

International Development Committee

Oral evidence: Future of UK aid, HC 1141

Tuesday 13 April 2021

Ordered by the House of Commons to be published on 13 April 2021.

[Watch the meeting](#)

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

Questions 62 - 83

Witnesses

I: Professor Melissa Leach; Director, Institute of Development Studies; Laurie Lee, Chief Executive, CARE International UK; Lewis Brooks, UK Policy and Advocacy Coordinator, Saferworld.



Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Professor Melissa Leach, Laurie Lee and Lewis Brooks.

Q62 **Chair:** Welcome to the International Development Select Committee's session looking specifically at the integrated review, but more broadly at the current Government cuts to the aid sector. This is an area of a lot of concern but also a lot of uncertainty, so I am very grateful to our three witnesses today—this is the first of two sessions—who are going to give us their views and opinions on the information that is available to us. We are joined by Professor Melissa Leach, Laurie Lee, and Lewis Brooks. I wonder if you could introduce yourselves and your organisations, please.

Professor Leach: I am director of the Institute of Development Studies at the University of Sussex. We are a research organisation and think-tank committed to global poverty reduction development and tackling inequality and sustainability questions around the world.

Laurie Lee: I am Laurie Lee. I am the chief executive of CARE International in the UK. We are a global humanitarian and development organisation and we partner with the Foreign Office in various programmes around the world, including humanitarian and girls' education.

Lewis Brooks: Thanks for having me. My name is Lewis Brooks. I work on UK policy and advocacy for the peacebuilding and conflict prevention charity Saferworld. We also work with the UK Government, including both the FCDO and the CSSF, which fund some of our work in conflict prevention and peacebuilding in different parts of the world.

Q63 **Navendu Mishra:** Thanks to all the witnesses who have made time to attend the Committee. Could you share your views on the integrated review and what it tells us about the FCDO's approach to development?

Professor Leach: The integrated review, sadly, is a missed opportunity. This was supposed to be the review that looked at these three crucial interdependent pillars of development, defence and diplomacy, and it has missed that. Development occupies a vanishingly small number of pages in a very long report, which majors fully on defence. While there are some good things in the report—in particular, I pull out the commitment to climate and environmental change and biodiversity, and there was a welcome strand and emphasis on human rights—the disregard for development in this review is a huge loss for this country's long-standing role as what many have called a development superpower, and the soft power and global influence that it creates. Combined with the Government's decision to reduce UK ODA, it demonstrates a really disappointing lack of ambition for the UK's role in international development and international research, and that key aspect of being a science superpower.



Lewis Brooks: From where I sit, the main problem with the integrated review is a gap between some positive aspects of the review itself and the reality of UK policy on conflict prevention in particular. In terms of where those gaps are, you see some positive wording in the review in the strategic framework in terms of a commitment to conflict resolution, but at the same time you have a cut of around £500 million to the Conflict, Stability and Security Fund that addresses conflict prevention.

Another area is open societies; again, you see open societies and that commitment to human rights in the strategic framework in the integrated review, which is really positive, but at the same time you have the UK building relationships with regimes and security forces with authoritarian tendencies, such as arms sales to Saudi Arabia or security co-operation with the likes of Egypt. There are two big gaps there between the review and reality.

There are a couple of other missing areas. The review has missed an opportunity to apply a gender lens to the issue of security and understand how different people experience security differently, whether they are in the UK or overseas, and how gender is a really big part of that. Applying that gender lens would have been really helpful.

Also, in the integrated review there does not seem to be much sense that it has engaged with communities and civil society, or with those people transforming conflict in conflict-affected communities who are themselves in those countries, such as Somali organisations and Yemeni organisations—those people who have sustainable solutions to the challenges that the review identifies. It could have done more to engage with those communities in the process.

Q64 **Navendu Mishra:** Both Professor Leach and yourself have mentioned the significant reduction in ODA. Could I come to you, Mr Lee?

Laurie Lee: I agree with what Melissa and Lewis have said. The integrated review tells us very little about the Government's development strategy, and we now expect there to be a separate strategy that is going to tell us more about that. As Lewis has mentioned, there is no mention of the 50% of ODA for conflict-affected states that the Government previously used. There is a real lack of coherence between development and security in this paper. We will have to see if the development strategy in due course is stronger from that point of view.

