HOUSE OF COMMONS

International Development Committee

Oral evidence: The Philosophy and Culture of Aid, HC 1192

Tuesday 23 February 2021

Ordered by the House of Commons to be published on 23 February 2021.

Watch the meeting

Members present: Sarah Champion (Chair); Theo Clarke; Brendan Clarke-Smith; Mrs Pauline Latham; Chris Law; Navendu Mishra; Mr Virendra Sharma.

Questions 1-17

Witnesses

I: Charles Vandyck, Head, Capacity Development Unit, West Africa Civil Society Institute; Sophia Gaston, Managing Director, British Foreign Policy Group; Lena Bheeroo, Lead, Anti-racism and Inclusion, Bond, Committee Member, Charity So White, Working Group Member, The Racial Equity Index.

II: Themrise Khan, Independent Development Professional; Professor Jamie Gaskarth, Professor of Foreign Policy and International Relations, Open University; Arbie Baguios, Founder, Aid Re-imagined; Charles Vandyck, Head, Capacity Development Unit, West Africa Civil Society Institute; Lena Bheeroo, Lead, Anti-racism and Inclusion, Bond, Committee Member, Charity So White, Working Group Member, The Racial Equity Index.

Examination of Witnesses

Witnesses: Lena Bheeroo, Sophia Gaston and Charles Vandyck.

Q1 **Chair:** I would like to start this evidence session of the International Development Committee. It is a scoping exercise that we are going to do today. We have six panel members who are going to give us their opinions on the philosophy and culture of aid. Going forward, we are looking to doing a full inquiry into this, so we are really keen to hear the panellists' views on what we should be considering, what aid is, what aid should be, what works, what does not work and where the Committee should be challenging and focusing going forwards.

We are going to have two panels of three witnesses. Our first panel is Charles, Sophia and Lena. I am going to call on you to do five minutes each. If each of you could start by introducing yourselves and giving us a bit of background to your organisation or how you reached that point, that would be really helpful. Then we will break and have questions from members, if that is okay. Without further ado, I will hand over to Charles Vandyck to introduce himself and tell us in up to five minutes what this Committee should be focusing on when we are considering the philosophy and culture of aid.

Charles Vandyck: Thank you so much for the invitation, Chair. My name is Charles Kojo Vandyck. I work for the West Africa Civil Society Institute, based in Accra, Ghana. We work on specifically strengthening civil society. We look at the whole ecosystem of civil society in the region and strengthen the actors, the organisations and even the organic movements to try to make them more effective, robust and influential. I am really thankful for the invitation from this Committee of the House of Commons, giving me an opportunity to share my experiences and insights. I would like to focus my submission on how the supply side of international aid can achieve more value for money and effectively tackle power asymmetry within the sector. I will focus on aid that goes to civil society in the global south.

From my experience and work, I have seen that, for a very long time, the aid architecture has been structured in a way that favours organisations with the right connections, to aid bilaterals, multilaterals, foundations, development agencies etc. These organisations are usually urban-based or peri-urban. They have the supportive infrastructure. That means they have a place to work, a building. They have a location. They have the tools, the equipment and the right human capital or skillsets to absorb the millions of pounds that are available. That means they run specifically like businesses, with a business-like mentality. They are able to produce amazing proposals. They have high visibility. They have impressive websites. They have an all-imposing presence etc.

What is driving this is that they can respond to the requirements that international aid makes available. Most of the time, because these requirements are centred on resources and money, it has made the

sector very competitive. Many organisations think that, for them to survive, they have to dim the lights of others. One of our colleagues who is based in the UK, Barry Knight, described the situation very well. He said it is all about egos, logos and siloes, basically saying that it has become a sector for self-promotion of individuals and organisations, especially on the supply side of the funding relationship.

What has this situation led to? It has led to a situation where community-based organisations working in disadvantaged communities in the global north, movements that are forming at the grassroots, national or even transnational level, and do not have the supportive infrastructure and skills, cannot access any of these resources to do their work. For them to get into the space, they have to sacrifice their authenticity, individuality and uniqueness. They have to conform with the requirements that enable them to get these resources, therefore shaving off some of their uniqueness and ways of working.

If you have worked in the global south before, you will notice that these resources are extremely important. If you look at the funding portfolio of almost all our organisations, almost 95% of our funding is from external donors. We depend on this funding to exist, do our work and make a community impact.

What can be done? I want to share what can be done in my view to support actors and organisations that are on the fringes and work in disadvantaged communities. They are actually doing most of the important work that is pushing the envelope of change. They are trying to get to the root cause of our poverty and inequality challenges. The first thing we need to consider with how aid is structured is flexible funding mechanisms. I am looking at how we move from short-term, ad hoc activity-based funding to more long-term—three to five years—and flexible funding to organisations. That will allow organisations to determine what the funding is going to be used for within their projects and programmes, also providing support to organisations' administrative functions. That is especially for organisations that work in difficult governance contexts where it is very difficult to access this funding. What are the innovative ways of getting these organisations funded?

Another thing is that we need to look at values where we place a lesser premium on money. By this, I am not referring to cutting funding. I believe that, because of the complexities of the challenges we face, with the pandemic and the impact of the pandemic in the future on our economies and communities, we actually need more funding. It is about how the funding is distributed, who is accessing this funding, how local organisations are supported and what we refer to as resources. Right now, it is about money, but there are other critical resources, knowledge or intellectual capital that need to be considered. There are so many ideas coming from communities that they can contribute, which can help us to reduce poverty and inequality. Time is a resource. Human capital is

a resource. Social capital, reputation and trust between local organisations and communities are all resources.

We need to look at how we reconfigure measures of success and impact. Is the way we are measuring success feasible? Does it really represent what success is in the eyes of those who are in these communities or what we call beneficiaries or partners? Is the western log-frame model really working? Is that the best way to measure success? These are the things we need to look at.

You may ask, as Committee members, what we are doing on the demand side of things, those of us who are working with civil society. What are we doing about the situation? I want to give two concrete examples. Currently, we are going through a reimagining INGO project, process or initiative. We are bringing together players in the whole global civil society ecosystem to look at the role of the INGO, whether the specific role of the INGO now, its direct implementation role, its localisation agenda, is really effective, and what other roles INGOs can play. For example, could they be brokers? Could they be connectors? Could they be facilitators? How can they support the local ecosystem of civil society in the global north? We are going through this process. It is an ongoing project. We are just about to launch a survey that we did in the global south on 4 March. I feel that it will be interesting if Committee members can participate in that launch.

The "shift the power" movement is extremely important. We have seen that it is important for us to make sure the power asymmetry is tackled. How do we give agency to local people? We have come together, from both the global north and the global south, to push an agenda of giving agency to local people, community-led development and community philanthropy, strengthening trust between local actors and eternal stakeholders, building capacity and identifying local assets as part of the development process. These are two initiatives that I feel should be interesting to the Committee, in terms of supporting what international aid can support globally.

I would like to conclude with some specific action points. One of the things that aid has to consider now is this: since the INGO is a pivotal institution or organisation within the global south, what is the most effective role for INGOs moving forward? Is the direct implementation role an effective role? Can there be other more significant roles that push the envelope of change in terms of connecting, brokering or facilitating processes or building the ecosystem for local organisations?

Why are we saying this? Covid-19 has been a great leveller. We have seen that many INGOs could not actually come into our spaces to do the work they usually do, so they depended on local organisations, because of the restrictions that came with the pandemic. Local organisations have proven to be able to do this work and are actually doing this work. They are more connected to the community. We need to look at what the role

of the INGO should be. We also need to re-examine approaches and funding for capacity building. When we do capacity building and focus on only one-off trainings, is that sufficient? Maybe it is important to look at capacity building for resilience, looking at the resilience and sustainability of the whole sector or ecosystem.

While we are delivering development, another thing we need to look at is how we value local assets, in terms of not only money but community skills, capacities etc. I feel aid can also support local giving and the philanthropy ecosystem in the global south. It is obvious that aid can never be sufficient, so we need to diversify or build the capacity for organisations in the global south to look at alternative funding models or alternative resourcing. How can aid support local giving and community philanthropy ecosystems in the global south?

