

International Development Committee

Oral evidence: The UK's development partnership with Nigeria, HC 1225

Tuesday 2 December 2025

Ordered by the House of Commons to be published on 2 December 2025.

[Watch the meeting](#)

Members present: Sarah Champion (Chair); Janet Daby; Tracy Gilbert; Noah Law; David Mundell; James Naish.

Questions 1-49

Witnesses

[I](#): Mary Dinah, Founder and Chief Executive Officer, Mary Dinah Foundation; Evelyn Mere, Country Director, WaterAid Nigeria; Andrew Mamedu, Country Director, ActionAid Nigeria.

[II](#): Camilla Higgins, Director, International NGO Forum Nigeria; Arjun Jain, Country Representative in Nigeria, UNHCR; Thierno Samba Diallo, Country Director, Action Against Hunger.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Mary Dinah, Evelyn Mere and Andrew Mamedu.

Chair: This is the International Development Committee's session on the UK's development partnership with Nigeria. We are very lucky to have two panels. The first panel is hybrid. Could the panel members introduce themselves? Mary, I will start with you, as you are in the room.

Mary Dinah: My name is Mary Dinah and I am the CEO and founder of the Mary Dinah Foundation.

Evelyn Mere: Good afternoon, everyone. My name is Evelyn Mere. I am the country director of WaterAid Nigeria. I am glad to be here.

Andrew Mamedu: Good day, everyone. My name is Dr Andrew Mamedu. I am the country director for ActionAid Nigeria. It is lovely to be here.

Q1 **James Naish:** Hi everybody. Thank you for joining us. My first question is to Mary. How well do you think that the Nigerian Government are adapting to the reduction in funding?

Mary Dinah: The reduction in funding has been, understandably, very difficult for the country and for the humanitarian endeavours that the Nigerian Government have been working on. Specifically, during the lean season, we would usually have a lot of support for various actors to increase the amount of malnutrition supplements and research being done on the number of people who are greatly in need, but that has reduced significantly during this period.

The Nigerian Government have raised funding from international sources as well as locally. They made that available to local governments, so that NGOs can approach those local governments and request additional funding to, in a way, act as a buffer source to bridge the funding gap.

The co-ordination of that has not been so strong. I run an NGO preventing malnutrition in the north-east of Nigeria, as well as the far north of Cameroon and Chad. I would say that it was quite difficult to understand and know how to access that funding. Although the funding was announced by the Senate, it is difficult as an NGO to know the right channel to approach it. There is a need for better communication to help the local actors, local governments and communities to know how to access the funding and bridge that gap.

We have been, shall I say, a little bit lucky. Over the last five years, we have had funding from USAID, and we are one of the few NGOs that have been asked to continue our implementation, so we have actually migrated to the US State Department. That is good news, but even with that in mind, we experienced a lot of delays initially in the early months. We were asked to pause and resume, pause and resume, and then after US Congress reviews, we were asked to continue and we have signed new

contracts. It is going well, but given that other international agencies and other sources and donors have reduced, it has been quite difficult for everyone.

Chair: Mary, congratulations on securing the funding.

Q2 **James Naish:** Do you know what the determining factor was in you being able to continue with USAID funding?

Mary Dinah: It is difficult to say for certain. One of the key things was that about two months before the new Administration started, so around November or December last year, we received an email from a US audit department. They mentioned that we had the largest programme in terms of scale for distributing the type of products that we distribute, which is SQ-LNS, small-quantity lipid-based nutritional products, but preventive. They were asking us to give our permission to use our proposal as a template. They loved the way it was structured. I think that was maybe a hint that they were really pleased with our programming.

Chair: Well done.

Mary Dinah: In addition, we have one of the most complex implementations in terms of the communities we are in. We focus on areas of conflict and of terrorism where things are very difficult and that are very hard to reach. We have been excelling in being able to reach those beneficiaries who need it the most. One of the key things for USAID was that whenever you submit your reports and you mention the number of people you have reached, there would be another tab that said, "Of that population, how many were IDPs and how many were refugees?" We were operating in refugee camps where 100% of the population were refugees or where very high numbers were IDPs, so I think it is about the complexity and scale of our programming.

Q3 **Chair:** How long has it taken to build that programme?

Mary Dinah: It took about nine months. We designed it with USAID in 2020. We worked together with them and then brought in UNICEF and the World Food Programme. It was a collaborative design and very high level; the reporting is very detailed. We utilise what we call an internal tracking table, ITT, and we have over 15 indicators that we are tracking. We have a number of complementary activities alongside the food distribution, including water, sanitation, and hygiene programming; sexual and gender-based violence protection; connecting women to antenatal care; vaccinations for babies; and MUAC testing. So it is quite a broad-scale programme as well as really high volume. We are reaching 102,000 beneficiaries every year across three countries.

Q4 **Chair:** So from the beginning you built in data capture?

Mary Dinah: Yes.

Q5 **Chair:** Was that very challenging to do?



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Mary Dinah: It was very technical; not challenging, but very technical. USAID at the time really supported us with that. We were able to define our indicators with them. They have done a lot of research in terms of the actual indicators and the reporting standards. We do baselines, end line and post-distribution monitoring. We were able to really stand on the shoulders of giants, learn from things they had done before and add a few new things to make it more adaptable to the location. All of that took us about nine months. On a yearly basis, when we start a new year of programming—it is a 12-month programme—we redefine it.

What we also did was to start in the north-east of Nigeria and follow the conflict. So we started in Nigeria and then we saw that a lot of the people affected by terrorism and war entered Cameroon through the north-eastern border of Nigeria. They were in a very large refugee camp in Cameroon, with over 100,000 refugees. So we followed the conflict and we were supporting them there. Then we entered Chad, and now we are looking at DRC, Sudan and South Sudan, because a lot of the refugees from Sudan have entered on the eastern border of Chad.

Q6 **Chair:** One last question: if I said, “Can you tell me how many girls with disabilities you are giving nutritional support to?”, could you do that?

Mary Dinah: Absolutely.

Q7 **James Naish:** That is fascinating and excellent work by the sound of things. Evelyn, where are you aware of funding gaps across the aid sector as a result of the cuts from the US, UK and other developed nations?

Evelyn Mere: The starting point where we have noticed gaps is in the health sector, especially areas covering the provision of antiretroviral drugs through the USAID initiative. The Government themselves are struggling with a deficit of close to 4% in this 2025 budget—it was the same for 2024. They have come up with some resources up to about \$200 million to begin to cover the cost of providing antiretroviral drugs, so that you do not have people getting into the situation of having late-stage AIDS. They have also absorbed about 28,000 health workers that were previously paid for by USAID, and there are plans to start producing antiretroviral drugs locally, but we do not know where that will be. That particular situation, which is extremely impactful on human life is, for now, covered to an extent, but there are still a lot of gaps.

The biggest gaps have affected the women-led organisations that provide services to women. Research done by UN Women has shown that about 62% of women-led organisations have had to suspend or reduce services to women and girls; about 51% have been forced to suspend or end programmes; 33% are facing severe cash-flow issues; and about 34% have shut down programmes aimed at ending violence against women. As one of them said, this creates a situation where women do not have options when they are facing violence, and it begins to normalise violence. It then negates all the progress made to enhance the rights of women and to end violence against women and girls.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Some of the cuts by the UK Government have affected WASH, which is one of the lowest-funded things in UK Government aid support for Nigeria. Again, WASH allows enables girls to stay in school by enabling them to manage their menstruation effectively, it enables women to give birth safely, and it protects the lives of children under five. These areas have not been covered, which has had significant negative impacts on both the women-led organisations themselves and those who they are meant to serve.

I will give the example of the UK Government saying that some of their priorities are educating girls, ending violence against women, empowering women and ensuring that their voices are heard. But this means that the UK Government say one thing but do another with the aid pot. That is what I will say for now.

Q8 James Naish: Andrew, I have a similar question for you. Women's rights were touched on then, but thinking specifically about women's rights and the impact on good governance and democracy, where are you seeing the funding cuts have an impact?

Andrew Mamedu: I will start with the specific example of how that has affected ActionAid in Nigeria. We were involved in an anti-corruption programme in Nigeria that was by no means increasing the level of accountability. There is what we call the constituency project, which is run by Parliament, but we saw a huge level of unaccountability going on within that programme. With FCDO funding, we were able to expand and work with the Government anti-corruption agency to track that, and we recovered over \$700 million in a particular year.

Of course, there was a cut in the funding and that project had to end abruptly. We had made commitments, so we had to find ways of fulfilling those commitments, and we had to let partners go. We lost practically all the results and traction that we had gained. If you look at the areas of health and women's rights, governance is at the centre of it. We are losing the traction and gains that we have made in the areas of democracy and governance. Specifically, we know that the UK is interested in issues of trade, security and migration of course. If there is not good governance, that is going to have a re-pull effect. You would have more people trying and struggling to leave the country and go to the UK. Good governance funding has been cut over the period.

