

# International Development Committee

## Oral evidence: Aid for community-led energy, HC 849

Tuesday 16 September 2025

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Members present: Brian Mathew (Chair); Tracy Gilbert; Noah Law; James Naish; Sam Rushworth.

Questions 108 - 159

### Witnesses

**I:** Baroness Chapman of Darlington, Minister of State for International Development, Latin America and the Caribbean, FCDO; Steven Hunt, Senior Energy Innovation Advisor, Research and Evidence Directorate, FCDO; and Chris Taylor, Deputy Director for Clean Transitions, Energy, Climate & Environment Directorate, FCDO.

### Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Baroness Chapman of Darlington, Steven Hunt and Chris Taylor.

Q108 **Chair:** Thank you very much to everyone for coming today. We will kick off with topical questions on a few unrelated points to the main body of the thing. It would be very helpful if we can just rattle through those. To start on Sudan, will there be any reduction of aid to Sudan in the coming financial year?

**Baroness Chapman:** We were asked not to do that, to protect our spending in Sudan, Ukraine and Gaza. That is the instruction I have had from the Prime Minister, and that is what I intend to do.

**Chair:** I think that is as clear as mud, as they say, so thank you.

**Baroness Chapman:** I think it is a bit clearer than mud.

Q109 **Chair:** Could you run through the efforts of the Government since the London conference to secure greater access for aid deliveries?



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

**Baroness Chapman:** That is not easy. We have secured additional financial commitments, and we have the agreements that were signed up to after the conference on the protection of aid workers. Since then we have seen some quite devastating situations with the targeting of aid workers in a convoy in Darfur. We are doing absolutely everything possible, principally with partners, to get aid where it is needed, but we are in a situation, not unique to Sudan, where we are trying to respond with a humanitarian response to what is essentially a political crisis. It is very difficult to get the impact we want on the ground. We know that ultimately we need a cessation of violence and all the warring parties to stop what they are doing to allow the access that is needed.

Short of that, we are fighting, with IRC, the UN and local partners, to try to do what we can but I don't pretend to the Committee that we have been able to magic up the kind of access that is needed to support the population. A lot of what we are doing is about supporting people who cross the border and who are traumatised, who urgently need nutritional support and psychosocial support. There are a lot of unvaccinated children, people who need important health interventions, and we are trying to educate those children and provide opportunities.

This is by far the biggest humanitarian crisis on the planet today, but we come back to the point that what we need here is some cessation of the conflict to enable us to do the work that we want to do.

Q110 **James Naish:** This is more related to the previous question. It is great that there is a commitment to Sudan, but there are a lot of displaced people who are moving into periphery countries. What is the commitment to recognising that in the support for surrounding geographies?

**Baroness Chapman:** That is a good question. We have put additional support into Chad and South Sudan specifically for that population. We must not underestimate the pressure that puts on the political economy, apart from anything else, in those places. We understand that very well in this country. Imagine what that does when you are fragile to begin with. We are doing that, and Chad is relatively stable. If you look at South Sudan and what they are trying to contend with there, and even things that have happened in the last day or so, it is doubly difficult. We need to continue to do that, but you are absolutely right, it has meant that we have had to put money into those countries.

**James Naish:** Broaden the horizons a little bit.

**Baroness Chapman:** Yes, that is right.

Q111 **Chair:** It is always good to look at successes, if there have been any. I imagine the fact that everyone is working together is a success, but are there any particular successes you would like to highlight?

**Baroness Chapman:** I must admit that I have not thought of it like that. One of the things I complain about other people doing is that we always focus on the problems in the latest disaster, and that takes our attention.



It is a fair challenge to me to think of successes. It is true that at Adré we are working very well, and we see good co-ordination between different UN agencies and NGOs to get the aid that is needed into Darfur, which is one of the most difficult places to operate in the world now. That is true.

One of the things we might want to talk about in a future session, when we are looking at the UN80 process perhaps, or more widely, is how co-operation can work—and how too often it does not in-country—when that experience through necessity has broken down some of the barriers that may have existed between agencies when the pressure is not quite so intense.

Q112 **Chair:** I drove to Adré back in the day, during the rainy season, so I know the territory. It is quite a challenging place even without all the other ramifications. Unless anyone has anything else they want to raise on Sudan, we will move on to water, hygiene and sanitation support. What comment did you receive from your Africa Approach consultation about the priority of water, sanitation, and hygiene?

**Baroness Chapman:** Talking about the Africa Approach, I need to pay tribute to Lord Collins who did an impressive job of leading that over the summer or before. I have had nothing but positive feedback from all the participants in Africa, and here as well, about their experience of taking part in that.

Water and sanitation is clearly a priority because it is so fundamental to health, dignity and wellbeing, so of course it is a priority. The approach that African nations wish us to follow is more about enabling their systems to be stronger so that they are able to make sure that those services can be delivered to their people and their citizens and they can be held to account for it. We agree with that, and that is right. The challenge is how we transition from a grant-based way of funding those services outside of humanitarian crises, which is slightly different, to make this more sustainable and available to people more reliably in the long run.

We are shifting more to an investment model, and WASH is a very good example of how that can be done. The message that we have had through the Africa Approach is a desire to shift more to that way of working. We have been listening to that and working out how we can use perhaps BII to address some of these things or how we work with our other investment vehicles to try to encourage that.

We need to take the messages from the Africa Approach and implement them. As you know, it mostly was not about development. It was about growth in economies, and about African countries saying they want to have more agency and be more partners with us. That fits very nicely with the work that we have been doing on development.

Q113 **Chair:** Out of interest, if I said WSUP, does that ring any bells at all?



