell me if I am going on for too long because I know you said this needs to be quickfire.

Q166 **Monica Harding:** Hello and welcome, Minister. Can I start off by asking you how your Government will differ from the last in their approach to achieving the second sustainable development goal on zero hunger?

Anneliese Dodds: We think we need to shift our approach in response to our partners in the global south and their concerns around nutrition and food security. First of all, we think we have to push hard for reform and shifting the international systems on this so we have more effective investment where it is actually needed. We talked about this in the last session, but that has to apply when it covers nutrition and food security as well. That means the reform agenda that we have been pushing with the multilateral development banks and other parts of the international finance architecture, with much more of a focus on smaller agrifood businesses and actually getting that support where it is needed.

Secondly, we believe we have to respond to countries' own plans around this agenda. For example, the Kampala declaration is one that we strongly support and are working with African nations around that 10-year plan to deliver greater food security.

We think this is very important when it comes to humanitarian support as well. I will not go into that, but hopefully you have seen the commitments that we have made as a new Government. Those have been seeking to shift the dial in a number of areas of humanitarian need. We are also really seeking to drive that change when it comes to integrating nutrition with climate and a strong focus on adaptation. I am sure we will get on to this in more of the questions, but I have seen for myself how important that is and we are seeking to drive that forward.

Q167 **Monica Harding:** The cuts to UK aid in 2021 disproportionately impacted nutrition. Can you lay out how you are either going to return that to the level it was before or increase the proportion of ODA that is spent on



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nutrition?

Anneliese Dodds: Those cuts were damaging particularly, of course, because they were unplanned. This was a chaotic period. The previous International Development Minister is on the record as saying, for example, that this led to food being taken off the plates of children in Yemen. Those were his exact words. This had a direct impact on that programming. We are determined not to see a return to that chaos and to have a much longer-term approach.

As you know, we have the one-year SR. We talked about that in the previous session. We now have the multi-year spending review coming up. We are looking at our programming and spending, covering nutrition but other areas as well. Key for me is going to be joining this up and making sure that we have a focus on nutrition where it is needed because it applies in so many other areas as well.

Q168 **Chair:** Thank you, Minister. Following up from that, how do you plan to engage with philanthropic organisations to maximise where your money can go?

Anneliese Dodds: That is a really important point. There are philanthropic organisations that have different forms of expertise on this agenda. I had a really useful discussion with Bill Gates around this. Clearly, he and his foundation have been doing quite a lot of work around climate resilience, animal husbandry, vaccination and so forth.

The UK has done quite a lot of work with him previously. We have announced additional work since that meeting. We are seeking to use those partnerships as part of that overall approach to make sure that we are working directly with global south countries, as we talked about before.

Q169 **Chair:** Specifically on nutrition, you would be open to that.

Anneliese Dodds: I would be if it is in line with that approach of long-term partnership, where we are really focused on what countries and communities themselves say they need in order to drive this forward. That means having a sustainable approach that is embedded in local communities, where we move away from perhaps, for want of a better metaphor, a helicopter-style approach and instead have something that is really embedded in local communities and economies. That is what would be important for me.

Q170 **David Mundell:** Achieving SDG2 by 2030 is looking increasingly unlikely. How are the Government going to lead on renewing global progress towards that goal?

Anneliese Dodds: Thanks so much for raising this. It is really worrying to see quite how far off we are from SDG2. Three-quarters of a billion people are going hungry. That is one in five people living in Africa at the



moment. We are clearly far off. We have to work with other countries on this.

Of course, we have some key moments coming up. I am sure the Committee will want to ask me about the big Paris financing for nutrition conference that is coming up soon, but there are many other areas where we need to continue to focus on nutrition. That includes climate finance, more generally financing for development—the Seville conference on that is coming up—and seeking to work directly with our partners in the global south on this.

Q171 David Mundell: You pre-empted me because I did want to ask about the nutrition for growth summit. You had indicated when you were here previously that you might be able to attend. I wonder whether you are able to confirm that or whether the Foreign Secretary might be attending. If you are, what have your preparations been? Do you intend to make a pledge at that summit?

Anneliese Dodds: I am really delighted to say to the Committee that, barring any kind of mishap, which I hope will not happen, I will definitely be at that summit. I am really looking forward to it. I know it is going to be a really important one. I know the Committee had a discussion about this previously with Briec Pont, the French special envoy for nutrition.