I already talked about reconfiguring the measures of success and impact, so I will not emphasise that. A very important topic is addressing racism head on. This is related to the power asymmetry. The thing is that, unfortunately, racism is still there in a systemic way. It still rears its head now and then. It is a learned behaviour, so it can be unlearned. How do we educate people to accept people, that other people are equal to them, etc? How do we get rid of this behaviour? How do we get leadership in various spaces, including from this Committee, to come out there with courage and conviction to condemn racism and stand against racism? This needs to be tackled head on, I believe, with no apologies.

The last thing I want to focus on is how we develop transparent mechanisms to hold donors accountable. I believe that, if we are able to develop these mechanisms to hold donors accountable, the aid system itself will become more effective, we will start having less division between global north and global south, we will become a global civil society and our relationships will be based on a certain civility, mutual respect and reciprocal partnerships. That is how I envision civil society can become when we reimagine aid. Thank you very much.

Q2 **Chair:** That was an absolutely fantastic introduction. I have been scribbling down notes, so thank you very much. I am particularly pleased that you brought up the racism element, because it has come across very loud and clear in the last two inquiries this Committee led. It is one of the reasons we are looking at this forthcoming inquiry, as a way to shine a spotlight on it and address it once and for all. Sophia, could you introduce yourself and a little bit about the work you have done? I know you have just recently published a very influential survey.

Sophia Gaston: Thank you so much for having me. My name is Sophia Gaston. I am the director of the British Foreign Policy Group, which is a rather unusual foreign policy think tank, operating at the intersection between the domestic and the international. My background is mainly as a social researcher, particularly specialising in public opinion. I have been working on all these destabilising social forces within advanceable

democracies, looking at them as a threat to governance and what can be done to unite countries and build a healthier public sphere.

We have been doing a lot of work into public opinion about all aspects of foreign policy. That includes aid and development spending. We are doing more on this in the future. We have been doing surveys and focus groups as well. I want to talk through five different things that are important to note about public opinion on aid and development. Then maybe we can get into more in the discussion later.

The first thing to note is that public support for foreign aid and development spending is built on probably stronger foundations than may be visible from the media debate around this issue. It might be more helpful to regard media coverage of foreign aid as challenging around the margins, rather than fundamentally questioning the value of all aid and development spending. The proportion of Brits who do not support foreign aid and development spending at all is quite low. Our survey puts this, as of last month, at 17%, which is a chunk of the population but it is certainly by no means a majority or a large plurality. In this respect, we should be assuming a more confident position when having these kinds of discussions. The impression of a fully divided nation is absolutely false.

The second thing to note is that attitudes to aid and development spending are highly personalised. They reflect a range of individual preferences, priorities and lived experiences. It is therefore really crucial to appreciate that different issues, programmes, regions and types of investments will be received and viewed differently on an individual basis. We should not assume that aid and development spending is seen as one single policy issue, but rather a suite of different issues.

Sometimes there will be contradictions in these preferences. We know that the UK's status as a very generous nation comes through really strongly in focus groups. It is incredibly important to Britons' sense of national identity, pride and sense of self. There are often going to be a range of different competing emotions and instincts at play.

The third thing, to provide an example of this, is the question of whether we should be making investments to support economic growth in developing nations. We find this is really the epicentre at which individual circumstances become critically important in shaping attitudes. Britons from lower socioeconomic grades, living in less prosperous parts of the country, are much more likely to question this type of spending. That is undoubtedly because they consider their own standing within British society and perceived structural economic inequalities persist here.

Britons make a quite fundamental distinction between promoting economic growth and alleviating poverty. This is the moment at which the zero sum game frame becomes very important and becomes activated. Equally, it is a mistake to consider this as something that applies to aid and development investments across the board. We should

not be spooked by those sorts of figures that come into the question around economic growth.

My fourth point is another example of this. This is why we can see such a huge groundswell of support for the UK reducing or ceasing our aid and development spending during the pandemic. Overall, our survey last month finds that 72%, so nearly three-quarters, of Brits support a reduction or a cessation, compared to 28% who think it should be maintained or increased. It is important to note that there is some disagreement about the tests for when aid provision should be levelled back up. The narrative of it being contingent on the UK's own economic recovery appears to be especially important. Again, that comes back to this sense of the point at which the zero sum game becomes activated.

Finally, it is really important to say that the motivations behind Britain's support for foreign aid vary wildly. Many Britons are motivated by a moral argument and others by historical arguments, so it is our responsibility as a former imperial power. Others are driven by more strategic or security-based impulses. On the one hand, you can see this as a strength. It certainly means there is a degree of resilience in public opinion on foreign aid. It could foreseeably withstand any particular scandal or uproar. Equally, it also means it is going to be rather difficult for the Government to speak directly to the heart of the nation on aid, whether that is tugging at hearts or minds.

They are just five things I wanted to throw into the mix. Overall, the foundations are strong, but it is really important to look at everything in a much more nuanced way and not see public opinion on foreign aid and development as a uniform, homogenous behemoth or even just one single issue. It is a much more complex picture than that.

Chair: It is reassuring. I think we will want to pick away at that a little bit as well.

Lena Bheeroo: I am Lena Bheeroo. I am a committee member of Charity So White, which is the campaign started in 2019 to root out racism from the charity sector and to get the charity sector to lead on that. I am also a working group member of the Racial Equity Index, a black, indigenous and people of colour-led collective, which is building a Racial Equity Index to hold the global development sector to account. I am also at Bond, the sector body for the UK NGOs. I am leading the anti-racism support for the sector to move to addressing racism in the sector.

For this inquiry, it is very important to take a look at the culture we have in the sector and to talk directly about racism. The last year was a year that shook the world for many reasons. The public murder of George Floyd resonated with racialised people around the world. We saw people coming together to demand justice and that people be treated equitably, because we are not. We exist in a society that is systemically racist. This racism is upheld by the institutions and structures that we have in place, and this is true of our sector.

The ACEVO *Home Truths* report, which came out last year, in 2020, stated that 68% of respondents to its survey said that they had experienced, witnessed or heard stories about racism across their time in the charity sector. The UK aid sector workforce is majority white. It is majority white leadership, both at senior management level and at board level. For a sector whose missions include many things, from eradicating poverty to ensuring access to education, water, health and food, eradicating violence against women and girls and ensuring the most marginalised communities do not get left behind, we have a problem when our sector does not reflect those we work with.

Understanding our reality and where we are requires a reminder of how we arrived at this point. A lot of disparities that exist between communities, that we still feel the effects of today and that people of colour experience on a daily basis, both in the UK and overseas, are born out of inequalities we have yet to address. These inequalities are pertinent to the work of the international development and aid sector. We need to be courageous, as Charles said, to name it and begin to address it. We must acknowledge the colonial roots of the sector and the effects that are still reverberating throughout the work we do.

The Gender and Development Network's Women of Colour Forum statement has been put out publicly on systemic racism and white supremacy in the aid sector. It speaks about our need to create space for rigorous discussion about systemic racism and the ways that allow it to be upheld by structures and authorities. We need to talk about it at the international, national and local levels. If we do not do that, we are kept locked in an endless cycle that perpetuates racism and does more harm than good.

The ways in which racism manifests across the sector are many. It is being judged for who you are and for how much you are perceived to know or not know because of the colour of your skin. It is who you are being reduced to—someone's perception of you because you belong to a racialised community. Racism manifests across the sector daily in the denial of interviews to people who have foreign sounding names or who are judged on their backgrounds. It is about the racialised communities we have in the sector not having progressive career opportunities. It is in the images that we use for fundraising and campaigning across the sector, which paint a disparaging picture of communities that we work with, showing them as desperate.