ActionAid is a member of the Nigeria Civil Society Situation Room. That is made up of civil society organisations and works on issues relating to elections. In the last election, particularly, hundreds of civil societies were supported through FCDO funding and went to track and monitor elections, and there were clear results from that. I will give you one specific example: a Government spokesperson was nominated to be appointed to the Independent National Electoral Commission—the commission responsible for running the election. Of course, the Civil Society Situation Room rose up and fought that to a standstill, and she was not appointed. But guess what? That is now turning around. Today, the chairman of the Independent National Electoral Commission—the same commission, and

the chairman who conducted the last election; he finished his tenure about two or three months ago—has been appointed as an ambassador. Very few voices are rising up because of the deficit we are seeing in this kind of funding.

There are several implications to all of this. For us, it goes beyond just the benefits that we are losing; it is about the global impact and what we see the UK standing for in the past. It is taking us to the post-world war two era, where every country was standing for itself, but at the end of the day, it is going to boomerang and backfire on us. Countries such as Nigeria and other countries in Africa will be affected. I am sure that we are following all the coups d'état that are happening across Africa, and we pray that Nigeria does not fall into that. But if we do not get the issues of governance right, we might get Nigeria falling into that, and if that happens, it will affect the whole of Africa, and it will spill into Europe and particularly the UK.

Q9 Noah Law: Turning back to Mary, what are the benefits of programming decisions being made at a local level?

Mary Dinah: In terms of the local level, so the state level, for example, in our programming we work very closely with the Yobe State Emergency Management Agency. The co-ordination, especially in areas of crisis and in emergency settings, is where the local governments, the public hospital boards and the PHCs—the public hospital council and centres—come in. There is need for greater co-ordination with the federal Government, and that is very important. I believe that funding should go into building more capacity for those local bodies to be able to really support what is going on and communicate effectively with the federal Government.

I met with the head of nutrition for the Ministry of Health just two weeks ago, and they mentioned that at federal level, they were not getting key information from those states' co-ordinators about data, statistics and the number of people reached. One of the key roles there is the state nutrition officer—the SNO. At the federal level, they have SNOs all over the country. The SNOs are meant to pass on information to the Ministry of Health, but that is not being properly done. I think that a lot of support should also go into making those systems—the technology systems—more robust. That was one of the things that they mentioned as well—that they are trying to improve the structure and strength of their systems.

As an NGO, all the local partners are asked to submit what we call the five w's: who, where, what, when and—I think—which. We put everything together and submit it to the state officers, but that is not being passed to the federal Ministry of Health, and that is an issue.

Q10 Noah Law: I certainly hope that there are ways in which we can help to strengthen that. Evelyn, how do you think development partners such as the FCDO can help us better achieve that localisation and the kind of partnership at the local level that we have heard about from Mary?

Evelyn Mere: What the FCDO can do is, first, conduct a mapping to understand which local players and actors are doing what and where.

From that overview of those who are working in areas of interest to the FCDO, you can then hold consultations to understand what exactly they are doing, what their needs are and what the areas of priority are, because then you can get the real priorities affecting people at the local level. The funding can then be channelled directly to those organisations, and you can avoid passing through two or three layers before it gets to them.

All the priorities that are agreed on are derived directly from issues that affect the people. It harnesses local knowledge and expertise, builds capacity and ensures sustainability. Once people's capacity builds in the areas in which they are working, it becomes very easy for them to replicate what is done.

I believe that that is the approach that has been adopted within the WASH systems for health intervention that the FCDO is now supporting in Nigeria. They are companies that are delivered at national level, but quite a few of them go down to state and local government level. Most importantly, it provides a platform for local actors to come together. Since it adopts a system-strengthening approach, it can look at key areas such as the capacity of civil society organisations and the issue of gender, making sure that they are covered and strengthened in the process of delivering the intervention.

Q11 David Mundell: Mary, can you give us a summary of malnutrition across Nigeria?

Mary Dinah: Severe acute malnutrition affects about 10% of children under five and, even more critically, about 12% of infants under 24 months. It is a dire picture—it is really a state of emergency.

Recently, I spent some time with the governor of Katsina State. MSF has been doing some great work in Katsina. The figures that are coming out of Katsina are a snapshot of what is happening in other parts of the country, especially the north-east and the north-west. On a weekly basis, there are close to 700 children and babies being admitted to stabilisation centres and OTPs—out-patient therapeutic programme centres. That is very difficult. For many of them, if they are not brought in early enough, it leads to death.

We are also hearing that, because of funding issues, the capacity of those organisations to cope is being reduced and restrained. They are having to send people back because the children are “not sick enough”. They have to prioritise the people who have dropped entirely into severe acute malnutrition, and send back those with moderate acute malnutrition. Some of these people have walked two days to get to that stabilisation centre. It is a dire picture and it is getting worse.

Q12 David Mundell: Do you think that it is acknowledged by the Nigerian Government that that situation is happening within the country? When we visited, it was not necessarily as clear as you might want.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Mary Dinah: I think that not enough is being done to raise the alarm. It is a very sad situation that needs more actors. Yes, the federal Government are doing a lot. Recently, they made the vice-president the chair of the nutrition council, just to put it front and centre that, up to the level of presidency, they have it in mind and want to make change, but more needs to be done.

The Katsina governor also mentioned that when he read the report, his team said, "This is horrible. MSF should not be allowed to publish this," but he said, "No. This is the situation. Let's work on it. Let's call all the actors together and bring together all the stakeholders." It is that type of ownership that we need the Government to be doing, rather than burying numbers.

Q13 **David Mundell:** Just to be clear, you are saying that there were forces that did not want the facts to be put into the public domain.

Mary Dinah: Yes. By his own admission, the governor said that many people on his team said, "Let's send MSF an email. They have to retract this," and he said no. That is the type of leadership we need, to take ownership of the situation. It is not always a good picture, but they need to start to work on how they can fix it, rather than burying it.

Q14 **David Mundell:** You have touched on it already, but what impact do you feel the cuts in funding internationally have had?

Mary Dinah: It has made the situation a lot worse. Something that happened a lot yearly, especially during the lean season, was mapping of how many children are in need. It goes into large-scale and mass mid-upper arm circumference testing for babies to see who is in the green and who is experiencing moderate or acute malnutrition. To test 500,000 or 5 million babies takes funding, but that type of funding was the first to be cut, because the work is preventive and it is research, but it is difficult for organisations and governments to operate if they do not know what the picture is.

The same is true of other aspects such as capacity building and training of health workers. All those areas have been cut. The cuts have gone even down to co-ordination. The nutrition sector would need a lot every month, and there were co-ordinators for that, but those jobs have been lost, along with a lot of the community nutrition mobilisers—CNMs—who used to go into communities to pick out malnutrition hotspots. The effect on the nutrition situation is critical.

Q15 **David Mundell:** Andrew, what is your assessment of the human and societal consequences if nutrition needs are not met?

Andrew Mamedu: Beyond the obvious, it is affecting children's education. People go about trying to find ways to survive. There is, of course, a long-term impact on society, families and individuals. We have a growing population who are trying to find ways to survive, and one of the ways they are doing that is by joining insurgent groups such as Boko Haram, whose numbers are increasing. They are just trying to find ways to



HOUSE OF COMMONS

survive, and they will join these groups if they see that as a means to make a living, to take care of their family and their home, and to escape malnutrition.

One of the wider implications is an increase in irregular migration. People in the northern states that have borders with other countries find ways to escape to Libya and find their way to Europe. That has implications for Europe, of course, including the UK.

The Government of Nigeria find ways to hide what is happening or to pretend that we are doing well, because there is a politics of food. As Mary explained, it is not good to put out some of the figures, so the Government try to control them. We have elections some time next year—we are getting close to general elections—so some of the figures will be manipulated or cooked up just to make Governments feel good.

The reality facing us on the ground is what we call black tax. I don't know whether you have heard of that. Probably every average Nigerian is taking care of between five and 20 people through black tax, regularly providing food and support. You do not see people who are malnourished without trying to respond to them. That has implications for the response from civil society. The implications cut across individuals, families, communities and the culture itself. At the end of the day, it is felt globally.

Q16 David Mundell: Just to clarify whether I am right in what I heard you say—this aligns with evidence that we heard when we were in Nigeria—it is the lack of food and the difficulties with farming conditions that drive a lot of people into the arms of the terrorist organisations.

Andrew Mamedu: Yes. The level of poverty increases their numbers. There are a whole lot of factors—several pieces of research have shown them—but the level of poverty and food insecurity drives people into joining these groups, yes.

Mary Dinah: I would like to add to that, if I can. Looking at the map of Nigeria, one of the key findings is that the areas that have the highest levels of malnutrition also have the highest occurrences of extremism, terrorism and activities of non-state armed groups. That is definitely not a coincidence. This year in particular, we have seen a big spike in kidnappings. There was a kidnapping of girls in Kebbi, and there have been kidnappings in Niger State and Kogi as well, to the point that the Nigerian Government announced a state of emergency for security just a few days ago. The correlation between the reduction in funding, the malnutrition rates and the extremism and terrorism is quite strong, I think, and it is getting worse.

Q17 Chair: Are the Government recognising and addressing that, or does it take the international community to help?