We are indeed working right now on our approach to that summit. I can tell the Committee now that we are considering setting a target for integrating nutrition objectives across FCDO's ODA portfolio so we can have a maximum impact on tackling particularly malnutrition through all of our programming. We want to encourage others to do the same as well, so we are working on exactly how we are going to deliver that at the nutrition for growth conference right now.

Q172 David Mundell: Does that mean a specific pledge when you are at the summit?

Anneliese Dodds: It means we are working towards setting a target for integration. In terms of whether we would set aside a specific figure of ODA for that purpose for the future, we will not be doing that. We will not be through the spending review by that point, but we are determined to make progress across all of our programmes on this agenda.

I know that issue of integration has been really important for the previous Committee before the election. It is something that has been highlighted as missing from the FCDO's approach, so we are determined to try to lead on that and hopefully bring some other countries in with us.

Q173 David Mundell: Essentially, that means no new money.

Anneliese Dodds: The spending review will look at whether there will be new money, continuing money or reduced money across the whole gamut of options. We are very well aware that the UK needs to make sure that



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we support communities in food insecurity, build resilience for the future for communities and, above all, work in partnership on this agenda.

- Q174 **Chair:** Minister, if I can just push you a little bit, I hear what you are saying. It absolutely should be integrated, as I would say things such as WASH should be across all the programmes that we are doing on gender equality, but sometimes you need specific project funding for nutrition. Is this an either/or situation or do you see the potential for both to be taken into consideration in the spending review?

Anneliese Dodds: It is not a situation where ensuring that there is integration should reduce a specific focus on nutrition. I am pleased that the UK co-founded the child nutrition fund. That is specifically focused on measures around nutrition and nutrition-specific supplies. We may come back to that later, but clearly in many contexts it is going to be very important, as it will be in relation to our humanitarian programming, as we talked about before.

That integration point is critical because there are very few areas that the Department works on where we cannot consider nutrition as part of the picture.

- Q175 **James Naish:** I was just going to ask this, given the warm words you have used about nutrition. I do not believe there has been an updated strategy since 2017. Is there a commitment to updating our nutrition strategy from the FCDO?

Anneliese Dodds: We have been determined to make sure that we have coherence around our approach to nutrition. Certainly since I came in, over the last six months, that has been really important for the Department. That started off with our commitment in Rio. I am really pleased that I have Jen and Chris here because they were working hard, with other officials, on the commitment to the Global Alliance against Hunger and Poverty, which was one of the first things that I was involved with as a new Minister.

We are seeking to make sure that we have coherence and that we always have an updated approach that is fit for the future. That integrated lens is going to be fundamental as we seek to develop longer-term partnerships with key global south countries into the future. I do not view this as a separate track of work from the rest of the body of what we are doing in ODA programming within the FCDO.

- Q176 **Monica Harding:** Minister, previous commitments to global nutrition include ringfencing interventions such as MMS and ready-to-use therapeutic food to treat children and for maternal health. Would you look at bringing back specific ringfenced funding commitments to nutrition programmes?

Anneliese Dodds: There are always challenges with ringfenced funding because it reduces flexibility. However, it can be important. It can be an important signal as well to others; it can hopefully crowd in other



countries to adopt similar approaches; and it can send a signal across the whole system that a certain outcome is really important.

On this issue we are really determined to make sure, when it comes to the most food insecure situations, that we are exercising leadership and we are working with the World Food Programme, UNICEF and others to make sure that those specific supplies for children are available. That was really important when the Prime Minister announced that he would support the UN initiative against child wasting and that we would seek to play a leadership role on that. That has not involved ringfencing so far; it is much more about making sure that we are really focused on this in those interventions for the most food-insecure people, particularly children.

Q177 Brian Mathew: Minister, how will you measure the contribution your Department's climate and conflict stabilisation programme makes to improve food security and nutrition outcomes?

Anneliese Dodds: We got a little bit into this and we will have more of a discussion about value for money et cetera with the Committee in a wee while. With every such programme, we would be seeking to look at the outcomes of it. That includes nutrition.

In relation to our agricultural programming—we may come back to this later—so much of the climate adaptation-related work is also about producing more nutritious diets because so much of it is about diversification. I will not go on about this because of the Chair's injunction to be brief, but I saw this myself in Zambia around the reform that we have been working on with the Zambian Government. Previously, it was mono-species. Every farmer got a sack of maize and a bag of fertiliser every year. We helped support reforms that have saved that Government loads of money and enabled farmers to diversify. They can buy a whole range of seeds that are both more climate resilient and more nutritious because there is a broader category of foodstuff that people can use to feed themselves.