It is in the language that we use to describe the communities we work with, describing them as beneficiaries, rather than communities we work with that we could work with in true equitable partnership. The language and imagery that we use needs to reflect the values we hold as a sector, rather than paint the picture of the sector being coloured by white-saviour complex. It is in the decisions of who gets to come to important meetings with stakeholders, Government and funders, and who has that door firmly shut to them. Racism is manifested through the power

imbalances that exist in this sector. It is about who has the decision-making power to sign off on programmes or any solutions to community issues. Is that held in the north or is that actually held by the country officers who are working on these issues?

It is in the decision about how much money goes to local organisations and the countries that we work in. It is in the actions of those who hold power over decision-making, funding and who gets fired and hired, in the UK and overseas, and whose expertise and what expertise we value. We must centre lived experiences in the UK sector but also, as Charles said, in the communities that we work with. Who is more informed about the solutions that are needed to problems in those communities than those people who live there?

Racism not only manifests in these overt ways. It is also about the covert ways that racism shows up. That is about people of colour being gaslit, being shut down in meetings and being asked questions about where they are really from. Both overt and covert racism happens daily and has an impact on people of colour. It has a traumatic impact. What we have to carry as people of colour in the sector is tremendous, particularly after the events of last year. It is damaging to people's self-worth and it limits the trust in the sector.

Prolonged trauma leads to people of colour leaving the sector and that is talent leaving the sector. From the work we do at Charity So White and the Racial Equity Index, we know that racialised people tend not to raise issues because there is a lack of trust that things will actually get addressed in a meaningful way. There is a time of reckoning that is coming. It has happened already in America and it will happen here. It is not something for us to shy away from. It is something for us to engage in. We work in international aid and we need to think about what we are doing to the people who exist in the sector, both in the UK and overseas.

We need to ask the questions about the communities we work with and how they got to be seen as poor in the first place. We do ourselves a disservice and hold ourselves back by not having more racialised people in the sector in senior management, at board level, and by not having marginalised communities in the room with equitable decision-making power. Addressing racism means that we need to have courage to talk about power and privilege. That means to talk about power and who is signing off on decisions, opening up the conversation about power and privilege. It will set us on the right path to addressing racial injustice in the sector.

We must move to be more inclusive, and this means talking about intersectionality, so recognising the compounded inequalities that people may face, for example a woman who is a woman and a woman of colour, or a woman who is a woman, a woman of colour and disabled. This is about the experiences of all these people being different. There are more barriers for them to overcome to be treated equitably and fairly. We have

programmes that seek to end violence against women and girls and to ensure girls have access to education. Gender is something we highlight, but we do not acknowledge that women and girls who are black and brown have different experiences from those white women and girls. This is too important to overlook.

We need to do more to recognise that racialised women in the sector have more obstacles to overcome. Race on top of any other protected characteristic provides another layer of complexity that people must overcome to be treated fairly. The longer that those impositions of power shy away from this conversation or turn a blind eye to engaging in the conversation on racial injustice, the longer we harm people of colour in the sector. This requires us to have courage and not to talk about generalisations like EDI but actually call it what it is, racism.

Talking about racial discrimination demands that we hold a mirror up to ourselves, individually and as a sector, which is scary but not impossible. Our sector is not perfect, but no sector is. We need to acknowledge the path that it took to create where we are now. We need to change our culture so that it builds trust and is not afraid to be held accountable. We need to do this at the same time as delivering aid work that we are doing. We need to remember that racial discrimination is real. It is abuse and must be addressed at every level in the sector, just as you would address any other abuse. It is a human right for people of colour to be treated fairly.

This is our chance as a sector to be more transparent and self-reflective on how we work, address the power imbalances and think differently to better the sector. We have an incredible sector in the UK. We have a developed sector. We have incredible talent in the UK. This work will help us be better and do aid more efficiently and effectively. Over the past year, there have been many statements of solidarity after the murder of George Floyd from a lot of the sector and a lot of the charity sector widely. It is time to move past those statements of solidarity to action, to be publicly committing to action and to be held to account. It is not about being held back by our fear or being paralysed by our fear of getting it wrong. Rather, we need to move forward with humility.

There is humanity in acknowledging that we have a problem and do not have all the answers, but we will work together to address these imbalances that exist. The UK has an important role to play in aid and development, but now it must show its leadership in addressing racism. This is something that will not only benefit our sector but will also position us as a trusted partner with those communities we work with overseas. As they grow, we will also grow. A fairer and equitable sector will only serve the UK in its position as a leader in aid.

There are things that have happened since last year, certainly in terms of Charity So White supporting people of colour across the sector. Within Bond itself, I have created a people of colour in development working

group to act as a support network for people of colour to come together in solidarity, but also to influence the sector. We are also working on a report that looks at the barriers people of colour face in progressing in their careers so we can have an honest conversation about it and start to address these things. We can start to see that this is a benefit for everybody. The Gender and Development Network Women of Colour Forum is doing fantastic work in asking the sector to hold itself to account.

At Bond, we are also starting to address entry to the sector, which is only one piece of this, but it is an important one. We have had an incredible partnership with Multiverse in bringing more diverse young people into the sector and taking away the barriers they have and the challenges they face. Change is possible in this area. The situation as it stands is not good, but we can do something about it. We have the power to do something about it. You have the power to do something about it. By working together, taking this seriously and not shying away from it, we can actually create a better, more equitable sector.

Q3 **Chair:** Thank you very much, Lena. I am very aware of my privileged position as a white British woman and particularly as a Member of Parliament. I am very aware that this Committee is part of the establishment. Therefore, who do you think we should be listening to for this inquiry, either specific people or groups of people who would not normally have a voice but who ought to have a voice on this topic?

Lena Bheeroo: It would be worthwhile talking to the People of Colour in Development Group that I have and the Gender and Development Network Women of Colour Forum. There are groups around like the Diasporic Development, which want to see more black professionals across the sector. There are lots of smaller groups, as you say, that have incredible value and expertise to work with out there. There are also the communities, as Charles said. The communities we work with should be the ones who are our first port of call and who we work with in true partnership to think about how we can do aid differently.

Q4 **Mrs Latham:** Thank you for those three very different presentations. They were very interesting. I wonder if I could ask something. We are looking at the philosophy and culture of aid. In that, we need to think about aid effectiveness and appropriateness. I do not know which of the three of you would like to answer this. Over many years—I have been on this Committee for 11 years and even before that—a lot of money, billions of pounds, has been spent in developing countries, not just from the UK but from the US and lots of European countries, and it is increasingly coming from the Middle East. It is clear that it has failed. Why has it failed and what should we do to make it succeed? If those billions of pounds have been spent, has it been money down the drain, or has it been used in a good way? I would be interested to know your opinion.

Charles Vandyck: It is a very good question. We need to look at where this money has gone to, in terms of the distribution of these resources. How have these resources been absorbed and what has been the focus in terms of implementation? Have these programmes been designed to advance a specific strategic priority or to make changes in communities? To what extent have communities participated in how these programmes have been developed and designed?

It has caused what I call passive recipience. It has caused the culture where people feel that some people are saying that they are coming to save us and do these things for us. Most people in these communities have become very passive, instead of active participants in the development process itself. There is a failure to recognise that the communities should invest in their own development.

It is not necessarily about money. Aid has made it look like you throw money at a problem and the problem goes away. We have seen that, when you throw money at a problem, the problem will not go away, because it is not really about the money. It is about identifying the root causes of the problem and having the main actors of that problem lead the charge to change their own circumstances. That is what has not happened for so many years. It has become like a leaking basket, where you are pouring money in, but the basket is leaking all these things. It is about the approach. It is time to do things differently and advance the mantra of helping people to know how to fish.

How do you support the ecosystem? How do you support local organisations? How do you support communities to do this work and become more resilient, instead of making everything so projectised, based on a certain activity, short term and ad hoc? You will not get results that way because development, especially durable development, is a long-term process that should be led by communities.

Another pane is how you define success. When we say it has not made an impact, in whose eyes are we talking about? Has it made an impact according to our priorities as a country or in the eyes of those who are in these communities? How are we measuring success? What kinds of indicators are we using? Are they indicators that communities can even identify with or find valuable? There are so many lessons we can learn from the approaches to do things differently, but it takes courage and conviction to make this kind of change.