Mary Dinah: I do not think that the Government have made that mental mapping between malnutrition rates and conflict and the activities of non-state armed groups. If they have made that mental mapping, they have

never mentioned it or alluded to it. I think it is something that has to be put front and centre.

As humanitarians or philanthropists, when we put our cases forward we are kind of put in a box of NGOs: “NGOs are coming to save the world,” or, “coming to discuss humanitarian affairs,” and then security is seen as a totally different topic. But these things are very much interrelated. I think it is important for the federal Government to see that the two are leading to one another. That goes together with unemployment. Unemployment is not just an economic finality. It is something that is woven into the situation—the desperation, the conflict, the insecurity. I think it is more intertwined than the Nigerian Government are noticing.

Q18 Chair: The UK Government have stated that they are shifting from being a donor to being a partner. In that example, how would that partnership work to encourage the Nigerian Government to understand the security risks, the areas of poverty and the exploitation that is going on?

Mary Dinah: In terms of them now stepping in as a partner, they have to think more broadly about what the situation is. They have to think not only about the impact on Nigeria, but about the impact internationally. If you look historically at some of the conflict, which is in Nigeria now, it started in parts of Asia and other parts of the world and then spread across the UK, the US and around the world. It was then curtailed somewhat around Obama’s regime with the elimination of Osama bin Laden, but then it spread out again in Africa in other ways. So there is a much broader and bigger picture; these are very organised groups on a global scale.

For Nigeria to come in as a partner, they need to recognise how intertwined these groups are, how slippery they tend to be and how quickly they can enter into new communities and commit new atrocities. It has become protracted over the past 10 to 15 years. More research has to be done as to the source of it and how to curtail it together, as a partner with the UK.

Chair: That is really interesting. Thank you.

Q19 Janet Daby: My question is for you, Evelyn. You have already mentioned WASH—water, sanitation and hygiene. What do you believe the consequences are of not investing in WASH and the sanitation economy? You started to talk about this earlier.

Evelyn Mere: Yes, I was going to contribute to the conversation about nutrition and the relationship with poor WASH. When children under five are given contaminated water, it immediately causes them to have continuous diarrhoea. With diarrhoea, it becomes very difficult for them to absorb nutrients and, ultimately, they die. The situation causes about 65,000 under-five deaths annually in Nigeria, so WASH has a correlation with the issue of nutrition.

I will give you a few statistics on the general WASH situation. In Nigeria, about 70 million people do not have access to clean water, 117 million

people do not have decent toilets, 48 million people are defecating in the open, and about 82% of the population do not have a place to wash their hands.

The whole mixture of issues around WASH leads to very negative consequences for Nigerians. The No. 1 thing is that girls are unable to stay in school because they have no decent toilets and no place to manage their menstruation in dignity and privacy. Once menstruation starts, they stay away from school. That negatively impacts their educational performance in school and begins the journey of disadvantaging them in life. In terms of health, the statistics say that up to 91% of healthcare facilities in Nigeria do not have access to WASH. That means that maternal mortality is an issue, as is infant mortality. Healthcare-associated infections are quite high, and there are around 93,600 related deaths in a year.

The situation with low funding for WASH is that Nigeria is unable to actualise a sanitation economy, which is estimated to be worth about \$26 billion by 2030. Investment in the WASH sector would enable Nigeria to realise that. The economy starts with the provision of affordable toilets for low-income homes. It looks at taking faecal sludge and transforming it into wealth. You can derive products such as biogas. You can derive water and manure that can be used to enhance agriculture. The sanitation economy sits untapped, waiting for investment.

For water supply, I have just given the statistic that about 70 million people do not have access to water. Utilities are the centre of providing clean water to people in open spaces, and the fact that only about 16 out of the 48 utilities in Nigeria are functional continues to complicate the poor access to water supply. It means that the Nigerian economy is bogged down by people taking sick days. People are constantly spending money that they would have used for other purposes to treat WASH-related diseases, and the economy is not thriving at the level that it could be.

Investment in WASH pays off significantly in increased productivity and economic growth, improvements in girls' performance at school and maternal health, and a reduction in under-five mortality. There is so much more, but in terms of water supply, there is room for the private sector to invest and to make significant profits. However, the Government have not provided an enabling environment to make sure that they understand how to make a profit, so that aspect is also negated. Increasing support for the WASH sector in Nigeria will unlock an entirely new world for girls, for women and for the private sector. It will create jobs and bring overall benefits to Nigerians.

Q20 Janet Daby: Thank you very much. It is an area of absolutely huge concern that needs significant investment. How do you think the UK can ensure local ownership of the WASH facilities that it supports? In terms of the local areas in Nigeria where the UK is invested, what more can be done to support them with their WASH facilities?

Evelyn Mere: I will look at a few key areas. As a starting point, there are the Heads of State initiatives, which enable Presidents and Prime Ministers to prioritise water sanitation and hygiene. Once that happens, budgetary allocations, presidential orders and co-ordination platforms are set in motion to make sure that that is realised. You can see that in what India did. After India prioritised WASH, in less than 10 years 100 million toilets were built. Building those 100 million toilets created jobs and ended WASH-related diseases. It enabled the private sector to invest—small businesses could sell toilets for households. Women were building toilets. Overall, it catalyses growth and wellbeing. The UK Government already support the Heads of State initiatives on the Sanitation and Water for All platform. More attention to that would enable the UK Government to influence the unlocking of the sanitation, water supply and hygiene sector in Nigeria.

A mapping was done of the hygiene supply chain and if UK-based private sector companies such as PZ Cussons could invest more in driving behaviour change, it could get more people to buy handwashing products, build great profits and increase health outcomes for the people. As for catalysing the sanitation economy, that economy is valued at about \$26 billion. The UK funded the SHAWN projects some years ago, which introduced market-based sanitation: affordable toilets were installed in rural and peri-urban areas. As I said, about 48 million people are still defecating in the open; more needs to be done.

On the issue of gender, we often talk about meeting the needs of women through more investment in WASH, but at WaterAid we have shown the skills and capabilities that women and girls can bring to the WASH sector, if given the chance. In one of our projects, we have trained young girls between the ages of 18 and 25 to repair solar panels and toilets and to do plumbing work, and we have put them on an app where people can find them. They now play a role in ensuring good operations are maintained. They can earn an income, and they are empowered in the process—they can be heard. We also get women to also be part of the WASH fund, as kiosk managers and treasurers for water that is being sold, so you do not only meet the needs of women; you show what women can contribute to the WASH economy.

On water supply, I will give an example. We work in Lagos. In a place such as that, there is a huge gap between the demand and what the Lagos Water Corporation is able to supply. The UK Government are supporting the Resilient Water Accelerator, which creates and ensures an enabling environment in which the private sector can understand the dynamics of an open water supply sector. It makes sure that obstacles such as non-revenue water and non-cost-reflective tariffs are discussed with Governments to improve the policy environment, so that the private sector can invest and see the pathway to getting out their profit. The only way open water supply can be sustainable is if it is subject to the market, but properly regulated in terms of pricing, reliability and the quality of the services provided.

The UK Government can also support climate action. Climate instantly negates progress made in delivering WASH access: once it rains and there is a flood, that destroys water facilities, floods places and spreads contaminated water across the entire place. Investment in climate resilience WASH, with the UK private sector helping to design climate resilience sanitation products, water supply and solar panels, can enable unlocking of the economy of the WASH sector. Right now, WASH is still being treated as a development thing, but if the Government are able to provide support and put WASH at the centre of the strategy partnership with the Nigerian Government, a lot of benefits can be unlocked.

Q21 Janet Daby: Thank you for that very comprehensive response. I wanted to quickly see if Andrew wanted to contribute in any way and maybe talk about the importance of WASH for women and girls. We have had a very comprehensive response already, but is there anything you would like to add, Andrew?

Chair: It will need to be brief, Andrew—we are running out of time, I am afraid.

Andrew Mamedu: I will talk about all the problems of governance and accountability. Nigeria loses an average of \$18 billion annually to illicit financial flow. If we get our resources to stay in Nigeria, we will be able to hold our Government accountable; then we can have free, credible and fair elections, and I think Nigeria would be a better place. A major focus for us as ActionAid development partners is investing more in getting assistance to hold the Government accountable, and ensuring that all leakages within the systems are blocked and we have enough resources to deal with some of those challenges.

Q22 Chair: Can I push you on that a little bit, Andrew? The figure that you said about illicit finances is eye-watering. What assurances do you have that if you were able to stop those illicit finance flows, they would go into development? What structures need to be put in place to enable that to happen?

Andrew Mamedu: We need civil society networks and platforms that have built the capacity to ensure independence of civil society and the media to be able to hold the Government accountable. We need to ensure that the Freedom of Information Act is working.

We had a well-resourced civil society organisation before. Do not forget that we came from a history of military rule. Civil society and the media jointly were able to get the military out of Government in Nigeria and have it come under democratic rule. Civil society has demonstrated capacity over the years in things like this with the right support and networking movements—it works around movement. We engage with Government from co-operation to confrontation—non-violent, of course, at every point in time. With civil society, working with the media and a network approach, that kind of support will give voices to the citizens. Imagine you have thousands or millions of Nigerians coming out, demanding

accountability and holding the Government accountable; then those resources would remain in Nigeria and be used the right way.