Q178 Brian Mathew: Leading on from that, you mentioned the impact of the value for money framework. Do you currently have an impact or value for money framework for SDG2 or is that something that is coming?

Anneliese Dodds: That would not be separate from the overall work on value for money. That is ex ante at the stage of the development of concepts and business cases; there is a process of assessment while programmes are ongoing; and there is an ex post assessment as well.

I am seeking to ensure that we do a much better job at pulling together the work of the Department and that we have much more clarity, certainly for me as the Minister and more broadly, around where we are achieving particular outcomes. That is ongoing work within the Department. I am sure I will speak to the Committee about that at some



other point. There would not be a separate regime applied for value for money for different SDGs.

Q179 **Brian Mathew:** What progress has been made in tracking food security outcomes across UK Government programming?

Anneliese Dodds: I know that the Committee would be well aware of this, but much of that work would be context-dependent. Within situations of severe humanitarian need, we would work with partners around this. That work—and we may come back to this—very upsettingly and frustratingly, in Sudan has got harder because they have not been willing to allow the famine assessment to take place into the future. In other contexts, that assessment would be part of the overall approach to the programme, whichever one it is. For example, again when I was in Zambia I saw work related to the health and nutrition of babies and their mothers. There was a thorough assessment going into whether this had actually resulted in better health outcomes for those children and their parents.

Q180 **Alice Macdonald:** Thank you, Minister. Going back to a quick point you made around climate financing and adaptation, I think that currently 2% of climate finance goes to small-scale food producers. Does the UK Government have a target to move that upwards in terms of our contributions to climate finance or pushing other partners to scale up the percentage that goes to small-scale farmers?

Anneliese Dodds: That has been a big part of the kind of reform that we have been pushing as a new Government. We find too often with climate finance that the funds may actually be there but they are very inaccessible for needs. Where we see a greater focus on making these funds more readily available and tailored to the needs of countries, you tend to see more of them passing through into a smaller agribusiness for example and actually being able to be accessed by smallholders in particular. I know that that has been a particular concern of the Committee and that you had some hearings with them. We do not have a direct target for UK spending on this, but, given our focus on adaptation particularly and our reform agenda, it has been really critical for us.

Q181 **Noah Law:** Moving on, Minister, do you measure the impact of your hunger-related programmes on people with disabilities?

Anneliese Dodds: Yes. We are determined to ensure that we have a positive impact on disabled people. Often they will be at the sharp end of food insecurity for a variety of reasons. We are going to ensure that these issues are part of our disability inclusion and rights strategy. I know that that is something that the Committee has been interested in before. We are working on that at pace with Minister Timms.

We have the global disability summit coming up in Berlin. We need to make sure that it is updated and covers issues such as this as well. There are specific examples of good practice that I could draw on here. When it comes to measurement, we are also encouraging others to make sure



that support gets to disabled people. I have certainly raised this with a number of UN agencies, for example, to try to make sure that they are seeking to support disabled people, including in food security.

Q182 Noah Law: We have talked in the past about cross-departmental working and your role in women and equalities. Can you perhaps elaborate a little bit more on how that collaboration works with Minister Timms' Department?

Anneliese Dodds: Yes, absolutely. We work really closely together. We now have lead Ministers for disabled people in every Government Department and we meet together and talk about the policies that we are trying to put in place where we are trying to achieve that change for disabled people. For the FCDO specifically, as I mentioned before, we are producing a refresh of that strategy. Those who were on the Committee before will remember there are a lot of good commitments within that strategy, but, in our view, it requires updating for current circumstances. Minister Timms and I have been working on this. As I said, we are going to be announcing that refreshed strategy at the global disability summit. That is at the beginning of April in Berlin.

Chair: Minister, it really makes me happy to hear that. It has been a failing for far too long, so thank you very much for leading on that work. I appreciate it.

Q183 Laura Kyrke-Smith: Thank you, Minister. One of the tests for me of the impact of our nutrition programming is whether it is reaching those who are in the hardest to reach areas, whether they are geographically isolated or facing multiple intersecting vulnerabilities that make it hard for them to access programming. What measures are we taking to ensure that our programmes reach those people?

Anneliese Dodds: We are working hard on this. We created a new resilience fund that is focused particularly on fragile contexts to try to make sure that we are supporting in that way. That is quite flexible funding that is available to posts to use in order to support in these kinds of circumstances. That is in addition to the work that we have undertaken on these matters in relation to the major humanitarian crises that the Committee may want to talk about individually. I am very happy to talk about them if that would be useful.