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

**Baroness Chapman:** No, not to me. I don't know if it does for my colleagues. What is it? Do you know?

**Steven Hunt:** Water & Sanitation for the Urban Poor.

Q114 **Chair:** Yes. That naturally has an affiliation with investment and all those things. I don't know if it is still active.

**Steven Hunt:** I have not recently caught up with WSUP, but I can certainly find out.

Q115 **Noah Law:** One of the challenges, in my experience of WASH projects, is making them investable and identifying the correct pipeline of projects. I appreciate that you could perhaps write to us in detail about this, but it would be interesting to hear what steps the likes of BII and partner institutions are taking to address that challenge, because it is a real challenge. I am sure that you are aware that it is difficult in practice, even though we would like to wave the magic development finance wand to address the issue.

**Baroness Chapman:** Yes, it is true in every policy area that, when you are looking for investable opportunities, they don't introduce themselves to you. You have to go and find them, and sometimes you have to do development work to build something to the point where it is investable. This speaks to the way that we need to work with our teams in-country. BII, just to refer to it again, needs to look at the expertise that it has in-country and what it is asking people to do.

Sometimes it looks for the bigger-ticket investable opportunities, and from a development perspective there may be more occasions—and this is what I think I am getting towards, although we have not had a conversation with BII about this yet—to look more at SMEs and some of the things that may take longer to show a return, but we know from the UK that the engines of growth, employment and opportunity can often be found in the SME sector.

I want to spend some time over the next few months looking at the way that we find and choose investments. If we are going to shift more to that way of prioritising, we need to make sure that we are doing it in the most impactful way. Sometimes we are, but I think we can probably spend a bit more time thinking about that.

Q116 **Chair:** I have two WASH-related questions, which you may want to get back to us on. What assessment has been made of the impact that the reduction of UK ODA will have on WASH and the progress that has been made?

**Baroness Chapman:** We have done our impact assessments on the decisions that have already been made, and we have published those. That is all available to the Committee if you want to have a look specifically at WASH. There will have to be another round of that, clearly, because we are making decisions now about bilateral allocations and we



are looking at all our centrally managed programmes, so we have further work to do.

We have prioritised health and climate, and WASH services speak very much to those priorities. I expect there to be an impact because of the nature of the cuts that we have made, but if we get this right and do it responsibly and work with Governments in the way that we want to, I hope that the immediate impact can be diminished. I hope, and the intention has to be, that we are able to move things forward, strengthen systems and get the investment in the right place so that, in the longer term, we continue to see the improvement that we have had in the last couple of decades.

**Chair:** If those reports could be made available.

**Baroness Chapman:** It is all there. I can send them to you, but they are published on the internet.

Q117 **Chair:** That would be great. Thank you. Lastly, how will the Government mitigate the cross-cutting effects of any reduction in WASH?

**Baroness Chapman:** I think that is where impact assessments are really helpful, because they will look at the cross-cutting effects on women in particular or people with disabilities. If there are particular impacts that we see affecting particular populations, as we make our next round of decisions we will be able to move money and reprioritise or reflect what the impact assessments show us in the decisions we are about to make. We don't just do impact assessments and publish them to give you something to read—well, the last Government did not publish them at all—they have to inform decision making. That is the whole point.

That is the next stage of what we need to do to make sure that, as we go forward, we don't do so blindly but use the insights that we have to try to avoid the outcomes that we are conscious we want to prevent.

Q118 **Tracy Gilbert:** I have a few questions moving on to women and girls and, in particular, the Women, Peace and Security National Action Plan. We are about to mark the 25-year anniversary. What successes and milestones can we celebrate for women and girls that have been delivered through the UK's Women, Peace and Security National Action Plan?

**Baroness Chapman:** It is very difficult with this at the moment. I think we are conscious that in many places this is contested like it has not been for a very long time, and that is to do with political leadership and the prominence that is given to these concerns. Although undoubtedly there have been achievements in women's participation in politics and political leadership, there has been impressive progress there, the rights of women and girls in some places are better, but if you look at women's bodily autonomy and wider conversations around gender, we see the risk of rollback here.



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

The responsibility that we have as women politicians in the UK is to take these arguments into multilateral discussions and show that we are not backing off in this space at all, and that we want to see more women gain their economic independence and rights over decision making on health. It is not that things have not got better, they really have. Maternal death rates have drastically improved and the age at which women have their first child has increased. These are all good things but, unless you get the piece about rights, voice and expression right, eventually those things will be harmed too.

I think we are at a moment of jeopardy here, and it is right that we have Harriet Harman now leading work on women and girls as well, but I am worried about this. We have the UN General Assembly next week, and at all the sessions we go to we will be talking about women and making sure that keeps the prominence that it has had.

**Q119 Tracy Gilbert:** From this plan to the next one, what do you think we could do differently to improve the outcomes for the next national plan?

**Baroness Chapman:** That is a really interesting question, and we need to think about it properly, but the things that jump out at me are continuing progress on health. That is pretty fundamental. We also need to work with leaders in other countries to try to get them to stay the course and strengthen their resolve, to make sure they don't feel that they are unable to articulate some of the things that they really think and feel on this issue, on behalf of their population, because they feel it would compromise or jeopardise some of their other priorities. That would be a disaster, so it is important that countries like the UK, EU partners, the Canadians and others create space for those discussions, and encourage and support that when we can. It is contested in a way that it didn't used to be, and we thought we had won all these arguments. It turns out we haven't.

**Q120 Tracy Gilbert:** On the national action plan, going forward, do you think there will be more of a domestic focus for us in the UK?

**Baroness Chapman:** More of a domestic focus as in—

**Tracy Gilbert:** The plan looking towards internal UK.

**Baroness Chapman:** I don't know. I honestly had not thought of that. I don't know. It is an interesting question. Do you have a view on that?