Q23 **Chair:** Why is that not happening now?

Andrew Mamedu: Because the resources are not there. The Government recognise the power of resources, so they use a propaganda mechanism. Because of the resources at their disposal, the Government are able to have counter-civil society groups. The corruption is spread so you are unable track all the resources and report them at various levels and various strata, so you need some level of co-ordination. Resourcing civil society is a big deal for us. We were gaining traction in that direction before the aid cuts started happening. The anti-corruption work and accountability work is gradually reducing, and the level of corruption is increasing. We know that, and the Government recognise it. We are still holding the Government accountable, but not enough is being done. I think we can do much more.

Q24 **Tracy Gilbert:** I want to turn to the UK-Nigeria strategic partnership. How could that be developed further and strengthened? Mary, you have referenced women, peace and security, and Evelyn gave some ideas around WASH, but, in addition to that, how do you think we could help?

Mary Dinah: One of the key areas is the strategy between the two Governments. A lot of the ideas and solutions that we have put forward are in relation to the UK Government working with the Nigerian Government, but there is a need for localisation, and that can strengthen the impact that these programmes will make. We co-ordinate and work very closely with the Government, but when you work with local NGOs and pull in the local actors, they have more of a lived experience of those scenarios and communities, it is more cost-effective, and they are more nimble and adaptable. One of the things that USAID did quite well is that they were able to release grants directly to local NGOs and then monitor them, but were also always insisting on collaboration and strong co-ordination with the Government. That sort of move to localisation in the strategy between the two Governments would have a major impact on how well the programmes are being disseminated.

Evelyn Mere: Some of what I am going to say is related to some things I have mentioned. The UK Government need to put WASH at the centre of the strategic partnership with Nigeria. There are two key pillars: one is growth and jobs and one is modelling a partnership that does not lead to aid dependency. That goes back to what I said before. We can add the WASH sector and the WASH gaps.

There are 70 million people without access to clean water, which creates an opening for the private sector to come in and understand the market, invest properly and introduce innovation and efficiency. It can close those gaps and create jobs in the process, bringing profit to the private sector. The UK Government can push for that to happen through an ODA partnership that does not lead to dependency.

Also, look at the climate. We are entering a phase where everybody wants to deploy green energy to enable mitigation. The market for solar panels in Nigeria is huge. Solar pumps and solar panels are able to power the water supply. You can come up with designs for sanitation facilities that are climate resilient. All that can enable UK businesses, working in close collaboration with their Nigerian counterparts, to make profit.

We can look at partnerships where the UK Government support the Nigerian Government to access green climate funds and begin to address issues of flooding, shoreline erosion and saline intrusion. All that can become embedded in the strategic partnership and enable the UK Government to meet their objective.

When you create jobs, you address the risk of the migration component and create people-to-people links. Two strong countries standing on the global stage can show how a strategic partnership can effectively deliver on economic growth.

Q25 Chair: On the example that you gave, why is Nigeria unable to build that development on its own?

Evelyn Mere: I think it relates to the availability of funding and collaborations to develop technologies; I talked about how solar technologies can continue to iterate. You can get solar energy to be as cheap as possible so people can access it.

Most households in Nigeria use fuel-supported generators. Moving to solar energy will enable Nigeria and businesses in the UK to achieve great benefits relating to addressing the climate issue, making profit, accessing the market and creating jobs for young people—with innovators among the youth being able to contribute. It is about collaboration and the two countries being able to harness one another's areas of strength.

I also talked about the issue of something as simple as hygiene. Every Global Handwashing Day, PZ Cussons runs a campaign trying to get people to wash their hands. If the company is intentional in having people understand the health benefits of handwashing, that immediately unlocks the hygiene supply chain and they can make huge profits while also delivering jobs and health benefits in the country. The strategic partnership framework has limitless possibilities if harnessed effectively.

Tracy Gilbert: Andrew, is there anything you want to add?

Andrew Mamedu: I think that the UK Government can do more in terms of partnership with the Nigerian Government and increasing visibility for women—particularly for issues of women, peace and security. The UK Government used to take a lead in that and getting women as first respondents. The framework that guides its operation has now expired and needs to be renewed. Those are clear areas that we can deal with.

Secondly, there is the issue of women in politics. We are doing very badly: four women out of 107 Senators and 16 out of 420 Members of the House of Representatives—that is about 3.6%. That is a very poor figure. The

issue of patriarchy would not allow us to get beyond that, so that partnership would go a long way for us.

Finally, there is the issue of the protection of human rights and civil society. That is key. We have had lots of recent incidents of the victimisation of civil society groups, the media and all of that. Partnership in those areas would help allow democracy to thrive. We cannot allow democracy to go down in Nigeria. It has huge implications, not just for Nigeria, but for the world, including the UK.

- Q26 **Chair:** Andrew, could I pick up on that? You talked about Government-to-Government relationships. Do you envisage the UK Government working directly with civil society in Nigeria, or should it be Government-to-Government?

Andrew Mamedu: I think both, but there is no way the UK Government would work actively and achieve great results without working with the civil society. The civil society are the only ones that can hold the Government accountable. I will give you a good example: we talked about localisation. In election work in Nigeria, it is only local or national civil society such as ActionAid—a national civil society—that can actively engage in electoral monitoring and electoral processes generally and come out and hold the Government to account. We will not be able to achieve in the areas of migration, trade, or peace and security without that work. The civil society have their role to play. The Government-to-Government relationship would also have its own role to play, but anchoring that in civil society would allow a greater result and a soother relationship.

- Q27 **Chair:** Mary, could I put that question to you slightly differently? You said your programme was created with a lot of support from USAID. Would you want the whole project to be taken on by the Nigerian Government in the long term, or can you see it as a stand-alone? And why would you make whichever choice you think most appropriate?

Mary Dinah: In terms of sustainability, we always have an exit strategy in mind on a community-by-community basis. We work with the Government, and we have always trained the Government staff—the health workers—so that if there is an instance where we do not have enough funding, we are able to exit without the people being affected. That is also to build resilience of the community as well, which is very important. However, it is important that the civil society and NGOs are empowered and able to lead.

With the USAID programme, it was always led with the NGOs and the NGOs would then bring in the Government. We created the Zero Hunger Program with them. We then approached the Yobe State Emergency Management Agency and the Ministry of Health and other key stakeholders—religious and educational leaders in the community and so on. They empowered us to do that. That is the right way round. If you work directly with the Government, and they are then supposed to hand-pick the NGOs that they work with—or what usually happens is that they

hand over to perhaps UNICEF or a UN agency who then start to pick the NGOs and so on—then the impact is felt less.

For us, in those communities with some of those large amounts of funding—\$100 million or \$200 million—we are not seeing where that money has gone, which NGOs are working on it or what their impact or numbers are. When you lead with the NGOs, it is also easier to monitor what the NGOs are doing. I would not necessarily suggest open grants where hundreds of people can apply. I think it is better to hand-pick five to 10 organisations that you work with, and then they present proposals that you build with them. Then you work holding hands with them, with the Government in tow as well. I think that sort of strategy would lead to a lot of quick wins and a big impact.

Q28 Chair: The UK Government are shifting quite dramatically at the moment both the amount of funding that they have and their priorities. Their ability to directly fund projects I imagine will be greatly reduced; they are shifting much more to a multilateral model. They are also, as I said, going from donors to partners. How do you think that will play out in Nigeria specifically?

Mary Dinah: I think it is important for the Nigerian Government, like you said, to step in as partner. I believe that what they can do is build better partnerships with civil society and NGOs. Historically, Ministries like the Ministry of budget and planning actually oversee all the nutrition programmes, and then the Ministry of Health. They are reaching out more to local actors to say, “Come and register with us. Be on the list of NGOs working. Even though you are operating in Yobe or Katsina, there is a big pull to work with us on a federal level.”

In Abuja this week, they are having a conference for micronutrient supplementation, and more NGOs than ever before have been invited to work with the Government in creating programmes and working together. Doing so, and then bringing in the UK Government and other international Governments, is a good way that the Nigerian Government can move forward. They have the intention to do that. They just need the support with the funding.

Chair: Andrew, Evelyn and Mary, thank you so much for the evidence that you have given us. You have given us a lot of evidence, and we really appreciate it. We will now switch to our second panel; Mary, you are most welcome to stay with us if you want to take a seat in the Gallery.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Camilla Higgins, Arjun Jain and Thierno Samba Diallo.

Chair: Thank you for joining us. Camilla, could you introduce yourself and the organisation that you work for, please?

Camilla Higgins: Thank you for the opportunity to speak. My name is Camilla Higgins, and I am the director of the Nigeria INGO Forum, which is

a membership body representing a large number of INGOs operating in Nigeria.

Chair: Excellent. Thank you. If there is any way you could turn the sound up at your end, Camilla, we would be grateful for it.

Arjun, could I ask you to introduce yourself and your organisation, please?

Arjun Jain: My name is Arjun Jain. I am the representative to Nigeria for the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the UN refugee agency.

Chair: Thank you very much. Thierno—is that how I pronounce your name?