At best it is a missed opportunity. What we are concerned about is whether it is really just turning aid into a tool of foreign and security policy. It talks about using ODA more strategically in support of our other objectives. Bond has said this is an erosion of using ODA to support people who are in need. The International Development Act is really clear about what the purpose of ODA is: it is to help the people of other countries who are in need and improve their welfare.



Lewis has also touched on gender. The 2014 Act also points out that aid should be used to contribute to reducing poverty in a way that reduces inequalities between persons of different gender. Gender equality is mentioned literally only once in the entire review. The Government have told us that the DFID strategic vision on gender equality is still part of Government policy, but that is not evident in the review. The review does talk about girls' education, which is good. It talks a little bit about gender-based violence in connection with conflict, but the other pillars of that strategic vision around gender equality, of women's economic empowerment, political empowerment and access to sexual and reproductive health, is broadly missing from the integrated review.

Q65 Navendu Mishra: The point about gender equality only being mentioned once is very important. The coming decades have some significant challenges ahead of us. Do you think the integrated review shows how the UK will approach these main development challenges, and do you think that this is the right approach?

Laurie Lee: As Lewis has said, it tells us a limited amount about that approach, to be honest. There are a couple of pages on official development assistance. We are trying to be positive. Really, we just have to wait and see what is in this next development strategy and see if the way of developing that is maybe more consultative than how the integrated review was developed. There are some links drawn between poverty and international development and other risks that the report is focused on, but it tells us not very much.

If we look at economic development, for example, it talks about an approach to development with more focus on economic development, which in many ways is a good thing. Countries definitely want economic development; that is how people are going to be made more prosperous. It says next to nothing about the distribution of wealth and making sure that economic growth is inclusive. We have got very used to DFID in the past talking about leaving no one behind, including women and people of disability, different ages, different race and ethnicities, and none of that is there. We can assume that that will be better represented in a development-focused strategy, but it leaves you wondering where it is in the list of priorities of this single Department now, given that it was so missed out of what was supposed to be the integrated review.

Lewis Brooks: I agree with much of what Laurie has just said. If you look at the integrated review combined with the merger, pre-merger you had DFID with a building stability framework where it understood what the development approach to conflict was and what the impact of conflict on poverty was as well. Post-merger we were hoping that the integrated review would at least clarify the status of that strategy, or articulate a commitment to a refreshed conflict prevention strategy that combined a development approach to conflict and outlined what that is, with the developmental and, where necessary, defence approach to conflict. That commitment was not in the integrated review. That clarity has not been



given. This is an area the Committee can perhaps push the Government on to find out what the status is of the UK Government's conflict prevention strategy and how it is going to use development, with everything else, to address conflict.

Navendu Mishra: This Committee had a lot to say when the merger was announced.

Professor Leach: We are at a really key moment. We are nine years until the deadline for the sustainable development goals, which still remain highly relevant not as 17 separate goals, but as an integrated package to build a more inclusive, sustainable future for everybody everywhere.

Secondly, we are just coming out—perhaps; maybe we are still in it—of the Covid-19 pandemic, which has really revealed the cracks in so many of the systems that we depend on in our economic arrangements and our environment arrangements, as well as inequalities across many axes, including gender and health. Moving ahead, development is becoming and does need to be transformational. It is not just about building back better; it is about building forward differently in a way that really takes these global challenges, which the SDGs actually articulated very well, extremely seriously.

Of course, this is also the year when the UK is hosting COP 26 and hosting the G7, and we have the biodiversity summit in China, the aftermath of the racial violence and injustices last year, and, of course, the issues around protest in this country, which have really put the importance of democracy and rights centre stage. This is a moment when development writ large in a transformative sense, around transforming lives, should be taking centre stage, and unfortunately in this review we do not have the stepping stones to get us where we need to get to.

Chair: These are really interesting answers; thank you, witnesses.

Q66 **Chris Law:** It is interesting that in some of the answers you all seem to agree with some of the major problems with the integrated review. I want to ask more about the perceptions, because the UK Government have made a lot of this new brand, Global Britain, with Union Jacks just about on everything. I wondered, given the reduction in ODA spending, what does it do for the UK's image as a leading global development player? That is a question for Melissa and Laurie.

Professor Leach: The phrase "Global Britain" is unfortunately being widely overused, and often used with a certain degree of hypocrisy: on the one hand we are talking about Global Britain, but on the other we are actually pulling back from many of the aspects of global relationships that have been appreciated by people around the world and indeed in this country.