**Q121 Tracy Gilbert:** I have many views on it, but we don't have time to go into it. It is interesting for us that the Government manifesto, in terms of violence against women and girls, is determined to fix these things, but with the Supreme Court judgment there is quite a lot of work to be done.

**Baroness Chapman:** Yes. I see what you are getting at now. We have a lot of work to do in this country, for sure. From my point of view, it is useful that we are progressive, and we have many policy points that we can point to in the UK when we are having conversations with



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

international partners. We can say, “Working in this way is not just good for 50% of your population. It is great for your economy and your standing in the world. There are good reasons that are in your interests, apart from the fact that we all have to live as humans alongside one another and get on and empower one another, all of that, but it is in your best interests”. It really matters from a diplomacy point of view.

I was the lead member for children’s services in Darlington. The safeguarding issues, domestic violence, all of those problems that continue to be surfaced and exposed in a way that is putting them right in front of us now—child grooming, all of these things—tell us that there is still a huge amount of work for us to do. That is about policy, leadership, our court processes, enforcement, awareness, policing, all of those things. We know we still have a huge journey to go on. I am at serious risk of straying on to Home Office colleagues’ territory, but you asked my opinion.

**Q122 Noah Law:** Very briefly, you mentioned the contestation of the very concept that we prioritise women and girls in development. Do you expect that to be strongly contested in the UN General Assembly?

**Baroness Chapman:** I don’t know if it is formally. I think it is sometimes more subtle than that, and you can see it in some of the language that is arrived at. We just have to be really clear that we still think the same as we thought last year on this. I am prepared to say “women” rather than “gender”, and things like that, that is fine, but we have to keep the core of what we stand for and stay true to that. We can compromise on many things, but our values are not one of them.

**Q123 Chair:** Minister, thank you for indulging us on those other topics. The main topic for today is UK aid for community-led energy. I will kick off with the first bit. What are the main barriers to achieving SDG 7 on access to clean and affordable energy by 2030? I will add to that: how will the UK’s support help to close the global shortfall in energy access?

**Baroness Chapman:** There is a lot in that. There are many barriers to SDG 7, and what we are talking about is access to clean energy. For that we need energy storage, the ability to generate energy or a grid to move energy around. Those things do not exist in too many places, mostly in sub-Saharan Africa where there is particularly an over-reliance on charcoal for cooking. We were just talking about women, and that impacts on women predominantly. They become responsible for gathering wood, which creates deforestation. Then there is the harmful smoke that they inhale, which has an impact on the health of women and their children, which puts pressure on health services that are fragile at best. There are many things going wrong with this.

Some of the projects in which the UK now has quite an impressive track record—and I pay tribute to my predecessors in this—are being able to have localised energy generation. That is through wind or solar and being able to use that energy for electric cooking. We have various



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

programmes that we have invested in over many years that have been very effective, but it is a huge challenge. There are far too many people still reliant on older methods, who don't have access to reliable energy at all. The barriers to that are sometimes geography, sometimes political instability, and difficulties in operating in difficult contexts. There are technological issues, issues of costs and sometimes there is an education element to all of this as well.

The barriers are many, and we have to be flexible and understanding of them and design interventions that are appropriate for the context we are trying to operate in. It is one of the areas where you can see a huge amount of progress has been made, really quite impressive progress, and in no small part due to the work that teams in DFID and the FCDO have led. There is always an awful lot more to do.

Q124 **Chair:** Are the UK Government planning any contributions on clean energy access for COP30?

**Baroness Chapman:** There will be. We are working on what our ICF pledge will look like for COP, and we have prioritised climate as part of our priorities. We are not looking at backing off things that work. The initiatives that we have been leading on transforming energy access have been successful. We should continue with things that are working and still seem to work because they are flexible and responsive to local needs.

Q125 **Chair:** Thinking back in time, is biogas more of a—

**Baroness Chapman:** I will try to answer this, and then my colleague will step in and correct what I say. My sense is that biogas specifically was the thing for a while, but now we are much more moving towards solar and other cheaper, more reliable things. Is that correct?

**Steven Hunt:** Generally, we support a multi-fuel approach to cooking. Depending on the context and the situation, different fuels will be most applicable. Biogas is still a technology that we have supported in a few places. Sistema.bio is one of the biggest now, and it is starting to scale up. It has BII investment, and it also had early-stage support from us through the transforming energy access programme. Yes, biogas is in there. It tends to do well through carbon revenues, which have been really important for Sistema to scale up.

Our emphasis has shifted under the modern energy cooking services, MECS, programme towards electric cooking, where we see significant opportunities. There are perhaps 680 million people without electricity, but there are 2.1 billion still cooking on firewood and charcoal. There is quite a big number who have electricity in some form but may still be cooking on firewood and charcoal. More of our innovation and effort is going into that at the moment.

**Chair:** I have fond memories of zero grazing and biogas in Tanzania, but that is another story.



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

Q126 **Tracy Gilbert:** Minister, you set out four essential shifts for the introduction of a development reset. What does that mean in the context of energy access?

**Baroness Chapman:** Energy is quite a good example of what it means. The obvious thing to point to is going from donor to investor, because virtually all our partner Governments are interested in investment in energy infrastructure. Even those that have a grid want it strengthening. They want diversity of supply, cheaper energy, and energy security. They have watched what has happened with the price of gas after Russia-Ukraine, and they want to have more control. Sovereignty over your energy supply has suddenly become something that everybody wants to talk about, and for that it is renewables for the most part.