Q184 Laura Kyrke-Smith: Thinking of places that are hard to reach, I have to ask about Gaza almost a week after the effective ban on UNRWA, knowing that, since the ceasefire, 60% of the food aid that has got into Gaza has been through UNRWA. What is your assessment of the situation there and what are we doing to ensure that food aid is still reaching people in Gaza?

Anneliese Dodds: After the announcement of the ceasefire, we saw radical scaling up of the number of trucks that were going in. There were 600 trucks getting in, rather than the far lower number that we had seen previously. We have been clear, however, that there must be a



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resumption of trucking commercial supplies into Gaza. That has to be part of that stabilisation. Of course, that is part of our overall commitment, which is to see a shift from phase 1 to phase 2 and eventually into a two-state solution.

You mentioned UNRWA. I think the Committee is aware of our position that we believe that only UNRWA has the scale, depth and indeed mandate to be able to operate in Gaza as required. That is relevant, as you mentioned, for food security and particularly for education and health. We would say that it is even more relevant there, but there is that knock-on impact on food security as well.

Q185 **Chair:** You spoke about a flexible fund that went out to posts. Is that in a specific number of countries or all ODA-eligible countries? How is that divided up?

Anneliese Dodds: That is specifically focused on fragile contexts and trying to develop the resilience within those contexts. As the Committee knows, unfortunately we have seen the number of fragile and conflict-affected states increasing over time. As a Department, we have specific programmes that already operate in different contexts, or focus on different aspects of food security and other core requirements for populations, but we felt that there was a need for something to be available that was more flexible and could be drawn on in that sense.

Q186 **Chair:** Is that the integrated security fund, or is it separate from that?

Anneliese Dodds: No, it is not part of the ISF.

Chair: It is a separate pot of money.

Q187 **Monica Harding:** Minister, do you have an update on UNRWA that you could share with us?

Anneliese Dodds: I have been in discussion with Tom Fletcher, the emergency relief co-ordinator, around the planning overall of the UN system around this. I am sure that colleagues will also be aware of the Government's general diplomacy in relation to what is taking place. We are seeing a reduction in food insecurity compared with the situation previous to the ceasefire, but we want to see a much more sustainable approach for the future when it comes to food security, but also particularly water and sanitation, given the extent of destruction of healthcare and other services too. We are working with other partners on this. We have a number of engagements over the next few weeks that seek to work closely, as I said, with other countries and the UN on these matters.

Q188 **Alice Macdonald:** I have a couple of questions on global co-ordination and then co-ordination within FCDO. I will confess that I worked on this in my previous life. In March 2024, there were 27 World Food Prize laureates who called for a global plan to tackle the hunger crisis, because of a feeling that there are so many different initiatives. We have heard so



many today. There is nutrition for growth. There is the Global Alliance against Hunger and Poverty. They are all welcome, but to me it sometimes does not feel that they all join up into a holistic plan. Do you think we are missing something internationally when it comes to the global plan to tackle hunger?

Anneliese Dodds: That is a really interesting question. We have the key moments to try to focus the world's attention on nutrition and food security. Clearly, the Paris summit is going to be very important in that regard. I have to praise Brazil's leadership on this, because I think the global alliance was a really significant measure, using the G20 and its presidency of that to try to push forward change. I am really delighted that the UK is on the so-called board of champions for that initiative, and that we have been particularly involved with policy sprints in relation to it.

That was a good example of partnership working across countries, trying to identify what is actually going to achieve a change here. Let us not try to create an entirely new structure that is overarching. Instead, let us focus on what we can do and push forward in a relatively short space of time. One policy sprint that the UK has been involved in has been around social protection and its link to combating hunger and poverty. Brazil obviously speaks with authority, because one can see the positive shift that has taken place in improving food security within Brazil under President Lula's leadership. It is great that it has used that to try to push things forward.

Q189 **Alice Macdonald:** When it comes to the UK and the previous Government, we have a list of all the different strategies that had some reference to global food security and nutrition. I think that there was a commitment to develop an internal sustainable global food security strategic framework. Is that continuing? What is your go-to strategy or policy within FCDO to make sure that this work is being co-ordinated effectively?