The surveys that have been done among the UK public about aid actually reveal a much higher degree of support for aid directed to tackling



HOUSE OF COMMONS

extreme poverty and addressing the needs of those who otherwise stand to be left behind than is often argued, frankly, in Government rhetoric. It is those relationships and that ability to be out there, actually listening to local voices, working with people who are genuinely in need in different parts of the world, that underlie a great deal of what Global Britain has been about and could be about into the future.

What we get in the integrated review is a view of Global Britain that, frankly, is perhaps harking back to a more imperial moment or imagining Britain as a military industrial superpower, which may be a little overreached, but even if we take that seriously it certainly misses a lot of the aspects of globality and global sympathy, as one might put it, that are important to our identity and the way we have been appreciated around the world over the last couple of decades.

Laurie Lee: It is important to note that making the cuts without a parliamentary vote to change the law is questionable. The Foreign Secretary himself told Parliament on 26 November that the law was really clear: they would need to change the legislation, and they would be legally challenged if they did not do so. Nothing has changed other than the calculation that that vote would be lost. It is not right that the Government's legal advice has changed for that political reason.

The cuts have clearly been called out by international partners. The United Nations Secretary-General called the cuts to Yemen aid a death sentence. Mark Lowcock, the previous Permanent Secretary of DFID and now the head of the UN's humanitarian organisation, said it was shocking that there was such a huge cut and that it would cost thousands of lives and affect the UK's global influence. Sir David Lidington and Neil Parish have both said that it will undermine the UK's credibility during its presidencies this year of both COP 26 and the G7.

CARE is based in six of the G7 countries and 100 other countries around the world, and we do not see other countries responding to Covid by cutting their aid budgets. Indeed, many countries have decided that the pandemic is a reason to increase their aid budget because global poverty is going up for the first time this century. The USA just announced this week that it was going to increase its aid budget.

One last thing about our global reputation is this apparent decision to prioritise aid for international organisations over our bilateral relationships with countries. That appears to be confirmed in the provisional data released last week on the 2020 spending, and is consistent with lots of the gossip—and that is all we have at the moment—about what might happen in 2021: that aid for the international organisations is being protected, and therefore aid for bilateral country programmes is being cut by massively more than the overall level of cuts required. That includes cutting aid for countries in Africa and the Indo-Pacific, which are supposed to be the new priorities under the



integrated review, and yet our relationships with those countries can only be damaged by those cuts.

The cuts in general, and specifically focusing those cuts on bilateral and humanitarian programmes, seem to be wrong in terms of need but also wrong tactically and diplomatically.

Q67 Chris Law: I will ask a follow-up question on that, because you have answered the other questions that I had. Given what the UK has termed its global force for good and its superpower status, how do you see this reduction in spending in aid? In particular in the report itself in the integrated review it points out that Africa will have 85% of the lowest—in other words, extreme—poverty of the first billion by 2045. How do you see that tilt away to Indo-Pacific from Africa?

Laurie Lee: My hopeful assumption is that that is not confirmed yet, and that maybe the development strategy will say that Africa remains a priority for aid spending, because some of the talk around the integrated review implied that. As you say, some of the analysis of where security as well as poverty issues are in the integrated review also talk a lot about Africa, so I am hoping that is in the column of, “We do not know yet”, and that it is hopefully both of those regions.

We will see, but of course all of that would certainly be inconsistent with reducing aid to the Sahel by 90%, as the openDemocracy leak suggested, a few days after the Foreign Office was saying, “This is one of the worst areas in the world now for Daesh”, or reducing aid to DRC by 60% when we are seeing that is starting to compete with Yemen as the worst food crisis in the world at the moment. I am hoping that in the long term Africa is still going to be a priority for aid, but it is certainly not very clear in the integrated review at the moment.

Professor Leach: I agree that the Indo-Pacific tilt is worrying, specifically in terms of this impact on poverty, because a focus on the bottom billion of those left behind will have to include a major focus on African countries, and not just those named in the integrated review as a priority—those in east Africa, Nigeria and Ghana. Certainly in the case of Ghana and Kenya, they are graduating to middle-income status. While there are important pockets of poverty, these are not the countries where the majority of poor people live, and especially those who are facing these intersecting crises of food, health, poverty and conflict.