Mindful of the event we had yesterday on nuclear and SMRs, perhaps there is scope in some countries—maybe South Africa, Indonesia—that they want to explore now that the safety of that technology has completely changed. It is no longer relying on uranium and plutonium—I am at the edge of my knowledge now. It is a very live discussion. We are seeing BII get more into energy investments, and it would be good to accelerate that. Our JETPs are looking at how we get countries like South Africa away from coal into other energy sources. That will require huge amounts of investment, and we will be part of that.

The truth is that a lot of that will probably come through the World Bank rather than directly from us, because of the scale that is needed, but you also have a whole load of political issues there. I am from Teesside. I sense that you are not from Suffolk, are you? You probably know about some of these challenges. They are real, and we underprice them when we are trying to understand why countries are not taking this journey. We need to be much better at getting alongside Governments and understanding these issues, which are about jobs, essentially, and trying to find solutions to those.

I think this is quite an exciting area, because you cannot develop your country if you don't have a reliable energy source that is affordable to your population and your business community. You are not going to get anywhere, so this is why climate is one of our priorities because it is a massive development issue.

Q127 **Chair:** I believe that the Chinese have just opened a thorium reactor operationally, which is quite an exciting development.

**Baroness Chapman:** Is it? I don't know what thorium is.

**Chair:** It is a nuclear reactor that does not have the same difficulties with refuelling. Also the fuel you are putting in is thorium, and you are not going to make nuclear bombs out of thorium, so it is quite important.

**Baroness Chapman:** Yes, because if you do not have to worry quite so much about proliferation or those sorts of issues—which in all honesty you would in some contexts that we want to see have that security of



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

supply—that is a massive benefit. I was talking to some guys yesterday about fusion, which is perpetually on the horizon.

**Chair:** Always 10 years away.

**James Naish:** As chair of the APPG for fusion energy, it is not 10 years away, I can tell you that much.

**Baroness Chapman:** I have started something. Technology is changing really quickly, and the way that we approach development and investment needs to reflect that. We have to keep pace, because otherwise there are other partner countries and there is a race on here. We are not the only investor country around. There are other people who see Africa in particular as a massive opportunity and we need to get in that mindset.

Q128 **Tracy Gilbert:** You have touched on this. I am wondering how you will measure success in these areas. You spoke about jobs and the economy. Has there been much more thought put into what success will look like in these investments?

**Baroness Chapman:** There is obviously investment return, but we need to think longer term about that. Ultimately, this is about getting closer to our Paris targets, isn't it? It is an investment opportunity, so we can invest the returns into more projects, which is great, but the reason we are doing this is about emissions and creating stable economies in places where if you allow the fragility and the lack of development to continue, it is an expensive thing to have to address as the UK. It is getting countries off coal on to cleaner energy sources, getting more people access to clean energy. We know how to measure this. It is one of the things in development where you can say, "Yes, we are doing that" or "No we are not". In measuring success, we will know.

Q129 **Sam Rushworth:** Do the Government see any role for ODA in delivering community energy?

**Baroness Chapman:** The word at the moment is "blended". BII has ODA, and if you want it to do something new in a new place or work more with SMEs, it will need money to do that, and that will be ODA. Absolutely, you could not just leave this to the market to do. You need to have concessional finance or any of those tools to make projects that on their own would be a little too risky, but they become really investable with a bit of Government assistance.

Q130 **Sam Rushworth:** ODA is derisking the BII investment, a bit like GB Energy. The purpose of GB Energy is to derisk investment, isn't it?

**Baroness Chapman:** I guess it is that principle, but it is about enabling the market to be active somewhere that, without that encouragement, it might not want to do.

Q131 **Sam Rushworth:** How does the UK ensure that its work with the private



sector is carried out in a way that is sensitive to local communities?

**Baroness Chapman:** That is so important. We are quite good at making sure we know where ODA is spent, we are good at insisting on certain standards, and we measure the hell out of everything. Working with local partners in the right way is fundamental to our approach to spending money in developing countries. That is non-negotiable, because you can irreparably damage the reputation not just of your country but of a whole technology or a whole approach to industry. If you harm a community, that is bad in itself, but you can really harm the agenda that you are trying to promote, so it matters.

Also what matters is using the opportunities when you are working with local communities to build capability and capacity so that they are able—an energy example—to safely manage and maintain the new assets that they have. They can repair and source parts. They have the ability to regulate. Ofgem is a partner here, as is our green cities programmes, TfL. It is building that capability in-country, so you are not just going and delivering something and leaving. You are leaving behind good, strong local leadership.

Q132 **Sam Rushworth:** Are there British companies involved in that process of knowledge transfer and capacity building?

**Baroness Chapman:** Yes, there are. That is also part of one of our shifts that Tracy mentioned. We call it technical assistance, but we are sharing our skills here, and often we are learning things in return. It is an opportunity for UK businesses, and influencing the regulatory frameworks in other countries is in our interest because it enables us to trade more easily in the future, whether that is on energy, communications or whatever it might be. There are lots of benefits in doing it that way, but from a development perspective it is about making sure you leave more behind than just the asset.

Q133 **Noah Law:** Minister, you have already very robustly answered what I was going to ask about, which is ongoing community involvement after the origination of these energy assets. Perhaps we can go one more than that and ask about community ownership in some of these projects, and about making sure that you get local buy-in and skin in the game.

**Baroness Chapman:** Co-operatives are quite a good example of where those can work. Especially where you have a mini-grid or community-based programmes, there is a natural opportunity to allow local people to participate or control what happens. You have just come back from DRC, haven't you? Did you see anything there that might be—

**Steven Hunt:** It depends on the country. In some places there is more of a culture of co-operatives and local governance of infrastructure. Sometimes there are also things like savings and credit co-operatives. In the communities we are talking about, on the whole they are marginalised and further away from grid assets. Generally speaking, they will struggle to build a mini-grid on their own.