Thierno Samba Diallo: Yes, you said it correctly.

Chair: Could I ask you to introduce yourself, please?

Thierno Samba Diallo: Thank you so much, and thanks for having us. I am Thierno Samba Diallo, the country director of Action Against Hunger Nigeria.

Chair: Thank you so much for joining us in the room. We appreciate it.

Q29 **Janet Daby:** Camilla, for the NGOs that you work with, are the demands for humanitarian and developmental support growing or falling?

Camilla Higgins: I would say that the demands and the needs are certainly growing and continue to be extreme in Nigeria, particularly in the northern parts of the country. Nigeria contributes a massive number to the global humanitarian case load, but we do not really see this often reflected, particularly in the media. I myself, having grown up in the UK, was very unaware of the needs in Nigeria until I took up this position.

I think you have heard from a few other representatives already, but just to share some additional figures on this, based on the latest Cadre Harmonisé analysis, Nigeria is looking at 35 million people projected to face severe food insecurity during the 2026 lean season, and that is the highest number ever recorded in Nigeria. That number is half the population of the United Kingdom, so this is not a small crisis or a small-scale need.

In July this year, I participated in a press briefing about the malnutrition crisis around this year's lean season, together with the EU ambassador, the Nigerian Minister for Humanitarian Affairs and nutrition partners. In that press briefing, I highlighted that the number of children suffering from severe acute malnutrition and risk of death—that is 3.5 million children—amounts to 60 times the capacity of the National Stadium in Abuja. To put that in a United Kingdom context, that is 40 times the capacity of Wembley. That is how many children are at very severe risk of dying. That shocked the media here temporarily. It should shock people permanently and globally. UNICEF recently estimated that 1,000 children a day could die as a result of malnutrition if the funding continues to decline.



We have all seen the recent uptick in insecurity. That is an escalation of a trend that has started already earlier this year, quite closely following on the heels of the of the funding cuts that we saw earlier this year across the sector. We have really witnessed insecurity events being progressively worse over the course of this year. I read a statistic somewhere in a UNDP paper that there have been more insecurity incidents affecting civilians and causing civilian death in the first quarter of 2025 than during the entirety of 2024. Obviously, with insecurity comes the inability to meet to meet basic needs, so for sure our members are reporting that they are finding more and more people competing for and trying to access their services.

A colleague who you have already spoken to mentioned that some outpatient therapeutic centres are having to turn people away. I can verify that. We are also hearing that from our members. The insecurity that we are seeing at the moment is absolutely affecting everybody in Nigeria regardless of faith. It is impacting the ability to deliver humanitarian services and the ability of people to access those services.

Q30 Janet Daby: How are your NGOs feeling on the ground with the overwhelming demand and tragedy in terms of the figures that you are speaking about?

Camilla Higgins: Pretty overwhelmed, particularly on the nutrition front, but I think every service is absolutely stretched to capacity. It has been an unparalleled year in the humanitarian sector globally, but no less in Nigeria.

The MSF paper spoke to this the most, because it was one of the few organisations that was able to fully maintain its services during the peak of the crisis, when a lot of the nutrition and health services that were funded by USAID suddenly had to stop until the situation became clearer about what would be funded and what would not be funded. It was reporting being at absolute maximum capacity and having to increase the availability of beds multiple times. Several INGO members, including Action Against Hunger—Thierno can speak very well on this—were reporting putting two or three children per bed in order to try to cope with the ongoing demands.

Q31 Janet Daby: Thierno, what is the specific risk to women and girls in this type of crisis, and due to the funding cuts?

Thierno Samba Diallo: On the insecurity that Camilla just described, we have seen a worsening scenario, which is impacting not only Nigeria but the Sahel region. Nigeria is stretched because of that. There was this joint regional taskforce, which the UK was supporting with surveillance and information sharing against non-state armed groups, but that stopped last year. Again, that caused a mass increase in the space occupied by non-state armed groups such as ISWAP or JAS.

We have seen access being very limited, including humanitarian assistance, but access for the communities is the most difficult one, in the sense that those in the camps—what they call the garrison towns—cannot



HOUSE OF COMMONS

go beyond 2 km. So that has stopped any kind of livelihood or agricultural production, which has added to this. With that said, women and children are the most impacted; women stay at home and take care for children and relatives.

On the funding cuts—as Camilla and other colleagues mentioned earlier—the suddenness caused a lot of damage. The health system was tested. We saw in the north-east that more than 100 health facilities had to stop providing services. We, Action Against Hunger, as the co-lead of the nutrition sector with UNICEF, along with others, have seen the facilities decreasing. Earlier this year, we were supporting about 103 health facilities; we had to cut down to 73. That was massive, and we are among those that still remain there. After getting funding, we got stop orders, and then rescinding, and continued support, especially in the north-east and north-west.

Camilla talked about the numbers, and what we are seeing is quite alarming. This year, the number of people who are food insecure was estimated at around 30 million. They just did the assessment for next year, and it has increased that to 34.7 million. The number of malnourished children was 5.4 million this year, increasing to 6 million with global acute malnutrition.

The 3.5 million children with SAM—severe acute malnutrition—has increased, with the north-east and north-west alone seeing up to 3 million children under five affected. Of these, around 2 million were at the brink of dying if no support was provided. A lot has been happening within that; together with our members, we undertook advocacy to the Government, the European Union and the UK, to demonstrate the needs in Nigeria.

What we have noticed is that Nigeria has become a kind of forgotten crisis. Our co-leads will say that, compared with Sudan, Gaza or Ukraine, if we go by the numbers Nigeria is overwhelming—but it is under-reported. That is why we spoke about the MSF report, which brought the issue to the stage with what is happening in Nigeria. Recently, because the US considers Nigeria a country of concern with its security and religious connotations, that has again brought Nigeria into the spotlight.

Other than that, we are seeing this happening but not really being talked about a lot. They estimate that, this year, more than 750,000 pregnant and lactating mothers are acutely malnourished. You can imagine a malnourished woman giving birth to a child; you might see a child who is six years old and think they are only one and a half. When you see some of those photos, it is really alarming. That is how women and children are affected in this situation.

Q32 Chair: Could I just push you a little bit on that? The figures that you gave are really frightening in their scale. Do they relate to internally displaced people? Do they relate to refugees? Do they relate to Nigerians in urban areas or in rural areas? Is there more of a breakdown, or is it literally across the board?



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thierno Samba Diallo: All those causes you listed are entwined. The displaced, refugees and host communities are all affected. The insecurity is affecting everyone, but those in the camps suffer more because their movement is limited, and they are all together. The host communities are also hosting some of those displaced people who cannot be in the camps, so it becomes an overburden for them, and what they used to have for their own families must now be shared. So there is that.

The insecurity is the primary issue, and you have seen the scale of it. I was just looking at the statistics: in 2012, there were only two states in the north-west where these bandits were active. In 2025, eight states are affected. That has just taken it from two to eight states. Insecurity is overwhelming, again because of the influence of the Sahel region—Niger, Burkina Faso and Mali. There is now no connection in that. That has an impact in Nigeria, and with Nigeria being the biggest country in west Africa, it has that weight. Normally they could have counted on Nigeria to have supported that kind of stability, but Nigeria is struggling with its own.

That is in addition to poverty. It is reported that 63% of the Nigerian population, around 130 million people, are under the threshold of poverty. Within that, if you just take the north—north-east, north-west—they account for 75% of that number. If you take just a few states, like Sokoto, that you have heard about, 90% of the population is under that threshold. So poverty itself is contributing to that. From 2023, there is galloping inflation. The economic status itself is not helping people, households, women, to have the purchasing power to really help their families. All these are interconnected, contributing to the situation we see.

Q33 **Chair:** The UK and Nigeria have always had a very strong relationship. There are many Nigerians who live here, were born here, or work or study here. Are remittances helping? Andrew in the previous panel said that each family had basically five to 10 additional people that were not on the books who they were trying to support. Is that where remittances come in, or how are people coping?

Thierno Samba Diallo: Any household that has a member outside is helping at some point, but it is so overwhelming that is not getting enough per se. For me, if families cannot go to farm for themselves and do not have that livelihood whereby they can earn their own revenue to support themselves—so that what they will get will be a complement to what they have—then it becomes insufficient. If that outside person alone is to cater for 10 to 15 people, it becomes so heavy for one person.

The UK Government, the FCDO, has supported programmes—the previous panel talked to some—but we also have the expanded social protection and inclusive development, SP programme, that brought in this social protection safety net programme for five years. We see that supporting households for a continued time will help them not only to respond to emergency need, but to have some income-generating activities that can help them to cater for themselves.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

That is why I think today, while these numbers are alarming, any support from the Nigerian Government, and friends such as the UK and related, has to really see the link between humanitarian relief and development and the nexus there. What we call the Integrated Food Security Classification uses phases. When you are in phase 4, it becomes an emergency situation. Phase 5 is famine. Humanitarians target phases 4 and 5, but while you are supporting those, you see phase 3 and phase 2 becoming phase 4.