Anneliese Dodds: This boils down to that point around integration that we are seeking to push forward at the Paris summit. Unless we make sure that we are sensitive to nutrition and, yes, that there is the specific focus where it is needed, we will end up with some of these matters not being properly integrated into programming and potentially even with the situation moving backwards. One of the most disturbing things I remember from Rio was seeing overall graphs of improvements across many parts of Asia when it came to nutrition, but then seeing, for example, that in India among many women it was actually getting worse, for a variety of reasons to do with access to protein and other things as well.

That integration mindset, rather than another bit of paper with the word "strategy" written on it, is going to be very important. Since I came in—I will not go on about this, given the Chair's injunction to be speedy—in the different visits that I have undertaken, I have been able to focus on



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nutrition-related interventions and what we are doing to try to push this forward, whether that is, for example, in relation to forest governance and how nutrition is part of that, as well as economic growth, by seeking to develop forest products and improve population health, or in many other contexts.

Q190 Alice Macdonald: If you are an NGO or someone external looking to track how the Foreign Office, under this new Government, is progressing on this agenda, where would you look to see what the metrics are?

Anneliese Dodds: You could look at DevTracker. That has become my best friend and I know the Committee is very interested in it. That is a great resource. I want it to become even greater, actually, so that it is much easier to find information about programming. Also, they will be able to look to that summit coming up and what we are going to say there. For me, some of the most important things are what the UK does directly, what we can support others to do and how we can push that reform globally, working particularly with our global south partners. I mentioned before the Kampala declaration work in particular with African nations around this. I think that that is going to be really important.

Chair: Minister, we love DevTracker too, but under the last Government it tended not to be updated that frequently. Is there is any way that you can keep your momentum going so we get it timely updated? Also, I know that you are really across your brief on this, so if you want to write to us on anything that would be fantastic as well.

Q191 James Naish: In our notes, it says here that the UN Environment Programme found that the UK scored only 41 out of 80 for policy coherence on SDG governance. You mentioned the word "coherence" earlier and we need things such as nutrition to be cross-cutting. What work is being done to make sure that our scores from an external perspective are improving?

Anneliese Dodds: That will be important and of course there is going to be an external report on our commitments made at the nutrition for growth summit as well. My view is that the more accountability we have around this the better, so that we can seek to ensure that UK interventions on this are delivering and we are seeing that integration. It has been helpful to understand the assessment of other bodies and we need to make sure that we are, if at all possible, moving in a positive direction in the future.

Q192 David Taylor: Hi, Minister. Thank you for coming in again. I am now turning to questions related to how SDG2 relates to some of our broader policies around trade and Alice's question around debt. There are two questions on trade specifically. First, have assessments been made about the potential impacts of UK trade agreements on food security in low-income countries?

Anneliese Dodds: There are impact assessments for new free trade agreements. They are publicly available. The assessment that has been



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made of them by the independent Regulatory Policy Committee is that they are rated as green, so they are deemed fit for purpose. That included an assessment of their overall global impact.

We are working as a new Government on how we ensure that we can pursue UK domestic interests and support developing countries as well, so that we can harness trade for long-term development in particular. This is an agenda that I am seeking to work on with the Department for Business and Trade. We are in a different context around many of these questions than we were, for example, pre Brexit and we need to make sure that we have an integrated approach.

Q193 David Taylor: To change the tune slightly, we have talked about smallholder farmers a bit already. I know that the FCDO provides some funding to help smallholder farmers, recognising that they have a role to play in food security, particularly within their own countries and maybe regionally as well. Partly because of my background of working in the Fairtrade Foundation, one thing that I observed was that there was not much support going to smallholder farmers who were exporting to the UK beyond BII.

Quite a large proportion of those farmers actually have food insecurity themselves because they are not getting enough money for the goods, so the tea, coffee, bananas and so on. I wondered whether there are any reflections on that point. It strikes me that we have a special obligation to help farmers who are exporting products to our markets and who themselves cannot actually afford to eat.

Anneliese Dodds: That is a really good point. There is activity from the UK Government that is pushing in a positive direction on this. Particularly, I noticed this when I was in Malawi. Some of the discussions there are really interesting, particularly comparing that with the readout from your meetings as a Committee with smallholder farmers.

There is a big debate going on in Malawi around the appropriate scale of farms, whether there should be more consolidation, how they could work with larger farms and so forth. One key problem is, as was mentioned, that they are in a huge bind on foreign exchange, which the Government are working really hard to try to deal with in Malawi. Increasing exports is an enormous priority, even aside from the impact on individual smallholder farmers and living standards more generally. We have been specifically supporting macadamia and mango exports. We are also supporting mining. Yes, they are three Ms. I do not know exactly why it has ended up like that; it is a slightly weird coincidence. That has been really quite important in seeking to enable that foreign exchange resource. That is critical for so many countries, as well as the impact on farmers' own food security and living standards that you have rightly mentioned.