Sophia Gaston: It is really important that we note the significance of this word, "effectiveness", in the framework of the formation of public opinion towards aid. There is very rarely a counternarrative that is being presented that demonstrates how transformative aid can be for individuals or communities. Every time we have done message testing on this or talked about it in focus groups, there seems to be this huge gap. A lot of this is coming from a place where, politically, there is this sense that somehow support for aid and development is hugely contingent,

fragile and not very resilient. Everybody is afraid to engage with the topic at all. We miss a huge trick in not making more of the huge, genuine impact that our aid and development investments can make.

The other thing we have found is that people are concerned about the idea of aid as turning on a tap. The point has just been made about teaching people how to fish, this idea of upskilling and putting the power in people's own hands to then lead transformative future change within their communities, to move up and bring their societies up to become economically active and productive in a global economy. These are the sorts of things that really resonate with the British people. Showing that aid is a stepping stone on towards a new life, that it is empowering and genuinely transformative, is something we are not doing enough of. Frankly, that would go quite a long way to countering the hysteria that often feeds into the media debate around this.

Q5 **Mr Sharma:** The three speakers have raised different questions but very important questions for the future philosophy of aid. I take it that racism in charity work and aid is one. Another is the divide between urban and rural. The third is whether the knowledge was shared. I will ask one of them. If we take the new philosophy, the aid will now be reduced. There will be competition; there will be more approaches to what priorities there are. Could you give me three examples to say, "If you are going to be in the new era, we would like you to start—one, two, three"? Can you give three bullet points, to have the new initiative, new approach, making sure that we deliver learning from the past?

Chair: That also links to the question I was going to ask. Charles, you raised measuring success. In Virendra's point, what would be the three main things that a successful aid project should be achieving, or aiming to achieve?

Charles Vandyck: Let me try to answer that. To say whether aid is successful and to measure success, we need to look at how we define what success is. Is success defined by communities or a foreign policy agenda? We need to get a participatory way of success being defined, not just by activities or by some short-term indicator but by milestones where the community says, "This is what success looks like to us. We were here. Now we have moved to this place". It should be very much focused on systemic and structural change. It should be linked to the root cause issues of specific communities and helping these communities to build resilience. The indicators for success need to be more flexible. They need to be more organic. Sometimes that seems a bit scary, when you have to report monthly and annually, for a lot of people who are on the supply side of aid. You cannot get success based on short-term indicators and one-off activities. You will not get the kind of success you are looking for.

Lena Bheeroo: We need to look at who we have working in the sector who hold positions of power. If we are going to dismantle structural racism, we need to make sure it is not parked in HR or not just at the

door of the CEO. This is an everyone problem and the sector needs to come round together to start thinking about who holds power. We need to look at governance of our organisations and how reflective of our communities that we work with they are. We need to, as Charles has said, centre meaningfully on the communities we work with at every single step. This is a different way of doing aid, everything from developing and conceptualising programmes to delivery to measuring. As Charles has mentioned already, the template for evaluating programmes has been set by us, by the north. That is a different way of doing it than actually starting from the communities where we are working. Those are the things we can tangibly do.

We need to acknowledge the colonial roots of the sector and not shy away from them. This is not something to show a blind eye to at the moment. This is about all of us owning how we got here and collectively starting to change the way we do things.

Q6 **Chris Law:** We have three great speakers bringing up lots of things that you would have seen from the Select Committee we are all nodding our heads in agreement with. We are facing a very difficult time, not just the merger but also the cuts that seem to be getting brought forward by the UK Government. We talked about who is making the decisions and how we give agency to those who are often the recipients, who really should be, at the community level, more involved. My challenge is how you get that diversity and that voice when you have an international development office now being submerged into a Foreign Office that, by and large, is not diverse and not at grassroots level.

There is a second question to that. In terms of the short-termism that I know, Charles, you spoke about specifically, what should be the minimum length of time for projects? Too often, we see one-year or two-year projects, which do not give sufficient time to develop what is needed. As projects develop, you find there are new challenges and opportunities. I wanted to ask what you thought about short-termism and how to change that, along with the culture that is predominant certainly within the UK aid sector and the FCDO.

Charles Vandyck: The most important thing, from my experience, is for you to actually see results. By results here, I mean when you go beyond tangible outputs or outcomes. To see that impact that actually leads to transformation, you really need to have a project between three to five years. It is not just the timeline. You need to have a lot of flexibility and adaptability around that project. It needs to be responsive to the changing and fluid context.

What do I mean? One of the things aid should now be doing is to avoid pushing organisations or actors to align with a specific agenda, by giving them space, giving flexible funding and letting those actors in communities define what issues they are working on to lead to that specific outcome. There needs to be more flexible long-term funding. It is not just about project funding but also about the vehicles. You need to

strengthen these vehicles. Administrative funding is also very important, because these are the vehicles that will get you to your destination. I believe in flexibility. Adaptability is key, along with a long-term horizon, three to five years. It should be very participatory. You will get the results you are looking for, because there will be a high sense of ownership. That is what is key. If you do not build ownership, you do not get results, from my experience.

Q7 **Chair:** Sophia, I wondered if you had anything on Chris's first point around the merger, the cuts and how it is likely to impact.

Sophia Gaston: I am not deeply pessimistic about the merger. In a way, if you are looking through a public opinion lens, there is an opportunity, particularly if we can harness this as an opportunity to shake things up and get the Government to be much more proactive in telling the story of aid and development spending. The potential merging of the narrative in with the more hard-nosed, security side of things is going to be quite helpful in bringing some new coalitions of support on board. There is a moral foundation, but that is probably the area where there is the greatest scope to bring people more along with the agenda. It is up to us to make the most of that opportunity. Like with all things, with Brexit and so on, let us use this as a constructive chance to say, "Let us have a reset and do things a bit differently".

I want to make a couple of points that tie into this question of consistency. The consistency of political leadership on aid and development issues is totally critical for public opinion. The different issues, priorities and programmes that people think they instinctively support and feel drawn towards are actually the ones that have received the most consistent degree of media and political attention over time. There is absolutely nothing to stop that kind of support being built for other areas.

It has been really problematic to have this kind of scorched-earth approach every time a new Administration comes in, in that we have to say, "The PSVI was so linked to Hague. Now we have a new Foreign Secretary, we need to have this new other agenda". As soon as we dip down in that kind of level of visibility and support, those issues fall off the radar. We need to be clear about what our priorities are and invest in them in the longer term in a way that is not subject to political whims or branding. Ideally, there should be cross-party, core British foreign policy objectives.

We need to invest in education, not just making the case for why but making the case for how. That is the fundamental gap. People have absolutely no idea about what happens when X amount of taxpayers' dollars get sent down south. They have no idea where that is going and how that is affecting people's lives. We need the stories about what that actually means and the success stories that come out on the other side.

Chair: I am going to pause you there, because you are getting into

specifics and we are running out of time, and I would like to bring in the second panel. Huge thanks to our first panel. If you are able to stay for the rest of the session and want to come in on questions, that would be fantastic. You have given us so much to think about so far.

Examination of Witnesses

Witnesses: Themrise Khan, Professor Gaskarth, Arbie Baguios, Charles Vandyck and Lena Bheeroo.

Q8 **Chair:** I would like to now turn to our second panel. Themrise, could you introduce yourself, tell us a little bit about yourself and tell us what you think this inquiry should be focusing on?

Themrise Khan: Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. Thank you for inviting me. I am speaking to you today from Karachi, Pakistan, a country that has been a long-time aid recipient, not just from the UK but globally. If I am not mistaken, Pakistan is currently one of the largest recipients of UK aid, if not the largest. I have spent over 25 years working in the aid industry now, largely in Pakistan and south Asia, but also globally. Today, I am speaking to you purely from a recipient country perspective. I would like to raise to the Committee today three questions on the first of your two asks for this inquiry, so I would like to raise some questions on the philosophy of aid. Only once these questions are addressed will we be better able to address questions regarding the culture of aid.