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

You are looking for some kind of partnership or agreement between a mini-grid developer, which is typically private sector, sometimes public-private or an NGO and a company. They need an agreement with the national Government and the utility that it is all right to be there, and they also need an agreement with the community. There is usually a regulatory framework, and sometimes that takes support to put in place.

In the DRC it is a private developer backed by Gridworks. It is part of a BII investment to bring together a consortium to deliver three large metro grids in the north of the DRC. There is extensive community consultation, and consultation and engagement all the way from the President and the Energy Minister to the regional governor, the mayor, the local chiefs and so on. That is how you have to do it if you hope for the project to be sustained.

- Q134 **Noah Law:** Community involvement, great, but perhaps community ownership, given the context, is a step too far. Do the likes of BII have the tools at their disposal to make sure that we enable those opportunities where they exist?

**Baroness Chapman:** I think the gold standard is community ownership where that is appropriate and possible, isn't it? It is not turning your face away from that or a lack of understanding of that. It is about what is possible. We can speak to BII and find out what it would take to incorporate more of that approach more often, and I am happy to do that, because there are longer-term benefits of managing things that way.

- Q135 **Noah Law:** You alluded to the ongoing commitment to ODA in this area. Do you expect that FCDO will continue to support bilateral programmes in community energy?

**Baroness Chapman:** Yes. What I want to do with bilateral programming, though, is to allow teams in-country to have more control over what they think is appropriate for their context. If energy is a priority where they are, absolutely they should be able to do that and use the fact that they have certainty over the next three years about what they will have to leverage money or to work with a wider variety of partners, because they will have the time to build up those things.

A lot of that will be a bit of technical assistance, using ODA to pathfind. It will not be at the scale to do the big investments that are needed in this sector, which will come down more to the BII and probably the World Bank. They are all about jobs, which I think is right, and the energy sector is a good place for them to go. That is where the big development money is.

- Q136 **Chair:** It would be nice to involve all of you in answering this one. UK aid on energy access has been focused on research and innovation. What evidence do you have that this is where aid is most impactful?

**Baroness Chapman:** I will take that as a steer to pass to my colleagues.



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

**Chris Taylor:** Steven leads the research team. In part it is a bit of a cycle because of the moving funds for the technology. To a certain extent we have seen innovation in technologies to make them more suitable, the cost reductions and innovation in the business models. Now you potentially get to the stage of more areas where you are scaling towards investment and there are more opportunities. That means you are shifting your balance of instruments. That does not mean there is not an ongoing need for certain research and development in technologies continuing throughout the business models, but maybe the balance in the package evolves. We are definitely thinking about that as we evolve through the ICF 3 portfolio towards ICF 4.

**Steven Hunt:** I think that technology and innovation is a big part of the UK offer in development, and energy is a space in which there is a lot of innovation, and it is moving quickly. Technology leadership is a key part of the story. It is not so much the resources anymore; it is the leadership on that. That has been a valuable strategy for us. As those technologies have become more developed, we have tapped more into our technical assistance support and work with policies, because policies have to shift, as I mentioned. BII and also the PIDG group have started to make investments increasingly as these companies come to market.

The last piece is about the incentives. This is where results-based financing and others have come on stream. We were talking about the role of the World Bank, for example, and the Mission 300 initiative in Africa is the big story at the moment on energy access in the continent with the biggest deficit. That involves these incentive programmes to try to draw investment into delivering energy access. I don't think it is one or the other and, as Chris said, the balance shifts over time, but we have great partnerships and there is a lot moving, which research and innovation support is linked with.

Q137 **Chair:** Feel free to shoot this next question down in flames. Is the focus on research and innovation not displacing resources from direct poverty alleviation efforts?

**Baroness Chapman:** It would be a real mistake to see it that way. One of the things that the UK brings is the research and innovation investment that we have done for some time now. We have a comparative advantage here over other countries. There are things that we can offer around energy technology. If you look at the way this sector has changed in just the last 10 years, at what is possible and affordable now compared with where we were and the point where, if you want to invest in your energy, everyone wants to do renewables, not because of emissions necessarily but because of affordability. That is because the research has led to a place where that is now possible.

There are still barriers to crash through. There is still a lot more we need to do on energy storage. We just talked about fusion. There is clearly still a way to go to make that possible and real. SMRs were a bit of a fantasy, to the point where we just stopped believing in them. They are now on



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

the cusp of reality. Things are changing so much, and it is right that we use the expertise in the universities and the innovative businesses that we have here to develop these technologies for the benefit of us and UK businesses, but also for the development of the economy and because this is what we need to do in order to meet our climate aspirations.

**Chair:** I think James has missed the boat there, unfortunately. He has run away. It would have been great to get his thoughts on that particular one.

Q138 **Noah Law:** Could I just press you on this point, Minister? Do you see research and innovation as value for money with respect to our goal of poverty alleviation? Or is it simply value for money for UK plc and our university sector?

**Baroness Chapman:** No, not at all. I think it is a win-win, but it is definitely a development priority. If you have been, and you probably have, to communities that still rely on coal, the health impact is dreadful. The quality of life is appalling. Life expectancy is damaged. These are fundamental development priorities. Allowing people to afford to live their lives in a clean and healthy way does alleviate poverty.

On the impact of climate change on developing countries, you have told me in the past that they suffer far more than other places. It is absolutely right that we prioritise this. It is incredibly good value for money, but there are so many benefits to the UK investing in this way. It is one of the things we hear all the time, that Government Departments cannot work together, and usually that is true. However, on this you have FCDO, DESNZ, DSIT and DEFRA. Patrick Vallance is playing a very impressive role in this, but we are all working together to get this work done. As you quite rightly say, yes, it does benefit UK businesses and UK universities, but the wider benefits are enormous.