Q194 David Reed: Thank you, Minister. I am conscious of time, so I will just do a few quickfire questions on FCDO internal capacity. Having the right



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specialists in the Department will be important. How is the FCDO attracting and retaining the specialists it needs to contribute meaningfully to SDG2?

Anneliese Dodds: It is a very good question. The review of development that has been undertaken by Minouche Shafik that we talked about previously in the Committee focused specifically on capability and capacity within the Department. There is a food and agriculture professional cadre of 45 technical experts working specifically on these issues for the UK Government and across the globe. I have seen that in action with a number of the visits that I have undertaken. They really are absolute experts in their field.

We need to make sure that we have that expertise, but also that we are flexible enough to be able to work with others on this agenda. We have some amazing UK research institutes, for example. A number of them are in the central belt of Scotland, but they are also in Norwich and elsewhere. They really are important for the Department as that source of expertise, as well as the in-house expertise.

Q195 **David Reed:** On the point of the Minouche Shafik report, can we have an update please? Will it be shared with the Committee?

Anneliese Dodds: As I said previously, I am really happy to have a session with the Committee to talk about the review and go through the core lessons from it. It would be great to work with you all on this, so I agreed to that at the last session.

Q196 **David Reed:** The report itself will not be shared with us.

Anneliese Dodds: It is a report to the Foreign Secretary, as with all of the different reviews. Quite a lot of it is technical and focused specifically on those development capability and capacity issues, which I know the Committee is really concerned about, but it goes into a huge amount of detail on them. I know, however, that you, like me, really want to see change on this. You want to see a boosting of that capability and capacity, and a restoration of the UK's reputation on international development, so it would be really good to speak about this with you soon.

David Reed: To confirm, it will not be shared with us.

Q197 **Chair:** Rather than going down that route, Minister, if you are able to share a copy with us, even if it is in a read only capacity, that would be deeply appreciated. Thank you.

Anneliese Dodds: I think that we agreed that we would have a discussion about it and that we would share the core findings of it with you, so we are seeking to take that forward.

Q198 **Chair:** Thank you very much. Do you know when we can expect that?



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Anneliese Dodds: It will be as soon as I can. I am sorry that I do not have a precise timescale, but I know that the Committee is really interested in this.

Q199 **David Reed:** The last Government informed the Committee that there would be a recruitment round for technical specialists in this area in 2024. Has this taken place yet?

Anneliese Dodds: I do not know whether previous government commitments around recruitment in this area have been fulfilled. I know that, more broadly around capability and capacity, when I came into role as Minister I worked with officials to ensure that we had a programme to increase our capability and capacity. That has included a recruitment programme for a large number of staff, particularly focused on areas where we needed to buttress our expertise.

Some of that was around fragile and conflict-affected states, and I would have expected that to relate to some of the issues we are talking about, but I am not sure about a specific commitment from the previous Government. I will not be unfair about this, but there were quite a number of commitments without always a plan to deliver them. I do not know whether that fell into that category.

Q200 **Sam Rushworth:** I have two questions. The first is about the degree to which centrally managed programmes are making use of the knowledge of in-country staff. What do you do to ensure that that knowledge is being shared?

Anneliese Dodds: Generally there is sharing of knowledge, but there is always more that can be done. When I was in Indonesia, I visited a forestry management programme that involved elements that were based in-country and from centrally managed programmes too. I felt that it was a really good example of bringing together the broader expertise with that in-country knowledge, because every social system and political system is going to be different. The context for the local economy is also going to be different.

In many places there is that integration but there is always more that can be done. As Minister, I am keen to ensure that we are as joined up as possible so that we can target our interventions. On top of the centrally managed programmes, we need to make sure there is integration of multilateral activities too, whether that is the World Bank or other UN agencies.

Q201 **Sam Rushworth:** This is a slight departure from nutrition, but nutrition has a close relationship with immunisation. We know that children who are not immunised are more susceptible to disease, but so are children who are malnourished.

There is concern in the donor community about the replenishment of Gavi. The understanding seems to be that the Government cannot commit until after the spending review, and yet the replenishment round



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is in March and countries around the world are looking to the UK to see what we do. There is a real danger that, if we do not commit in March, neither will other countries, particularly middle eastern countries, where we may be able to exercise some leverage. We could then roll back on years of progress fighting and eradicating infectious diseases. Could you speak to that?