The first question I would like to ask you is how you view aid. Aid is normally seen in one of two ways. It has been seen as either a very altruistic tool to do good around the world or a tool to further political or foreign policy goals. I am making a distinction here between humanitarian aid, which is normally given in terms of humanitarian disasters, and altruism, which is the more "doing good" aspect of aid. Most donors have claimed that it is, as most discussion in the industry over the last few decades has seen it, a mix of the two. To me, that is a conflict of interest. From what I have seen and my experience, aid has been and is purely a political tool and not an altruistic tool.

The design of aid is geared towards donor countries' political commitments. It is taxpayer-funded. It is governed by an elected Parliament etc. If aid were purely altruistic, we would not be sitting here, having this discussion. Altruism requires aid to step back from one of the questions you have posed in this inquiry; i.e. what are the benefits to the UK for having an aid budget? Altruism would only ask "What benefit is our aid giving to those who receive it?" This inquiry does not seem to be raising that question, at least not directly. Many northern donors, including the UK, do not see aid as benefiting others, but rather more themselves and their own nation. Sophia has brought that point up, in terms of the public opinion in the UK on aid.

A lot of donor Governments see aid as reflecting their own image and place in the world, as a form of soft power. That is a term that I strongly

object to being applied to aid. At the end of the day, power is power, however you approach it. We all know that power is a very important form of control. In this scenario the aid giver is the one with the power, both political and financial. That is my first question.

My second question that I would put to you is what objective you want to achieve with your aid. Being a little controversial and perhaps stepping on some toes, do you want your aid to further your political interests abroad? Do you want it to counterbalance, for instance, a lot of lucrative financial deals made with countries in the sale of arms or in control of oil or natural resources? That is happening. Do you want to help the less fortunate? That is how aid is projected by many donors. Do you want to look good in the world because you are helping the poor? Do you want your political allies in the world to do as you say when the time comes because you are holding this carrot and stick of aid above their heads?

Aid today as a political tool supports this agenda to a large extent, in many ways. I will not get into specifics now. Maybe we can later in the discussion. Aid cannot and should not be the answer to any of these questions. Aid is not about us, as in recipient countries, being in debt to you for your kindness, just as it should not be used as a sword held over our heads that will cut us off if we are not being good or compliant as nations.

The last question I would ask you is what responsibility and accountability you have to the recipients of your aid. In my opinion, this constitutes perhaps the key question in whether aid should be even given in the first place. That is something the Committee should also consider in this inquiry. I believe that donors have the right to decide how their money should be spent. It is your money, after all. My experience of working with a range of all the major multilateral and bilateral donors today, for almost three decades and at the receiving end of the stick, which is important, is that this is not sustainable if we want equal and just global relations. Let us be honest: no one actually wants equal and just global relations when it comes to power, so you have that sword hanging over your head as well when it comes to decision making.

Also, to be honest, no country, Pakistan included, will ever really say no to money in any form. If anybody offers us a chunk of money, we are not going to say no. Despite that, the fact that recipient countries have extremely little to no control over the use of that aid, which in theory at least is meant to improve their countries and their people, is the real issue. It is not about whether you should give or not give. It is about how you are actually designing and spending that aid to the benefit of your recipients. Whatever will benefit your recipients will automatically benefit you.

This is one of the reasons so many aid projects have failed. The country priorities of aid are designed by the giver and not by the receiver. Pauline Latham just asked why it has failed. Here you go: it is not just us. It is

not just the receivers. It is also you, the givers. I would caution here also on the use of the word "failure". In the way many of my colleagues here have spoken about how we should be defining success, we should also be discussing how we should define failure. What is the benchmark for that? Is it the SDGs? Is it a cost-benefit analysis about how much profit is earned on each pound of aid? The idea of failure is something that we are not very clear about at either end. The inquiry should discuss this, because a lot has failed and a lot has been successful, but how are we distinguishing between the two and what impact does each have?

Since the recent cuts in the UK aid budget, I have been hearing a lot from many UK-based INGOs and the chatter online about being very upset at not having been involved in the process of the budget cuts. The reality for us as recipients of the aid that has been cut, as governments and as national civil-society organisations, is that we have never been involved in such processes. We have never been asked. If anyone should be upset about the aid cuts—which, by the way, I am not, and my personal opinion on that is a different issue that I can discuss—we should be, because we are never part of any conversation when it comes to designing aid.

Even with the INGOs that were upset, my take on that was that they were more upset because of how the cuts would affect their own livelihoods and their own powerbase, rather than the effect it would have on the countries that they work in. We as recipients are really at the bottom of the aid food chain. That is how I see us.

We do not even have any significant impact on the design of the evaluation, as Lena pointed out. We cannot even design the evaluation of the impact of that aid on our people, let alone design the programming. I have been an evaluator for many years, and I have been part of several evaluations of donor programming, including of the former DFID's programming in Pakistan and of donor-funded projects themselves. When everything is handed over to us by the donor, we are expected to blindly follow instructions, like a how-to manual: "This is what we have. This is what we are going to do. This is how we are going to do it, no questions asked". The unfortunate fact of the matter is that a lot of us at the receiving end do blindly follow that, but that is a different discussion altogether.

Granted, aid is someone else's money, but it is also for an audience that is very far removed culturally and geographically from the donor, so that is one reason why they should be fully on board, from design to conception, implementation and evaluation. Granted also, many of our countries, including my own, have weak democracies. We stand in the way of equality and we are struggling, but that should never be a reason for excluding our voices from decision-making about the lives of our own people. I just do not think that donors have tried hard enough.

We are, instead, expected to just be grateful for the money that we get. Why is that? Is that because we are poor, because we are needy, or because helping us makes you look good? These are all words that have become so obvious and so common in the aid narrative that it really does not address the issues on either end. If that is the premise that you have been using and you intend to use as donors to provide aid, it is completely the wrong one.

In conclusion, I would encourage the Committee to consider these three questions from a recipient's point of view specifically, and not just your own, before you move forward. I would also like to point out that aid should be about quality, not quantity. I am a firm believer in that. It is not how much you give but how you give it and what you do with it.

One question was about what the project timelines would be. It is not about time so much as it is about design and intent. To me, a one-year, well-designed programme can be far more effective than something that is five to 10 years, because it is about delivery and efficiency, as we have all discussed. At the end of the day, international aid is not so much about taxpayers as it is about the lives of others, but it is for you to decide who takes priority.

Q9 **Chair:** Themrise, that was fascinating. I have written down all of your questions and you can score us at the end of our inquiry on whether we have addressed them.

Professor Gaskarth: Thank you for the invitation to talk. My name is Jamie Gaskarth. I am professor of foreign policy and international relations at the Open University. I have been teaching in universities for about 20 years now—Exeter, Plymouth and Birmingham—and my research is mostly interested in the ethics of foreign policy, holding people accountable for the decisions they make and thinking about the ethical structures that exist in international relations.

There are three areas that I wanted to talk about, some of which were touched on by the previous speakers. One of them was, thinking about the philosophy and culture of aid, why the UK gives aid abroad. I identified five factors. I can totally see the binary framework that the previous speaker gave, but maybe it is more on a spectrum, with different aspects of the spectrum between self-interest and other directed behaviour.

There are five key reasons we tend to see for giving aid. One of them is altruism. It is a sense that we want to give something to people who are in an unfortunate circumstance. Secondly, it is about redressing unfairness. There is usually an acceptance that there are inequalities in world politics, and Britain usually benefits from them, partly because it has devised the structures that enforce those inequalities, so we want to redress fairness.

Thirdly, guilt is a key motivator that often comes up. The very idea of development aid is bound up in colonialism and becomes formalised as the colonial project unwinds. The various Colonial Development and Welfare Acts in 1929, 1940 and 1945 formalised the idea of giving development aid on a regular basis, and it is no fluke that a separate ministerial post is created in 1964 as decolonisation is proceeding apace. It is bound up in the idea that development aid was about instituting more self-government and supposedly encouraging development in a way that had not happened a lot during the colonial period and was beginning to happen at the end.