**Steven Hunt:** I do not think you should conflate research and innovation with academia. Our support to research and innovation includes academia, but it is very much about supporting SMEs, start-ups, businesses and technology development. As one example, the Transforming Energy Access platform has delivered clean energy access for 22 million people.

We are delivering results through these innovators, and then what is happening is—and we have increasingly good examples of this—the innovators we are supporting are then raising capital and they are delivering more results as well. We have managed to leverage £1.2 billion of additional public and private finance into these businesses. That is more than 750 innovators, academics and entrepreneurs. I just want to highlight that we are learning, we are innovating, but this is not something that is just staying in universities or on bookshelves. We are piloting things that then make a difference in practice.

Q139 **Chair:** Minister, you and your colleagues might like to bring up examples



on this next one. What is the UK doing to support grassroots innovation in low-income countries?

**Baroness Chapman:** Innovation in-country? Do you want to take that? There are examples of that.

**Steven Hunt:** Sure. We have a number of bilateral programmes in countries. In Mozambique we have the BRILHO programme, which has been stimulating household solar, clean cooking and the mini-grid sector. That has been running and has already delivered energy access for 3.1 million people through 375,000 solar home systems and 250,000 improved cookstoves. That is an example in the context, and they have evolved that over time. The Sierra Leone programme has electrified around 100 off-grid villages, centred around the health centres as well as seven hospitals. That is an example on the ground.

Then we have the global platforms, Transforming Energy Access, and Modern Energy Cooking Services. Those are both supporting innovation at grassroots levels but through partnerships. For example, the Global Distributors Collective is a network of about 200 last-mile distribution organisations, which we then support through the GDC, which has a base in the UK and partnerships elsewhere. It is an international partnership.

There are lots of examples of that, but we are essentially trying to support intermediaries and partnerships, which then enable wider action at the country level. Where we do have country demonstrators, which is another model where we have country offices investing, that is helpful, but we try to co-ordinate that with these global platforms so that it adds up. They connect with the expertise.

Q140 **Sam Rushworth:** Another example of this—albeit historic—is that UKRI used to have programmes where certain research funding required a global south partner. This was one of the ways that the UK exchanged knowledge and built the research and innovation capacity in the global south. I wonder whether that is something you feel was a success and if that is a similar model that you would like to take forward in the future.

**Baroness Chapman:** I like that approach, and I think we do that. One of the things I have been impressed with is our universities' ability to be agile, popping up all over the place where you least expect them.

I was in Ghana last week, and they were telling me that Lancaster University is present. I don't know what it is doing, but it is not just recruiting students to come to the UK; it is responding to local aspirations and local businesses' skills needs. Energy is a good sector to be active in and doing that. One of the many amazing things about our university sector is that they are not just willing to do it; they actively want to put themselves in those places because they see that as part of their role of global leadership.

**Sam Rushworth:** Our soft power.



**Baroness Chapman:** It is soft power, yes, you are right.

Q141 **Chair:** This is an off-piste question, but I think it is still an interesting one. These sorts of developments can happen with bilateral aid, but they are perhaps more difficult through multilateral. Is it unfair to say that?

**Baroness Chapman:** I think that is a little old-fashioned. With the scale of what we need to do, you have to work multilaterally. The fact that multilateral partners want to be active in this space is a good thing, and we should encourage it. Our bilateral work is about trying to build capability, trying to put it alongside our diplomatic work to encourage countries along a path that they might be curious about, but they might just think, "That is just too difficult for us right now. We have other priorities", but to encourage and enable that because countries that can, want to. I think there is a role for both.

I know you did not say this, but one thing I am keen to emphasise is that it is not just about our ODA spend. This is very much about what our in-country teams can do, the expertise that we have to share and the conversations that enables us to have. They are as important, or perhaps even more important, than ODA programming.

**Chris Taylor:** I was going to say, just on that multilateral split, I think the risk would be if multilaterals were not operating in a country-specific way. I think there is that strong focus, though, particularly if you are looking at M300. It is about countries developing their own country compact that sets out their investment plans for expanding energy access, both expanding the grid but also through off-grid, last-mile-specific measures as part of that.

Steven spoke about the co-ordination that is needed from that national level down. Having a central plan that people rally behind that is driven by that multilateral process makes it easier for all those different bilateral actors to then work together.

Q142 **Chair:** I have a final question on this little bit, and this is coming right down and looking at it from the bottom up. How could researchers in low-income countries be better supported as equal partners?

**Baroness Chapman:** I suppose you could start with our scholarship programmes, where we are encouraging master's qualifications in relevant academic specialties. In a lot of this the Government need to be there to support, enable and encourage. Our teams in post oil the wheels, but the wonderful thing about the scientific community and universities is that they find these opportunities. They want to collaborate. They naturally want to work together. I have never had that raised as something that is a particular problem.

Whenever I have been in developing countries, you see no end of examples where there has been this co-operation. I am sure we can do



more, and if universities come to us and say, "As part of your international education strategy or your industrial strategy, we need you to work in a different way" we would be very open to that. I do not know if there is anything more specific.

**Steven Hunt:** I can add that UKRI still does that, exactly that policy of requiring local partners through the innovation programme and academic research. It is very serious about long-term equitable partnerships. Under Transforming Energy Access we have a learning partnership, which supports 30 universities in Africa, south Asia and the Indo-Pacific, specifically on master's training in energy access. That is a southern network co-ordinated out of Cape Town in that case.

You will have to keep an eye on local leadership and equitable partnerships, but there is a lot of experience in the system. Through the Ayrton fund we are just concluding a study looking into best practices and gaps in that area, which is picking up some of these examples.