Anneliese Dodds: Yes, of course. We are really determined that there must be successful replenishments, whether we are talking about Gavi or indeed the Global Fund. There are a number of replenishments that are coming up. When we are talking about multi-year commitments, of course we have to consider the context with the spending review. It would not be appropriate for me to say that we can ignore that. I do not think that other Departments would be happy with us saying that and I am not actually sure that the taxpayer would be happy with us saying that we were not looking at these issues as a Government in the round.

We are in discussion with Gavi, as we are with the other major health organisations, looking towards replenishment at the moment. I believe that I have a meeting with the head of Gavi next week. That follows from other meetings that I have had with Dr Sania Nishtar. I am really looking forward to that to talk about this and how the UK can support that process, but also, as was mentioned, how we can try to broaden of the donor base. I know that Gavi has been doing a lot of work around that itself and we are keen to work with it on that.

Q202 **Sam Rushworth:** With other Departments, there is an assumption that budgets will stay more or less the same until the spending review. Are we in a position with Gavi where we will be walking into that meeting in March unable to commit any funding?

Anneliese Dodds: With respect, I do not think that there is an assumption necessarily, so maybe I misunderstood the question. In every Department, there is an assumption that there needs to be a really thorough review of budgets and indeed zero-based budgeting where possible, so that there can be that really thorough analysis about whether we are delivering best value for the taxpayer. I am determined to achieve that as the Minister for Development, just as every other part of the new Government will be determined to do as well. These issues around having proper fiscal competence that can be trusted are really fundamental. They are important for our economy as well as for Government.

Q203 **Sam Rushworth:** Where does that leave us in March?

Anneliese Dodds: I just spelled it out to you. I can repeat it again if you like. We have been really clear that we want to see a successful replenishment of Gavi, as with the Global Fund. We have been working with Gavi on this. We continue to have those discussions. I am aware that, ultimately, Gavi delivers good value for money for those who invest in it. Many pounds of benefit are realised for each individual pound of funding that goes into Gavi. The UK has traditionally been one of the



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biggest funders of Gavi, so we are working with it right now on its replenishment, but I cannot pretend that the spending review does not exist, because it does.

Chair: Minister, we are hoping from what you have said that you are going to fight tooth and nail. We were one of the founders and you are right that it is exceptionally good value for money.

Q204 **David Mundell:** I am very much onside on both the Global Fund and Gavi. Anything that you can do in that regard is extremely welcome. I wanted to go back to the nutrition part of the discussion and ask for you to say a bit more about how the Department works with the likes of the Roslin Institute, which the previous Committee visited, and John Innes in Norwich in terms of taking forward the development of more nutritious and affordable foodstuffs.

Anneliese Dodds: That work has been really important. I would also mention the Pirbright lab. I believe that there is an Edinburgh-based initiative called GALVmed as well that has worked on livestock vaccines. This is clearly absolutely fundamental work that also contributes to other Government goals. I was just thinking while you were talking about that. We had a meeting this morning on global health. Of course, veterinary health is very much relevant for global health more broadly too.

We are really clear that investment in those kinds of initiatives and that kind of research is not only important in the global south and situations where there is food insecurity. It has also been really important for UK farmers. We were looking previously at some of the figures for CGIAR and the UK's contribution in relation to that overall research programme, which many of these institutes are plugged into. UK farmers gain between £1.60 and £2.40 in productivity benefits for every pound that the UK Government invest. This is cutting-edge UK-focused activity and jobs within our own country, which is then leading to those really positive results globally, but also with a positive for our UK-based farmers. They are benefiting from that research too.

Q205 **Alice Macdonald:** As a Norwich MP, it is very good to hear the tribute to the John Innes Centre and all the work that it does. I wanted to go back to the issue of debt. The previous Committee found that debt cancellation is one of the most cost effective things we can do as a Government. You have done a lot of work on this already. It would be good to hear how specifically that will impact on nutrition. One idea that has been pushed by people such as President Joyce Banda, the former President of Malawi, is the idea of suspension of debt for countries that are at risk of backsliding on food and nutrition and, in a similar way that there are these debt suspension clauses around climate, having that on food security as well. I wondered whether you have been thinking about anything specific around debt and food insecurity.