Fourthly, it is about security. It is often the idea that we need to give aid in order to enhance security abroad. Sometimes, that is self-directed in the idea that, if we give aid abroad, conflict will not erupt and end up affecting our citizens. Fifthly, there is this sense that aid is about spreading influence: that, if we give money, it will make other people like us more and align themselves with our interests.

There are those five broad areas, but one of the problems with aid is that it is bound up in conceptions of dependence, of hierarchies of development, and of implicit superiority and inferiority that came from the colonial period. They are still legacies of how we think about development aid. Those five motivators vary in importance, and increase and decrease in different historical periods. Aid has always featured in diplomacy, but it is relatively new as a regular and formalised aspect of foreign policy.

It should not necessarily be taken as a given that the UK has always provided aid, because it has not, and it will not necessarily always do so in the future. My second point is that aid is likely to be more necessary in many parts of the world after Covid, but support for aid could be under threat. With a larger debt burden, higher taxes and unemployment rising at home, as well as the existence of an increasing wealth of economies abroad and the rising powers that are often talked about, more and more people may be asking why we are giving so much money away and why it is not being spent at home.

I completely take on board a lot of the information that Sophia and her organisations provided, and it is important, but it is also important to say that, sometimes, when you drill down into the motivations of the public and their conceptions of aid, and when you try to ask them, "Would you rather spend money on this than this?" or, for instance, "Should we cease or reduce aid until we have recovered from the pandemic?" you find very strong support for that. Depending on how the question is framed, it might raise issues about public support for aid, and this could become a serious issue in the coming months as the impact of Covid begins to be felt.

The third point is about where aid goes in the future. In a Foreign Policy Centre report in September last year, I called for a more communitarian

foreign policy that pays more attention to public opinion and domestic needs in the future, and this could apply to aid. If we could democratise aid policy, break down these divisions between development out there and at home, and give British people a stronger sense of connection and ownership of the aid we give, it might make it more sustainable and effective in the long term.

In order to do that, we do need a change of attitude. We need more humility about Britain's own developmental situation. If you think about the impact of Covid and the serious health inequalities in the UK at the moment, it begins to break down that notion of our superiority and the inferiority of people abroad when it comes to development. In reality, health life expectancy in Blackpool or parts of Glasgow are the same as or worse than in Afghanistan, one of our largest aid recipients.

We may need to start thinking about development as a shared endeavour, to democratise it and to build people-to-people networks, rather than seeing it in a rather elitist fashion as something that an elite in London gives to peoples abroad. There are a number of different ways we could talk about doing that. In order to think about how we could democratise aid, we have to raise the distinction that the previous speaker did between emergency aid and development aid, because some of these suggestions would not work when it comes to emergency aid. It would be rather gross to have a public vote on whether you should give money that is necessary for sustaining life.

When it comes to development projects more broadly, it could be appropriate to have the public having a vote and a decision on what projects we fund and democratise it in that way. You could harness domestic constituencies to identify needs and wants. In an era of globalisation, we have very strong people-to-people ties around the world and can harness local civil society groups and business leaders, channel aid through domestic constituencies and funnel that out abroad.

Lastly, you could harness development projects at home and abroad, perhaps. Money spent supporting key sectors in the UK could be twinned with projects doing the same abroad, recognising that global inequalities are being felt at home as well as abroad, and breaking down some of those barriers.

It is a little bit provocative because I am trying to break down some of those elite structures and assumptions that have been very strong in the aid community for a long time, while thinking about development differently and about maybe allowing British people to have more say in how aid is spent in the future.

Q10 **Chair:** Thank you, Jamie. We really appreciate you being provocative. That is what we need and what we hoped for from this panel, so thank you for delivering that. Arbie, thank you so much for joining us. What do you think this inquiry should be focusing on? Can you tell us a little bit about yourself to begin with, please?

Arbie Baguios: Good afternoon, everyone, and thanks very much for having me here. I am Arbie Baguios, founder of Aid Re-imagined, a research initiative that advocates for a more effective and just aid system. I have worked in the aid sector for the past eight years, mostly for British international NGOs. I understand that the IDC is looking to set up an inquiry on the philosophy and culture of aid. If there is one thing that should be a main feature of this inquiry, it would be for the inquiry to ask, "Is our decision-making and delivery of aid ethical?"

First, I want to step back a bit and talk about why it is important to look at the philosophy of international aid. Like other areas of public policy, such as health, education or the justice system, international aid is similarly faced with questions of a philosophical nature, particularly concerning resource allocation, decision-making and outcomes. For example, in health, we might use insights in philosophy to come up with an ethical answer to the question, "How should a doctor treat a patient, given the risks and limited resources?" In fact, there is an ethical framework used in our very own NHS to answer that question. It is called the four principles of biomedical ethics and includes concepts like respect for autonomy; beneficence, which is balancing a treatment's benefits versus risks and costs; non-maleficence, or doing no harm; and justice, which means distributing benefits, risks and costs fairly.

In international development and humanitarianism, we also have some ethical principles, and these touch upon questions around, for example, how we define development, or humanitarian principles we follow in providing assistance, especially in times of war. I want to focus on the decision-making and delivery of international aid, or what I will call the bureaucracy of aid, which begins in the offices of donors like the FCDO, is then delegated to headquarters of INGOs, then often passed on to local and national partners, and finally received by the local people and communities.

Ethical issues in this particular area are neglected. Like healthcare, aid is constrained by limited funding and comes with risks. Even if done out of the UK's good intentions, aid can sometimes cause more harm than good. We have seen this in the pattern of sexual harassment, exploitation and abuse that is happening within the aid sector. We have seen, in the vast literature on the unintended consequences of foreign aid, how it might, for example, exacerbate conflict or undermine local and national systems. That is why, in a paper that synthesises decades of literature on the impacts of foreign aid, Harvard economist Nathan Nunn concludes that, across history, foreign aid may have caused just as much harm as good, and that the west might have a more positive effect if we restrained ourselves from helping.

The word "restrained" here is not the most appropriate, especially as millions of people are grappling with the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic, living in extreme poverty and facing insecurity due to conflict and the changing climate. Like doctors, a question that aid workers and

policy-makers often have to answer is how we should allocate and deliver limited aid that can achieve the best outcomes for people in the global south. At present, most of the guidance that we have in answering this question focuses on technical aspects or represents values of the global north without sufficiently accounting for the values of those in the global south: for example, technical standards such as the Sphere standards, value for money from the perspective of the UK Government, or, under the FCDO, whether it advances British interests.

The ethical dimensions are missing here. Covid-19 has shown that responses to public health require not only the robustness of the science behind policies and treatments but care in the way we implement policy, so that we do not cause more harm, and engagement with communities to ensure that the policy is in their best interests. In the same way, aid could be more ethical; that is, it could be more careful and more aligned with aid recipients' values and interests.

How might we determine whether our aid bureaucracy is ethical? This is a complex question that merits serious study, but, building on what others have already said, I have four starting points. First, there is the issue of equity among the stakeholders of the aid bureaucracy, such as the unjust salary gaps between national and expatriate staff or the racial and power dynamics between typically white British aid workers and local people, which is a factor that may lead to exploitation and abuse.

Secondly, there is the issue of how aid bureaucracy values international expertise more than local and indigenous knowledge. This is despite the fact that, when Johns Hopkins economist Dan Honig studied over 14,000 American and British aid projects, he found that the projects where the implementation was delegated more to local actors were more successful, because they benefited from what Honig calls tacit knowledge from local staff.

Thirdly, there is, as others have mentioned already, the issue of how we measure aid effectiveness. We mainly do so by using criteria designed in countries in the OECD, with little space to include the values and priorities of local people and communities, despite the fact that our aid decision-making and delivery affect not OECD countries but the lives and futures of the people and communities in the global south.