If there is no support for long-term development and linking of humanitarian aid to development, we will continue in that cycle of dependency. That is what we have seen over the last 15 years, except some of those programmes, like Jigawa, where the state was able to put in place a policy on social protection and allocate 10% of the annual budget to helping elderly people and women like those we just mentioned. I think those are the kind of things that the Nigerian Government themselves and any other support can really focus on, so that we can see a reduction of these vulnerabilities and poverty.

Chair: My concern globally, but particularly for the UK's investment, is that the prevention, the early intervention and the sustainability drop off because the humanitarian need becomes so huge, and if you do not address the early stages, you are just going from crisis to crisis.

Q34 **Tracy Gilbert:** This is a question for Arjun. Could you briefly summarise the UNHCR's work across Nigeria?

Arjun Jain: Sure. The UNHCR has been here since 1983, but today we work with around 3% of the world's displaced population. When you look at the numbers, that is quite significant. There are 122 million people displaced around the world, of which 3% are Nigerians in Nigeria and the surrounding region. Our first population of concern and the first communities that we work with are asylum seekers and refugees: people coming in from neighbouring countries—largely from Cameroon, but also from 40 other countries. We have a reasonably robust asylum system that is run by the Government and supported by us; that contains 140,000 people right now. We still see a lot more coming in from Cameroon, due to the recent election.

The second population or community that we are working with are Nigerian refugees in neighbouring countries, especially in the Lake Chad Basin countries of Chad, Niger and Cameroon. We are talking about 400,000 Nigerians living as refugees in that neighbourhood, largely due to the insurgency, but also because of other reasons, such as climate emergencies and things like that. This is why there is a displacement crisis in Nigeria: it is because there is a regional crisis—we have insurgency movements and other armed groups from outside the country—and we also have Nigeria contributing to the instability by having refugees in the neighbourhood who are unable to come back due to safety concerns.

Of course, the largest community that we are working with is internally displaced persons, and there are around 3.6 million of them across the



country, largely in the north-east, in Borno and neighbouring states. That is due to the insurgency in the north-east. We are seeing the number of displaced persons growing in the north-west, largely due to banditry and illegal mining, but now also due to a different type of insurgency and extremism that is popping up in the north-west. We have what is known as the middle belt or the north central, where a range of issues contributes to forced displacement, starting with the state of Benue, which has the second-largest number of displaced people. There are 500,000 people displaced there, partly due to gang violence, the farmer-herder conflict, natural disasters and a series of other concerns.

A small part of our work is also dealing with stateless communities. These are people who are at risk of being stateless, or people who may be stateless; we try to institute a stateless determination procedure with the Government and also try to resolve the nationality of certain individuals. That is broadly what we do here in Nigeria.

Q35 Tracy Gilbert: How secure is the funding to your organisation and to other UN bodies in Nigeria and the wider region for the coming years?

Arjun Jain: To say “shaky” would be euphemistic. We are very precarious right now. The situation is deeply precarious, for not just UNHCR and a few other UN agencies, but a lot of the NGOs, many of which have had to shut down operations over the past six to nine months, which is why we are seeing fewer and fewer services offered to communities—*[Inaudible.]*

Chair: Arjun, we are having trouble with your link. We will try to get it resolved and come back to you. Thierno, turning to you, are women-led civil society organisations helping reduce conflict and displacement?

Thierno Samba Diallo: At Action Against Hunger we work with some women-led organisations, especially in Borno and the north-east—not the north-west, per se. What we have seen in conflict areas is that women are peacemakers. When there are funding cuts and organisations had to shut down, and there are fewer jobs for young people, and they are not really attending schools, it is a high risk that they will join those armed groups. Women step back. Usually, when they say to a man, “Don’t go to that conflict,” they are mostly heard, compared with others.

All those actors in the conflict, they are people from the same area. You belong to a family. Instead of moving into those armed groups, they can see that they can take another direction and see how they can earn for the family, and contribute to that. That is one thing.

Then there is when they get into advocating in front of the actors—the Government, the security forces—and then me coming and advocating on what I see and how I see it. We work with a women-led organisation that Mary maybe knows, called BOWDI, the women’s association in Borno. They have the ability to bring the voice of women and children, and call people to action to stop some of those atrocities.

Sometimes they also help with access. When there is a network and accessibility into communities, they are a voice that can be listened to.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

The previous panel talked about representation. That is a negative side that we see. The more we see women empowered, the more they can get livelihoods, the better a family is fed and the better the context for becoming peaceful. But that representation is still low.

It is our responsibility to support those organisations, especially community-based organisations led by women, to really triumph at community level, because they can build the kind of system that can prevent more atrocities and that can prevent more escalation of the conflict, and they can be heard at a higher level when it comes to advocating for peace, stability and of course development.

Q36 Tracy Gilbert: Arjun, I hope you can hear us now. You were talking about funding and the instability of that—we got half of that answer. Would you give us the rest?

Arjun Jain: Thank you so much; I have just switched off my video hoping that that will improve the audio.

I just wanted to say that the funding situation for many of us is quite precarious. Effectively, what we are looking at is a number of people who are extremely vulnerable—we are not talking about people who miss a meal here and there; we are talking about people who are in an extreme and dire situation—not being supported.

Just a couple of weeks ago we were with a few member states including the FCDO in a camp called El-Miskin in Maiduguri, where they met women who were in an extremely dire situation. We were discussing what more we can do for them and how we identified them. We have deep roots in communities. We have people who seek these women at risk in communities, identify them, help them form co-operatives and work with them so that they are self-reliant over a period of time.

We will have more people who are living in a precarious situation and who will continue living in a precarious situation.

During the lean season that you have heard a lot about, with the high malnutrition rate, we were in some of the most remote communities, identifying families who are at greatest risk, including separated and unaccompanied children, women at risk, single parents and the disabled. Without us having a presence on the ground or having some local NGOs that have a deep insight into the communities on the ground, these people will remain unidentified and in precarious situations.

It is really precarious for us. We have been operating in 13 states. I think we will cut that down to five or six now. We were working in 50 Government areas, and now that will go down to around 20 or 25 with the current funding situation.

We have been heavily dependent on core or flexible funding, but that is now not coming. I will stop there.

Q37 Chair: Arjun, may I push you further on that? Will those funding cuts



HOUSE OF COMMONS

mean that you are still able to work on combating the drivers of instability and displacement across Nigeria?

Arjun Jain: We will and we won't—it is not a straightforward answer. Over the past couple of years, we have done a lot to gain efficiencies. We have got the Government to take a lot more responsibility—they have been very receptive on some issues—and there has been a lot more cost-benefit work. We work only with local Government agencies or local NGOs—we do not have any international agencies as partners—and we are very solutions-focused. We are looking at how the private sector can do more, at how we can have solutions from the start and at development solutions for traditional humanitarian situations. We have gained a lot of cost-benefit and cost-efficiency over time, but the truth is that while we are addressing some of the aspects—including finding solutions for communities that have been displaced—I sense that if that continues and if this year is any reflection of the coming years, we will have massive structural failures across the whole system, be it to the north-east, the north-west or the north central. That is not just for UNHCR, but for the whole system. That is what is concerning for us.

Q38 **Chair:** What are the consequences of that?

Arjun Jain: If you are looking at the north-east, most likely you will see a massive displacement crisis, which will only increase. I do not see how a lack of solutions will do anything but increase the number of people displaced. A previous speaker spoke about people joining armed and insurgent groups, and I think that that is quite evident in situations of extreme poverty. We will also see people move across the border and create regional instability. For the first time, we saw Nigerians cross over into Cameroon because of the food crisis, because of the nutrition crisis. That is something that we have been tracking over the past few years. The regional instability in a region that is already unstable would be quite evident in the north-east.

In the north-west, too, we would see a lot more people being displaced. Compared with the north-east, we do not have such a solid footprint in the north-west, and that could create more displacement, not because of our presence, or lack thereof, but because of a number of other agencies being impacted. We were the first agency to respond to the Yelwata crisis in June, when 200 people were killed in Benue State, in the north central. That emergency response capacity will disappear, and we will see more people remain in a situation of displacement. Hundreds of thousands of families live in dilapidated, forgotten IDP camps across Benue State. We are trying to get them out of the camps and provide them with a self-reliant, dignified way of living. We are working with a number of partners. That, too, will disappear, which means people will remain dependent on humanitarian assistance and in a situation of extreme poverty.

Q39 **Chair:** To put it very simply, if the UK reduces its funding, and other international partners do, the consequences to Nigeria and to the region could be catastrophic.

Arjun Jain: Absolutely—in stark terms, that would be absolutely right. May I add that the FCDO team here is quite brilliant? You have a really good team here. During the many crises of this year, your high commissioner has really helped hold us together, worked with us to identify some of the challenges that we are facing, and been guiding us through a very difficult time, making interventions with the Government as and where possible. You have a fantastic development and humanitarian team that is on top of the situation and is tracking a number of the issues that we are working on, but it is true that funding is a huge part of the puzzle. We are not expecting the FCDO to cover the losses and the gaps that have been created by the absence of USAID, but strategic investments in the humanitarian and development fields would be absolutely critical to regional stability and the stability of Nigeria.