Q143 **Tracy Gilbert:** To circle back a bit, you touched earlier on energy projects and the impacts they have on specific groups. I think you mentioned women and cooking. In the context of the cuts to the aid budget, how will the Government ensure that the focus on gender equality and inclusion in energy projects remains at the centre of the programmes and is not compromised?

**Baroness Chapman:** Because we are cutting some of our gender-specific programming, the commitment I made was to mainstream gender across the piece. We already look at impact on gender when we are designing programmes. I think that could be more fundamental to what we do, perhaps, in energy. Although in a lot of the things that we have been focusing on, because cooking is such an important part of this—leaving aside the gender angle, just in and of itself it is important—there is undoubtedly a disproportionate benefit to women and girls of our focusing on this area.

What I have learned is that, unless you specifically ask at design phase what the impact and the benefit is for women, it can be overlooked or come to a bit later in the process. We need to make sure that happens. It does most of the time, but we need to keep our focus on it to make sure it does not slip in the future.

Q144 **Tracy Gilbert:** In that engagement with local communities, can you give us reassurance about what is taken into account in similar projects for other groups, such people with disabilities?

**Baroness Chapman:** We look at all equalities, disabilities and social inclusion with all programming. If they are designed here, that is taken into account. We also monitor for it, and then we will assess it at the end as well. It is part of our monitoring, evaluation and learning processes that that is taken into account. Sometimes when we make the cuts that we make, those are the things that seem quite easy not to do any more,



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

but because they are part of our existing processes, it does not cost you anything to continue to do those things. I think it is quite important that we continue them.

**Q145 Tracy Gilbert:** In the context of the cuts, will you continue to monitor specifically how those cuts have impacted on those underrepresented groups?

**Baroness Chapman:** Yes.

**Q146 Tracy Gilbert:** Finally on this point, again in the context of the cuts, how can we continue to ensure that we have that local expertise and that it is included in the decision making, and that that knowledge is preserved within the Department?

**Baroness Chapman:** One of the shifts you asked about at the beginning was about doing less through international organisations and more locally led work because it is better value for money and usually you end up with a better product. You get wider benefits from your intervention. You are not just paying an agent or an NGO to go in and deliver something. The reason for that is because we understand the point you are making. If you are right and I am right, the outcome will be that benefit.

**Chair:** Great. We are going to have to get our skates on a little bit because of time. Sam, could you ask the next question, and if we could rattle through them, that would be good.

**Q147 Sam Rushworth:** This is in two parts, and I will ask them both at once just for speed. The question is about whether the UK could be doing more to mainstream energy access across its strategy and programming. With regards to value for money, to what extent do value for money frameworks capture the multiple and cross-cutting benefits of energy access?

**Baroness Chapman:** Value for money is something we need to look at more widely. I am interested in that. The fact that we measure value for money—and we measure impact perhaps more on our ODA spend than any other area of government—I think we are quite good at it. However, do we always encapsulate everything that we could? I think that is a fair challenge, and I am thinking about that. That is something that we constantly need to revisit. What was the first part of your question, sorry?

**Sam Rushworth:** It was about mainstreaming energy access across strategy and programming.

**Baroness Chapman:** Yes. A lot of our programming is specifically about that. It is central. The TEA programme that Steven was talking about is all about that. The next step is all about making energy accessible and usable. I think we do that.



**Chris Taylor:** On metrics, very quickly, because it hits so many different things, it is very difficult if you then compare it on a single metric with other interventions. It may look less effective. It is a challenge because of that breadth of impact, which I think is particularly strong in this case. It means you need to take that rounded perspective in evaluating it, or think through how careful you are when making comparisons on single metrics.

Q148 **Sam Rushworth:** It touches a lot of SDGs with one package of delivery, does it not?

**Baroness Chapman:** Sometimes with value for money we are just a bit short term about it. Sometimes I think we judge things a bit quickly, and sometimes we claim benefits too quickly, too. Perhaps we could do a whole session on that.

**Sam Rushworth:** We have done a whole report on it, haven't we?

Q149 **Noah Law:** This is maybe another quite functional question. How does FCDO define clean energy in its ODA programming?

**Baroness Chapman:** It is energy that does not cause horrible emissions and cause people to get sick, but I am sure there is a more technical definition.

**Chris Taylor:** We use quite a broad definition across all uses of energy.

Q150 **Noah Law:** You have mentioned jobs quite a bit, but is there anything more that can be done to reduce emissions while combating poverty?

**Baroness Chapman:** I think there is. The climate crisis is a climate opportunity, and I think that the new technologies we bring will create a secure energy supply, which is great for business and industrial development and, therefore, fantastic for jobs. The two go hand in hand.

Q151 **Noah Law:** You mentioned siloed working and the risk of that. Is there any way to ensure that there is not that siloed working between your energy access programmes and your broader climate adaptation programmes?

**Baroness Chapman:** Yes. It is funny you should ask me that. The way that we are doing ODA now is going to change. The FCDO has been given the ability to work together and take more leadership in the way that we work and the way that we spend ODA across Whitehall. We have a board on which all ODA-spending Departments are represented. That is not new, but the way that board works is going to change in that we will be sharing the new approach to development tomorrow when we meet for the first time in a long time.

I want to get to a place where, say, on climate we have a single strategy for how we spend ODA on climate across Government. We do not have that at the moment, so there is a real problem with the money that FCDO



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

spends, DESNZ spends, DEFRA spends; less so with DSIT, to be fair. There is duplication. There is no clear sight of each other's programming.

There is programming in-country being done by Government Departments that our posts do not know about. This is ridiculous. It is wasteful. It is diplomatically stupid, because we are not then getting the benefit of what we are spending in a country to use with our bilateral relationship. This has to stop. We want to change this and join the whole thing up more closely together. I feel this is the next thing that we have to crack. When you have less money, the argument for allowing that lack of oversight just—you cannot continue in that way. It is a priority to fix.