Finally, there is also the issue of how we tell the story of aid. At the moment, the narrative of aid is oversimplified: "Give £5 and help save a life". "Adopt a goat and lift this child out of poverty". Aid is complex, in the same way that, say, healthcare or economic growth in the UK are. There is vast evidence to show that successful aid projects are not about what happens but how it happens. It is a lot to do with experimental approaches, including learning from failure—and failure, as discussed earlier, can be good—and shifting the power to local people, as they can find solutions to their own problems. The current narrative perpetuates white saviours and promotes unhelpful ideas about how aid works. That is

why, for example, so many people seem not to understand the concept of overheads and operational costs.

These ethical issues of aid decision-making and delivery are at the very heart of why, to be honest, many people are dissatisfied with and angry at the international aid system, so far as to describe it as racist and colonial. A lot of these ethical issues that I have mentioned are inextricably linked with racial and colonial power dynamics, for example when a white British country director makes decisions about the delivery of aid in a global south community, including how much their local staff are paid, which experts they hire, how they design programmes and how they evaluate the impact of their work.

I believe these are serious operational and programmatic issues that, for far too long, have been neglected, because we have failed to ask whether our aid decision-making and delivery—our aid bureaucracy—is ethical. In the upcoming inquiry, I would advocate for exploring this and having, as its ethical compass, the values and preferences of aid recipients themselves.

Chair: Arbie, that was both incredibly thoughtful and thought-provoking, and it really has drawn together a lot of the strands that other speakers were discussing, so thank you hugely for that.

Q11 **Theo Clarke:** I am particularly interested, in this inquiry, in what informs the Government when they decide the UK aid strategy. I would be interested to hear from the witnesses particularly about the role of the UK in funding multilaterals versus smaller charities on the ground. The UK is such a major donor to the big players like the WHO and the World Bank, but that sometimes comes at the expense of funding smaller grassroot charities, so I would be interested to hear what your views are on that, what the Government's priorities should be and what questions we should ask relating to that. I wonder, Arbie, if you want to answer that first, because you mentioned resource allocation.

Arbie Baguios: That is a really interesting question. It is admirable that there is this goal of shifting more funding to local and grassroots organisations. That is very necessary because, for too long, it has been neglected. That is not to say that we should not contribute to multilateral efforts, because a lot of the problems that we are facing, including climate change or even refugees and migration, are global issues. It is important to strike a balance between these two. For far too long, we have swung on one end, where a lot of the money is channelled to these multilateral organisations.

Secondly, at the same time, yes, we have to support multilateral organisations, but we also need to hold them accountable and scrutinise them more, because a lot of the mechanisms within these big international bureaucracies can be improved. They have carried on for far too long, since they were established, and the bureaucracies have got bigger and more complex. I feel like sometimes they can be alienated

from local realities, particularly the grant-making process, for example. It is very politicised and there are lots of inefficiencies within it. Yes, let us support multilaterals and rebalance it by shifting more funding to local organisations, but let us also scrutinise how multilateral funding works.

Q12 **Theo Clarke:** That is really helpful. Themrise, I wonder if you could comment, given your experience on the ground.

Themrise Khan: I would go in a different direction on that. It stems from this whole discussion that has been coming up about the failure of multilateralism. I agree with Arbie that we should not give up on multilaterals, but I also feel that we should not be focusing on local organisations. When major donors directly fund local organisations, by which I am referring to national civil society institutions in recipient countries, I have seen a major shift in power within those organisations as well; they become very subservient to the donor.

For me, the ideal form of channelling aid should be bilateral, from Government to Government, because it should be the responsibility of every Government, every recipient Government in particular, to be able to channel those resources further down to their own national counterparts. That is not happening. Right now, there is a pool of donor funding and everyone is after it, from a multilateral organisation to a Government, a Ministry, an NGO or a grassroots NGO. All these organisations are structured very differently, from a bilateral or multilateral donor and going all the way down. There is no mechanism there that works right now.

Ideally, local organisations should be using donor money channelled through their own Governments or through specific national organisations that have the ability to hold their own against bilaterals. When it comes to multilaterals, that is a big "if" at the moment, and there needs to be a lot of discussion about where multilaterals stand now in the global world order. We know that global issues like health and Covid can be targeted only by large institutions, but it does not have to be multilaterals.

We also need to start talking about whether there is an alternative to multilaterals: can donors come together and pool their resources differently instead of through a monolith like the World Bank or the IMF, for instance? We know where we are headed with those organisations. Ideally, it should be Government to Government, and the recipient Government needs to be given the accountability and responsibility for furthering that money down.

Chair: While you are talking, I am wondering if the fear of having funding withdrawn stops people challenging the way donors act and behave. I wonder if any of you could comment on that. Virendra, you said yes.

Q13 **Mr Sharma:** All six panel members have given the different dimensions of aid in different countries. I am quite familiar with what Ms Khan was

talking about, because I know south-east Asia and the political and other culture in that area. I was also very pleased to hear Jamie say that we should be involved in decision-making, by which I take it that British people should be involved in deciding on aid. Can you elaborate a little more on that? In what format can we get British people involved? Is that the beginning of the election results and what is put in the manifestos, or are there any different structures in order to get people involved and to get their opinion addressed on the issue?

Professor Gaskarth: It links in with regional development and local government partners, recognising that there are shared development problems that may link in. Fishing sectors in the UK may have similar problems to fishing sectors in west Africa or other areas of the world. It is about trying to delegate and create more grassroots people-to-people networks and then, hopefully, building up some business partnerships and trading relationships that are more equal because they are at a lower level, rather than the elite-driven development policies that we have tended to have.

Q14 **Mr Sharma:** I will use blunt language: there are cuts and reductions in aid availability, and everybody recognises that. Whether or not we agree with it, it is going to happen. Correct me if I am wrong, but my fear is that, in the coming months and years, our commitments to the SDGs, particularly around young girls in developing countries, under-age marriage and those sorts of projects, are under threat for many reasons. Ms Khan indirectly hinted at the problems, but will countries who receive funding be prioritising what we think. Should the British Government and the new Committee need to impose our priorities? Will the host Governments be as willing as we want to own those social issues, including the development of children and young girls, in those countries?

Themrise Khan: That is the main question. It is something that people like me have been struggling with. On the one hand, the argument is that it is a good thing that funding is being cut, because that might give us at the receiving end an opportunity to get serious about ourselves and our own priorities. Right now, we are like, "The money will keep coming, no problem", but once that tap turns off we are like, "Oh, my God, we need to do something ourselves". In that sense, it is a good thing for us—maybe not for you, but definitely for us.

This is where the issue lies. For instance, using Pakistan's example, as you know, gender, young women and girls is a huge issue. It is one of the most under-recognised and under-attended issues in this country. As women and girls, we are under extreme threat. However, our successive Governments have not seen that as a priority. We have seen that, and that is the reason why we are where we are. Should the UK or any other Government impose that as a priority on us? That is really where we need to have the debate. I do not think you should impose that on us, because that is exactly what aid should not be. It should not be an imposition of your priorities, no matter how important they are globally. That should be our decision. By taking a decision that opposes that, for

instance saying, "No, we do not give you money for women and girls; we give you money for energy and infrastructure projects, because that is what you need", that will invariably create more problems for women and girls.

It is not going to address the issue, but perhaps it will raise activism within our countries. I am seeing that in Pakistan today. The pressure that is building up on the Government on the issue of gender, women and girls is immense. Still nobody is listening to us in our countries, but that pressure was not there 20 or 25 years ago, when I began my career. It is there now and that is the pressure we need in our countries, even if the Government decide otherwise: "No, we are not going to prioritise women and girls. We are going to prioritise something else". The effect of that will be women and girls suffering even more.

I hate to say it, but we probably need to suffer a lot more before finally realising that this is where the crux of the issue is. I hate to say that. Everybody would say, "That is ridiculous. How could you even think that? How could you make yourself suffer more?" This world of aid has become so unnecessarily complex that it is a matter of us versus them. It is a matter of egos. It is a matter of Governments saying, "We are a sovereign, independent Government. We will decide". Having said that, there are also ways that donors can perhaps negotiate on that issue, and that is where you come in, in terms of your global power. If you want to use your power, you do it by saying, "You decide where you want it, but you also have to realise that, if you do not do well on women and girls, we are going to start backing out". That is where that threat perception of donors backing out from our country lies.