I was reading the recent strategic partnership agreement between Nigeria and the UK, which was signed last year. Without that funding, you will have challenges in realising some of these issues in the strategy. You guys are being very strategic about your investments, and the work of the FCDO is critical.

Q40 David Mundell: Camilla, can I ask you about Nigeria's capacity to meet the cost of its own humanitarian and development needs? Although there is great division in the country in wealth, it is a lower to middle-income country.

Camilla Higgins: Thank you for the question. I would like to build on a little bit of what Arjun has said. Overall, yes, there is capacity there in theory, but it is going to take us time to build that in practice. If funding from the UK and other partners were to disappear overnight, as it has in some cases, that will have a severe impact on those communities that rely on the existing channels, structures and mechanisms that are in place—that is one of my greatest fears.

To give the example that was mentioned earlier, with the commitments to health investment that were made at the onset of the funding crisis, most of those have not become a reality in any meaningful manner. Although we are aware that the health budget has increased overall, we have not actually seen any public reports of disbursements, or those funds that have been verbally committed to actually materialising in projects, programmes and activities to support people who need that assistance.

That really exemplifies my answer to your question: the financial capacity might be there, in terms of the income and revenue potential of Nigeria, but we have not yet built the will, and the momentum of financing and co-ordination structures to make that turn into solutions for people in need. I have to say that, to a degree, the international community is guilty of contributing to a cycle of dependence, but that is not something that can be changed overnight.

To underscore your point, I completely understand that Nigeria is a country with quite a significant oil industry. I believe the net revenue last year was something like \$32 billion, but we should also consider that the



HOUSE OF COMMONS

request for the humanitarian appeal for Nigeria last year was \$926 million, which is less than 3% of the year's oil revenue. None the less, we see humanitarian needs pop up in the media every now and again, and they very quickly go back down again.

I think that speaks a little bit to one of the points of the earlier speakers; we really need to empower civil society and media to be able to hold duty bearers to account. There is a lack of accountability for decision making and financial disbursement, and a lack of architecture for those things to materialise. That is partly contributed to by a lack of clear terms of reference within the authorities themselves, in terms of who will do what and who will bear what responsibilities. That remains a very big knot to untangle, and again it is not something that can be done overnight.

Without wishing to repeat myself too much, I make the point again that I met representation from your side in Nigeria. We need to start by having very up-front conversations with the Government of Nigeria about what they are motivated to take up out of what the international community currently does, and those conversations are really at their very beginning stages. Once we know what they are motivated to take on, we then need to identify how to address the gap between their motivation and capacity, which is there, as I have outlined.

Once we have addressed that gap, we then need to start thinking about all the areas where they have indicated that they have no motivation to invest, of which there are many, for various reasons—political strategies are part of it, but they are of course not the whole picture. For what they are not willing to take on, what are we going to do about that? Are we going to apply political pressure, diplomatic pressure or other kinds of pressure to try to get those needs on the table? Or are we going to retain some core international intervention specifically to focus on those needs? As we outlined earlier in this conversation, the level of need that we are talking about is really quite high. If we walk away, we are talking about large numbers of people being affected to the point of it being life-threatening.

Q41 Chair: Camilla, you said a couple of times that “we” need to find out what the Nigerian Government want or need to do, or what their capabilities are. Who is the “we”?

Camilla Higgins: I take the international community as being responsible at this moment in time. I am privileged to sit on the humanitarian country team. Of the international inter-agency standing committee structure that is in Nigeria at present, it is the senior decision-making body about how humanitarian needs are organised. Essentially, we are looking in Nigeria at a transition from the IASC architecture, which has all these UN-led structures in place, such as the Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs and a humanitarian country team. All those things are going to have to disappear because of the funding cut.

Q42 Chair: Can I pause you on that? You are saying that the change is happening because of the funding cuts. Shouldn't the change be



happening because it needs to happen and because countries need the support to take ownership, rather than them having to do something when the funding is not there?

Camilla Higgins: I definitely do not disagree with you. Ideally, the change would be happening because the scale of humanitarian needs is reducing, but we are very clearly not seeing that. As the scale of humanitarian needs remains extremely high, and in the meantime, there is ever less funding available from international sources to address those needs, we have to—and we should have before now; I would definitely own that—encourage more national-level structures to step up.

Chair: Thank you. Let me pass you back to David.

- Q43 **David Mundell:** Camilla, you answered the question I was going to ask you about institutional capacity, but one thing to draw out, which maybe has not come across as much in the evidence today as we discovered when we were in Nigeria, is the complex relationship between the federal Government, the governors and the individual states. Whatever partnership the UK Government have with the Nigerian Government, the Nigerian Government are not necessarily able to deliver on a number of these issues, because they are the responsibility of the states. Am I right in that analysis?

Camilla Higgins: Yes, it is definitely complex. Before you even get to the federal-state relationship, the nature of relationships and responsibilities even at the federal level is complex, to say the least. To give an example, there is a department of nutrition within the Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs. There is the same department within the Ministry of Health and a similar department within the Ministry of budget and planning. It is relatively clear that the budget and planning role is for overall planning of any ongoing response, but it is really unclear who then should take the lead in the case of a nutrition emergency. Should it be the Ministry of Health or the Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs? That is a question that we had to ask earlier this year and have not resolved.

Then, to consider the federal-state relationship, yes, you have to secure things at the federal level and then secure them at whichever state level you want to work in, because the governors have so much autonomy and authority over how budget is allocated within their state. Quite often, we also hear the complaint, when trying to address things at a state level where decisions are taken, where they will say, “Yes, we have taken the decisions, but we have not managed to unlock the financing from the federal level.” In reverse, you will hear similar things where the federal level says, “We have released funding to the states to do x, y and z, but they are not doing it.” For sure, it is certainly a source of delay and blockage of needs being met.

- Q44 **David Mundell:** Is that your experience as well, Thierno?

Thierno Samba Diallo: Absolutely—it is complex. Earlier this year, when we really hit the lean season and saw 600,000 children almost at the level of dying, the NIF, which represents many organisations, and ourselves at



Action Against Hunger had to take the baton and do a tour of these federal Government institutions. As Camilla just mentioned, you deal with one department, and then you wonder if the co-ordination is with the other department. In nutrition, you have the Minister of Health as the co-ordinating Minister, but you have these other three departments, as Camilla just mentioned. Everyone would claim that they would lead on that.

At some point we wondered how we can really get that transition that is being worked on right now. Given what Arjun and Camilla have said, at this point we have no other option but to transfer or transition to locally led co-ordination and interventions. If you take that side from the federal level, you have to do the same thing at the state level with the governors.

Take Borno State. You might have heard about humanitarian principles and people being returned to areas, whether secure or insecure. They have the power to do what they do at the state level without linking much with the federal level. I mentioned the example of FCDO funding that was implemented in Jigawa. The Jigawa State government came up with a policy on social protection. At least four other states took that example. That can make it work at state level, which is closer to the population. For us, that can help to build those systems at community level. Then, it comes up from the grassroots, at least to the federal level. Maybe that can help to connect the barriers that we are seeing.

If you build green and you have agricultural co-operations, women's associations, livestock system associations and those kinds of community-based systems and resilience built, and you link that up with the local government authority level, it then goes up to the state level. With what we do as the international community, see more impact on communities and relieving of suffering of those communities than we sometimes do with the complexity of dealing with things only at federal level. That is how it can be.

Examples exist, as I just said. For now, it is not easy because you have to deal with both parts. The first panel talked about governors. You just talked about institutional capacity so that there is interlinking and accountability in those lines. I agree that if you take the Nigerian Government oil resources right now, if they are well supported and institutions are working, they will need fewer resources for international relationships. International relationships always exist because terrorist actions in Nigeria can impact the UK. If the Sahel is engulfed with terrorism, it is a global problem. I saw in your partnership strategy something strong on defence and security, which is key to bringing about stability in the region, including there. The federal level and the links with state are complex. It cannot be solved in a day or two.

Q45 David Mundell: Arjun, do you hold out any hope that the processes that Thierno and Camilla just spoke about could be simplified, streamlined or made more effective within a foreseeable period?



Arjun Jain: Sadly, my job is to be hopeful, so I will always hold hope. Is it likely during my tenure here? I do not know. Everyone has said what needs to be said about the relationships between the federal and state governments, but here are a couple of things that we do to overcome it. The first is that we anchor everything with one ministry. In our case, it is the Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs. We have signed MOU after MOU with them trying to reinforce the work we are doing at the federal level. As a consequence, they act as a guarantor, so to speak, for us. When there is a problem at the state level, we go to the federal level and say, "Listen, we have a problem here. We've signed an MOU with you. Please take a look at how we can resolve it." There is often a way to resolve it.

As has been said before, it is not just at the state level; it is at the LGA level and the ward level. We work from a ground-up basis, which means that we start working with the communities. When the communities engage, it is very hard for Governments to say no. That is how we work. We have to build in costs for security and transportation. It is crazy expensive because we have to work at so many different levels. We have to build in the cost for Government engagement, because we have to engage at so many different levels. It does work sometimes, but it is immensely difficult. It is almost impossible to work in a black and white zone; there is a grey zone, where we have to work with personalities and communities to make it happen.