**Q152 Chair:** That is very useful and something for us to continue to follow. This next question, rather than a one-word answer—although that might be useful—would be some examples. Is the FCDO's co-operation with other Government Departments on community energy working well?

**Baroness Chapman:** On community energy, yes, but to take the research question that you were talking about earlier, we have not had a properly co-ordinated approach to R&D ODA spend across Departments. I am talking to Patrick Vallance about how we get that. We need a single strategy, so we are doing complementary activity. We are talking about how we get to that. It was put to me, "Oh, but if you try to open up discussion around strategy, you will incite lots of competition for financing" because obviously the money needs to follow strategy priorities that are arrived at, and there will be open warfare between Departments.

Patrick and I feel that is not a satisfactory answer, and we are not going to have that as an outcome. We are going to make sure that we do this well and that there is a single strategy across Government so that officials know what it is that we, as the UK, are working to achieve.

The money will follow the priorities that are agreed on. If that means money needs to switch between Departments, so be it. If it ends up with DSIT spending money that was previously FCDO's, or vice versa, that is absolutely fine. We cannot afford to be precious about this. The money needs to be with the people who are best equipped to spend it to get the outcomes that we as a Government want to see. That is revolutionary talk around Whitehall, but that is where we are trying to get to.

**Q153 Tracy Gilbert:** In terms of future direction and opportunities, when we learn lessons from UK-led projects, how are they identified and how is that shared to shape future programmes and policy?

**Baroness Chapman:** Whenever something is concluded, or even at various points ahead of that, we do monitoring, evaluation and learning, and the point of that is for it to be shared. What I have been quite impressed by is the willingness to redesign or to tweak partway through projects where things are not hitting the targets that we have wanted to see. That is one thing. There is more outcome-based financing now as



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

well. I have seen bad examples of this in the UK—in probation—but used well it can be a good way of holding to account and incentivising outcomes. We are using those sorts of approaches as well.

The one that really is valuable is the evaluation and learning work that is done. If anything, I would like to see that enhanced so that it has more status and there is more notice taken of it across the system. One of the things that can happen over time, if you do things in the same way for a very long time, is they become a bit like wallpaper. We may need to revise some of that to make sure that it has not happened. I don't think it does, and I think we are pretty good at learning as we go, but I am just mindful of that risk.

Q154 **Tracy Gilbert:** How are those projects identified?

**Baroness Chapman:** We do it for everything.

Q155 **Sam Rushworth:** I have two questions. One is about the Ayrton fund, which is currently funded until March 2026. How do the Government plan to ensure continuity of funding and momentum after this date?

**Baroness Chapman:** Patrick Vallance loves this, so there is that. I think it has proved its worth. We need to continue to do things that are successful. We are working through all our spending commitments at the moment, and we have scaled back our R&D, as we have on everything else. I am pretty sure we have not announced anything yet, but the Ayrton fund has been a big success, if I can just say that.

**Chris Taylor:** It is also a model of co-operation between the Departments.

**Baroness Chapman:** Yes, definitely.

**Chris Taylor:** There are lessons from that in terms of having common results frameworks, and we are looking at how we can apply the structures within that to other areas. I think this is an area of strength in terms of co-operation.

Q156 **Sam Rushworth:** In terms of certainty for stakeholders, could they be encouraged by your answer that Patrick loves it?

**Baroness Chapman:** I am encouraged by that. One of the things that he says is that, with the scientific community, there are long lead times, and if you have committed to something you have to see it through. Otherwise reputationally you are completely shot. He is very clear that we maintain commitments that we have made.

Q157 **Sam Rushworth:** In the context of constrained funding, it none the less remains a strategic priority; there has not been a change of direction?

**Baroness Chapman:** No.

Q158 **Sam Rushworth:** I mentioned GB Energy, and this Government use the



language of Britain becoming a clean energy superpower. Of course, a superpower has weight in the world as well as in its own territory. In the context of our overseas work on clean energy, what do you see as the potential benefits to the UK taxpayer and UK trade and industry?

**Baroness Chapman:** It depends how far ahead you want to look. More immediately, there are investment opportunities for UK business for sure. Over time, we are already saying to the UK taxpayer that we want to share the burden with the private sector and with other investors so there is less onus on British taxpayers in what they have to spend on development, and that is already happening.

The whole reason we are interested in this agenda is because we believe that if you have prosperous, stable partners in the global south, not only do you spend less on dealing with crises, but you also have economies you can trade with to enhance the prosperity of both.

Q159 **Sam Rushworth:** Are there any opportunities for the UK energy sector, though, in what we are doing overseas in development of R&D, expertise and business opportunities?

**Baroness Chapman:** Definitely. The money that we spend in India, for example, is mostly about knowledge transfer. That uses UK business, UK universities and the UK energy sector. We made money on that last year.

**Steven Hunt:** A great topical example is MOPO, Mobile Power. It is a company based in Sheffield that has a very innovative battery-swapping technology. It had early-stage R&D support from us, and it has subsequently raised investment from BII to scale up this model using these MOPO hubs. It is a solar-powered charging hub in the DRC. It has also raised capital from Octopus.

That is an example of a UK entity that is now employing and supporting many jobs in, I think, seven countries in Africa. It has done more than 25 million battery swaps now, so it is really starting to achieve some scale. You are also now seeing Octopus, a major player in the UK sector, starting to think this is worth investing in. Hopefully, that is a useful example.

**Sam Rushworth:** Yes, thank you. I appreciate that.

**Chair:** I think that is a lovely place to end. Baroness Chapman, Steven Hunt and Chris Taylor, thank you all very much indeed.