Anneliese Dodds: Yesterday I set out a number of measures that we are seeking to take in relation to debt. I called on particularly the private



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sector to work with the UK on the take-up of majority voting provisions and other changes that we want to see. We want other countries to be much more transparent in their lending as well, as the UK is.

One element that I mentioned was precisely as you said around climate-resilient debt clauses. I know that the Committee will be aware of these. I am really pleased that, under the new Government, we supported the World Bank to be able to deliver that and to mainstream it through its lending, quite rightly. I know that there have been calls to think about whether there could be a broader debt holiday related to other forms of crisis that might impact on a country. We have been quite focused on climate-resilient debt clauses because that has been a particularly strong call from people such as Mia Mottley, for example, and what she said was needed.

We are looking carefully at all of this. The key thing for me is that, while the nature of debt now may be different—in fact we talked about this at the last hearing—to that back in the 2000s, the impact of it is the same when it is reducing countries' domestic resources that they can use, whether it is to support nutrition or indeed health or education.

Q206 Monica Harding: Minister, many of us have noted with concern what is going on in America in the moment with USAID. I would be interested to know what your response is to that. What impact will it have on the UK funding programme and our partnership with USAID? Can you reassure us that we will not be following but will hold steadfast in our provision of UK aid?

Anneliese Dodds: As the Committee would expect, we are currently working to assess the implications of the US funding pause across development sectors. There is still a lot that is unclear, as you will have noted, I am sure, as well, but we are actively gathering information. We are also carefully calibrating our engagement with the US and looking for opportunities to influence, based on our shared objectives between the UK and the US. I know that the Committee will be aware that there was news that emergency food aid and lifesaving humanitarian assistance should be exempt from the pause in US foreign aid. We are currently assessing the implications in other humanitarian sectors.

You asked, rightly, specifically about UK development activity. We are very clear about our priorities. We are clear about what we want to achieve through development and I set that out in the previous session when we were together. We are really determined that we restore our development reputation and we work in partnership with other countries, particularly global south countries. That will involve working with the United States, but it will also involve working with many other countries. I have been having a lot of discussion with a whole variety of countries that are keen to contribute to development and humanitarian support. That kind of engagement needs to continue into the future.

Q207 Chair: On that point, a number of Committee members have colleagues



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who have been directly impacted. It is a big concern for us. Do you know of any UK-led projects that have been compromised as a consequence of this at this point?

Anneliese Dodds: We are assessing all of this currently. These decisions are decisions that have been taken by President Trump and his Administration. He was elected by the US population, as we know, with millions of votes. It is ultimately a US policy decision.

Q208 **Chair:** I am not challenging his policy decision at this point. I might in the future. I am asking whether we have any UK projects that are now vulnerable because they have lost key staff members or funding, for example?

Anneliese Dodds: We are assessing this currently. I am confident that our programmes are resilient programmes. Whenever there is any change in development policy by a range of countries—and we have seen many of them changing their approach over recent years—there will be an impact from that. Certainly from the UK's point of view, we are clear about our approach. We are clear about what we want to achieve and that is not going to change.

Q209 **Chair:** The work is ongoing to see what that impact is.

Anneliese Dodds: Yes, absolutely. I believe that that is in common with every other country. We are calibrating with our friends on that.

Q210 **James Naish:** On a similar theme, this is a risk that maybe we were expecting. How long has the Department been preparing for the announcement that came from America? Is that something that we have been working on for a period of time? How long will it be until you get to the point where you truly understand the impact?

Anneliese Dodds: I do not think that the Committee will be surprised to hear me say that there was quite a large amount of trailing of different elements of President Trump's agenda before the election. The Department was well aware of this, as with every other upcoming election, and we have a number of them in fact coming up that may be of relevance to development issues. Of course this is looked at carefully, but, at the risk of sounding like a stuck record, we need to be clear about what we want to achieve as the UK. That is really important.

We are determined to keep working with the US. We have been talking about nutrition, for example. The US is traditionally a very significant contributor to food security in a number of countries. I was in Ethiopia not so long ago. It has been a very significant provider of food aid there, as well as of course in Sudan and in other contexts. We will seek to continue to work with the US on this and other issues, and indeed with other countries, and be very clear about our objectives in doing so.

Chair: Minister, you have been very gracious with your time and experience. It makes our job easier to have a Minister who is all over



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their brief, so thank you very much for that. We really appreciate it. I think that you have satisfied Committee members, which is quite a tough challenge, so congratulations on that. Thank you again for your time and thank you for your team as well.