David Mundell: Thank you; we all have to work with personalities.

Q46 **Chair:** Don't we just? This is the last question from me, which I put to all of you. How could the Nigeria-UK development—I use the word deliberately—partnership be strengthened?

Thierno Samba Diallo: There is an historical tie between the UK and Nigeria. In all the different sectors outlined in the partnership strategy and the six pillars, there is content that, if it works, will really lead to the long-term development that we are talking about—growth first, then defence and security, people to people, and all those actions—and we know the influence.

The call we make today is not just for resources; it is for a voice—for a relationship, for diplomacy, sometimes for influence, and really for supporting the Government, so that that can come up strongly. I think somewhere we say that there can be help. When they were pressured recently on this "religious conflict" connotation, the President came up with a meeting with all the security heads, and he cancelled his trip to the G20 in South Africa. One action they also took was to call back all those security guards protecting VIPs, so that they can make savings, in addition to all the other resources. If we can get rid of what we just talked about—depending on someone—and depend on a system that can work, those kinds of development ties can become stronger and stronger. Because of the historical relationship, the UK can really support the Government of Nigeria in that voice.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

We just talked about the humanitarian crisis. Honestly, when we come out with all the advocacy we are doing, to the EU membership, to other donors and to the UK in particular—Arjun mentioned how strong your representation is there—I think that influence can be used. They have what is called child nutrition matching funds, so that, in terms of funding and when there is a system of accountability in place, we can say, “Well, if we’re giving £50 million to Nigeria for development, can you also give £50 million, so that the impact can be doubled?”, or something like that. I believe they can have that, but it should be based on a systemic approach that can be built for long-term development. I think that is possible, so I am looking at local development and all the sectors we have mentioned.

Honestly, if you take the nutrition sector, it comprises all other sectors. If you construct food security and livelihoods, it contributes to nutrition; if you work on the WASH sector, it contributes to nutrition; and if you do not have key indicators in WASH, the consequences are felt by children and women. And if you do not have social protection as another sector, then you are missing gender-based violence and all those related things.

Taking those things together can ensure a holistic approach, agreeing with the Government of Nigeria in their discussions. No time is better than today, when they are facing those multidimensional challenges: security, poverty, inflation and political—well, I wouldn’t say political instability, but let’s us see what happens in the elections in the coming year or so. Bringing all that together can strengthen this partnership and benefit both sides. We talk about migration in the strategy. In defence, after doing some development work around Africa, I know that until we have some level of stability, it will be difficult to talk about development gains, because you are building today, and tomorrow something happens that would actually clear up all of this.

Then, we must take a holistic approach, supporting defence, stability and social cohesion, not only in Nigeria but linked in with the region—talking about Cameroon, Chad, Niger, Benin, because all those are interlinked today. Recently, we heard that some groups active in Mali are now transitioning to Nigeria and the Niger State. It is kind of a global trend all together.

There is a lot to say here, but I just—

Q47 **Chair:** I want to push you on a specific point. Are you seeing on the international stage a recognition of the interconnection between those different countries, and that a conflict in one or a famine in another will have a knock-on effect, or are they identifying individual problems in individual countries and therefore not seeing the bigger picture?

Thierno Samba Diallo: I think it must have been there, but the level of it that is being seen is less, because I wonder about the international community. I think there were no kind of options in the Sahel region. They wanted to withdraw from ECOWAS, which has a huge impact on Nigeria—Nigeria being the biggest country and normally the elephant in the west that could impose peace, stability and security within the 16 member

states. But that is falling apart. That has consequences globally in terms of terrorism, insecurity and related issues.

Even with vulnerabilities, if there are more people hungry in Nigeria, the effect can be felt everywhere in the world—everywhere. I do not think that there is voice enough at the international stage about the danger that is boiling up in the region. And because of this defragmentation of even the joint forces—the regional forces I talked about earlier—they are no longer there. The UK, France and Germany used to provide support with that. Now, each country is fighting for itself, and that makes it very difficult and gives space to those groups.

I can tell you that in Borno right now, ISWA—the Islamic State in West Africa province—is setting up a kind of governance, within themselves, collecting zakat from the communities in exchange for security. That is a type of governance that can be very dangerous, if they really get to succeed in that kind of thing.

That is why I think that in a kind of co-operation or partnership on defence and security, and what the UK represents globally, there can be a voice in addition to Nigeria to really call for action, because it is a danger for the global stage. That is what I would say and I think the UK can do something on that—definitely.

Q48 Chair: Arjun, can I bring you in on the same question about strengthening the Nigeria-UK development partnership? One of the things that we are seeing the Government do is to shift from specific schemes for women and girls, or for people with disabilities, to mainstreaming that. What are the strengths and weaknesses of mainstreaming development support, rather than working with particular groups?

Arjun Jain: There are a couple of things here. The first thing is that you have got a great team, a great strategy and a great network, so one of the things that I would recommend is this: don't dismantle it, underfund it, or defund it. I think that you guys are doing a great job here and I say that as an agency that is not being funded by FCDO in Nigeria.

The second thing is to recognise that we have a crisis over a crisis. We have a huge crisis of forced displacement and a huge crisis on security, which is resulting in an annual crisis on nutrition, food insecurity, and so on and so forth. That is a regional crisis more than just a Nigeria crisis. And if there would be one thing I would say, it would be to look at this thing more regionally than just as a Nigeria-specific crisis.

Responding to the question that you asked, when you have specific programmes that become cross-cutting, you end up cutting them out and that becomes a risk in many ways for the specific groups that we would like to target. We really need to target the most vulnerable and the most destitute—the ones who have little to no hope, and who we know will be in a precarious situation moving forward in the coming month. We can't do that without specific programmes. There are some really good generic programmes that we should continue. Of course we should roll out the



HOUSE OF COMMONS

social safety net programmes that have been suspended for some time and make sure it is done in a credible manner to include these communities, but we can't wait for perfection to get in the way of the good, and we need to target the communities most at risk. Most of the people who are at risk are forcibly displaced not just once or twice, but multiple times over one or two decades—in the north-east, the middle belt and now a lot more in the north-west.

Another issue is solutions from the start. The humanitarian development nexus, which is one leading to the other, is a false narrative. Development activities and solutions need to start from the very beginning of the humanitarian crisis, depending on the nature of the way we do things. I believe we can find solutions from the start. Finally, more investment in growth and jobs is absolutely critical.

Q49 Chair: Thank you; that was very comprehensive.

Camilla, from an NGO point of view—for the organisations that are part of your forum—what would be the one message that you would want to give to both the Nigerian and the UK Governments about what a successful partnership between them would look like?

Camilla Higgins: That is a great question. Opportunities to invest in system-strengthening is definitely one. Because of the history of the UK's relationship with Nigeria, and the high regard in which Nigeria holds the UK's Government, structures, systems and ways of doing things, when we attend meetings here, we see many echoes in the protocols of the slightly more archaic way that things might have been done in the UK years and years ago. There is definitely a huge opportunity for the UK to play an influential and supporting role in terms of building some of these national and state-level structures and systems that we have been speaking about.

The UK can step up as a partner in being able to say to your international partners to be very clear with us about where you can step back and where the Government should step forward. That is a very powerful message that the UK can send. On the UK side, I would encourage investment in governance and the rule of law, as was mentioned by some speakers already, and boosting investments in civil society in Nigeria to be able to hold duty-bearers accountable.

One of the biggest challenges that is faced is that it is very difficult for national-level organisations to be able to access international funding. Given that the UK has traditionally been such a thought leader in the aid and development funding space, there is huge potential for it to step in on that. I want the UK Government to apply pressure on the Government of Nigeria to really step into its potential role as a regional leader in becoming independent of international aid, and yet being able to objectively and effectively meet the needs of its people. It has the potential to do that, and it needs strong advocacy in that regard.

Arjun might have more to say on this point than me, but I really feel like there are a couple of areas in which we cannot simply rule out humanitarian assistance. One is protection. It comes back to the question

of will that I mentioned earlier. When the state is a party to the conflict, we have to be extremely careful about walking away from responsibilities in terms of protecting civilians who are in harm's way. To some degree, there will always be parts of that work that cannot be done by national actors for the reason of a lack of impartiality.

The other thing I would say, echoing the point that Arjun made, is that we do not need to see humanitarian development and peacebuilding as sequential—they are not. They absolutely need to happen in tandem with each other, and development investments, as much as you make them, will not take hold in a country like Nigeria until we are able to shrink the scale of the humanitarian emergency down to a point where it can be absorbed by the systems and structures that you are able to put in place. Right now, the sheer numbers we are talking about are above and beyond what one would expect any Government to be able to reasonably handle on their own.

There is also great potential for partnership in terms of private sector globalisation, again drawing on the strong relationship that the UK and Nigeria already have in this regard, the strong diaspora community and the many from the diaspora who are involved in businesses in the UK and in Nigeria. I think there is huge potential to unlock that and redirect those resources towards national actors and improve the capacity of national actors to respond. I hope I have mostly answered your question.

Chair: You have indeed. Panellists, thank you very much. You have given us lots of really helpful evidence. We may well want to follow up with more questions in writing, if that is okay.