There are ways to negotiate around this, instead of just saying, "This is what you do because this is the problem". In my humble opinion and from what I have seen over the last few decades, this is how we now need to start talking.

Arbie Baguios: These are really interesting questions. I would like to reply to some of them. Something that Jamie said and that I really agree with is that we have to democratise the way decision-making within aid policy is done. I like the idea of giving people in the UK the power to influence aid policies. The problem with this is that it does not reflect the preferences of the aid recipients. I wrote some ideas around this, including a citizens assembly for aid, which we see in other areas like climate change.

The missing link now is linking the donor public preferences with the aid recipients' preferences. That is where the magic happens. If the preference of aid recipient communities can be linked to the donor public, that is the best way to make a decision on aid. That is the solution: building solidarity between these two publics rather than a technocratic, top-down imposition of aid from, say, the British, who say, "These are our priorities". As people say, democracy is not given; it is seized. The

international aid sector can play a role in this is by building that solidarity between donor publics and aid recipient publics, so that they can seize the future that they want for the global south.

Q15 **Chris Law:** I am not sure that I have a question, but I have lots of thoughts. There have been six excellent speakers and lots of fantastic contributions. Just to open it up a bit, I would like to ask this. I am not entirely sure it is a question. We are now in the 12th or 13th month of Covid and there has been a lot of talk about building back or—I prefer the language—building forward better. I wanted to ask a broad question about whether the sustainable development goals that have been set out by the UN and partner countries are still fit for purpose in this context?

If not, how can aid recipients and donors work together to change those SDGs? In particular, how much of it should be umbrellaed under the existential crisis that we have, which is environmental degradation and climate change? I realise these are big questions, but they are things that are present in most of our minds right now. How does that fit into what we should be considering going forward in our inquiries? Jamie, I am going to ask you first, because there is a smile on your face, which only begs for you to give an answer.

Professor Gaskarth: It is such a big question. Themrise raised the point about power dynamics in world politics. We are giving money to the World Bank and some of the bigger international organisations in order that we further our influence and crowd out the influence of other, potentially hostile, states. That is a big part of this. There is almost a divide between some of that macro stuff that is influenced by big, structural power differentials, and then there is micro stuff, which is maybe what Arbie and I were talking about: more local-level projects.

By the way, I would hope not just that that democratisation of aid is happening in the UK but that there would be more discussions in recipient countries about what kind of aid they want and them feeding that back, with much more of a dialogue rather than it only being a one-way democratic process happening in the UK. In a way, I am dividing it up between a macro and a micro element there.

Arbie Baguios: At the heart of it, it is about how people and communities define development for themselves. This is very much inspired by the work of the Nobel prize-winning economist Amartya Sen, whose main approach is the capability approach: giving people and communities the capability to pursue the future that they want. This is how the Human Development Index started. We believe that education, health and income are the ones that help people pursue the future that they want.

From a pragmatic perspective, the SDGs are useful in the sense that they can guide that goal of helping people define what they want, but at the end of the day we have to really bring it back to the question of what

development means for people and communities in different parts of the world.

Lena Bheeroo: On Covid, it would not be a bad idea for us to rethink and perhaps update the SDGs with communities that we work with, given that Covid has had a disproportionate impact. Also, the vaccine rollout is not equitable across the world. Given all those things that we are contending with, is it realistic that we will achieve what we said we would? What other issues has Covid thrown up for the countries that we work with? That needs to be done in true, equitable partnership with those communities as well.

Themrise Khan: I am always a harbinger of doom. SDGs should just be scrapped altogether. I am not saying that they are not important—they are extremely important—but tools such as the SDGs have been developed to further box us into silos. All the targets set and all the goals that we have to meet become something countries feel they just have to do to check the boxes. They are not actually doing them. That is one of the issues with donor mechanisms: that they develop these tools that we have to blindly follow without actually following them and making any impact.

If you really want to talk about environmental degradation, climate change or gender justice, we need to talk about those issues. It is not going to be done by meeting targets or goals. Frankly, we should just scrap SDGs altogether and talk about, like Arbie and others have said, what development means to each country. We are not going to like what we hear, because a lot of countries are not going to be talking about gender, environment, climate and health etc, but that is the raw reality of life and of global relations. How we work around it is what we need to be talking about, rather than talking about coming up with a new or an alternative system.

Q16 **Chair:** Thank you very much. Could I ask each of you as a final comment what one taboo we should challenge in this inquiry?

Charles Vandyck: One thing that you probably need to challenge is issues around power asymmetry. Look at the issue of shifting power to communities and really think through what that means. The power dynamics are very unbalanced. It reminds me of a famous Yoruba proverb: if you have a ram with a rope around its head and you give it to someone, let go of the rope too. Maybe that is something that you can think about.

Lena Bheeroo: It is about whose expertise we value and recognising that, within the sector in the UK, we have incredible expertise. In one of his questions, Chris Law mentioned the new Department and how we engage with those people when perhaps you have a homogenous

Department now. There is a risk that the Department will be left behind, because so many of these conversations about locally led development and addressing racism in the sector are happening.

It is about who you engage with and whose expertise is the thing that you need, and recognising that, in the sector, they are not going to be at the top. They are going to be the managers and co-ordinators who have lived experience and who can bring you a different perspective that you are sorely missing. Equally, the same can be said for the communities that we work with. It is about thinking through who you engage with.

Mr Sharma: Can I take this opportunity to congratulate Lena for the way she has brought the racism issue to the forefront? I have been a campaigner on race since the late 1960s, fighting against racism and inequality in society. The way that Lena put it is wonderful and I thank and congratulate you. I wish you every success in fighting for this and then achieving the goals that we could not achieve.

Lena Bheeroo: Thank you.

Q17 **Chair:** Thank you for sharing that, Virendra. Yes, solidarity to you. Themrise, what is the one taboo that we ought to challenge?

Themrise Khan: It is the issue of the saviour complex. I do not use the word "white" in front of it, because, as far as we are concerned in recipient countries, we have had a lot of brown and black saviours coming from western countries who behave in exactly the same way as white saviours do. I know that there is an issue of racism within the global north and I completely acknowledge and accept that, but, when it comes to us, everybody looks down on us. We suffer the saviour complex from everybody who comes from the north. It is a matter of not just talking about first figuring out among yourselves where the issues lie but also then talking about why, collectively, as northern and western states, you look at us as if we are nothing, that we need to be saved and that we are poor. We are not, and more of us in our countries need to start talking loudly and being more vocal about that.

Professor Gaskarth: All those ideas are brilliant, and I would support them. It is about breaking down the elitism around the idea of development and being humbler about the fact that Britain has serious development challenges domestically that may mirror some of those abroad. It is about understanding that inequality and development are universal challenges.

Arbie Baguios: I talked earlier about the ethics of delivery and design of aid. One place where a lot of the issues that have been mentioned in this forum—racism, colonialism and not valuing local people's knowledge—can be seen is in competitive grant making. We have simply accepted competitive grant making in the international development sector as the most efficient way of allocating resources. I would really like us to look under the hood and see the political economy of competitive grant

making and how INGOs have taken advantage of it with their advocacy teams. A lot of issues, like the very western-centric criteria that we use in judging which projects or proposals are funded, can be seen in that one seemingly benign area, and that is a taboo that needs to be addressed.

Chair: I have to say that that was an absolutely fascinating session. Thank you so much for being so brave and so honest in sharing with us what we needed to hear. You have given us so much food for thought and, if it is okay with you, I am quite sure that we will be coming back to you for more direction and guidance, but also for you to recommend other people, so that we can continue this. I am particularly keen to hear from the people most affected and impacted, and often most ignored, as you have repeatedly told us.

You have given us a real gift with all this information that you have shared. We will treasure it and take it forward with as much power as we are able to muster as a Committee. You have genuinely raised issues around ethics, power, success, the long shadow of colonialism, looking at the ever-present racism, and whether aid should be given, full stop. We will go away with all of those and feed them into our future inquiry. Thank you so much for your generosity in giving us this information.