The other real danger that we are seeing here with the aid cuts is the loss of funding for research and evidence, which is a really key part of the force for good agenda and the UK’s superpower status, as it were. The integrated review talks a great deal about the UK as a science superpower, yet the focus here is on high-tech, digital, biotech and things like producing drugs and vaccines and innovation. There is nothing wrong with that; these are things that the UK does very well, but what it misses is this whole slew of what the UK is also brilliant at: global challenges research and development research, which is being conducted and



bringing together multiple disciplines—social as well as natural science—working with local partners in an equitable way and building up capacities to provide the evidence of what the problems are, why they matter to whom, and how to address them.

We saw impacts around things like tackling the Ebola outbreak in west Africa, bringing together this integrated, bottom-up science. There are examples we are now seeing in a lot of the programmes that, frankly, stand to be cut, including those from my own institution—freedom of religion and belief, tackling child labour, the basic programme on social protection in a humanitarian context. These are all part of a research budget controlled either by the FCDO or by UKRI, which has already seen a £120 million hole in its research budget. So far we have only heard whispers of what will be coming from FCDO, but this is important because it has been part of the force for good agenda. It is not just part of the levels of the cuts, but the disproportional focus on those cuts, as Laurie has said, on the bilateral programmes which are crucial, but also on the research and evidence programmes, which are crucial to making sure that aid is well targeted, well spent, good value for money and reaches the people who need it most.

Q68 Theo Clarke: I am interested to hear more about trade in the integrated review. In the IR there is an emphasis on trade and economic growth as a way of leading lower-income countries to be more self-sufficient, so I would be interested to hear from Mr Lee and Professor Leach about what this reveals about the Government's philosophy of aid.

Laurie Lee: As I briefly mentioned earlier, we need economic development to be an absolutely integral part of a development strategy. We should not be talking about a choice between economic or humanitarian approaches; we absolutely need to do both. One of the things that is slightly worrying about the cuts is a bit of suggestion that maybe we cannot afford to do both at the moment, but we really need to do both, because they mutually support each other. Trade is absolutely at the heart of economic development for virtually all countries, and it is important to see that in there. The Government have been working to replicate some of the EU access to trade to the UK for the least developed countries, and that has been good to see in the last year or so.

Again, there is very little in the review about who is going to benefit from that general economic growth in countries. That might be good for helping countries get to a point where they no longer need aid, but if it is done in a way that leaves a very large portion of the population out of economic prosperity and progress, that is not good from a humanitarian, needs, morals and UK values point of view, but it is also probably not good in the medium term in terms of the stability of those countries, and therefore their security, which the review is primarily focused on. It is right to see a focus on economic development as one of the pillars—it should be an exclusive focus—but I am concerned that there is not more about making sure that growth is inclusive.



Professor Leach: I would echo those points. The emphasis on trade in the review underlines economic development, but it actually misses some of the opportunities and some of the really important learning through development work over past decades, and, indeed, over the last year before Covid, about the potential of inclusive and collaborative forms of economic development. These sometimes involve different measures that do not simply prioritise growth as an end, but use growth as a means—perhaps lower levels of growth, but the delivery is on livelihoods, wellbeing, the reduction of poverty and social protection.

There are new mechanisms for that kind of collaborative economy, which often involves interactions between the state and civil society, as well as private sector groups. There are lots of really positive examples of inclusive value chain work, and we heard very little about this in the review. I am hoping that they will be part of the next-step development strategy, but even given the focus on trade, what we also need to see—again, there is not very much about it in the review—is making sure that trade policies themselves are actually progressive, and that this is not just about trade as a free-for-all, but trade as a regulated policy decision-making area for Governments, in ways that protect livelihoods, create equal outcomes and ensure that policies on labour standards, antislavery, child labour and health standards and commitments on climate change, low-carbon economies, waste, managing pollution and environmental standards are really adhered to. The trade focus needs to include those things.

Finally, we have to be very careful that, alongside the move away from bilateral programmes, which are really targeting poverty reduction, we do not see a creep back to the aid for trade approach to development, which takes us back to the 1980s, really, before the recent decades of learning about what makes for good development. There is a thin end of a wedge here, which could tip over into violating some of those long-held lessons about the dangers of aid for trade provisions, as well as moving us away from those real commitments of what ODA needs to be about.

Q69 **Theo Clarke:** I want to pick up on this point about the Government's trade policy. Mr Lee, could I come back to you first? What evidence is there currently that the Government's trade policy supports economic growth in low-income countries? I would be interested to hear what more you think the Government could be doing in this area.

Laurie Lee: It was good that the Government moved quickly to replicate the access that the least developed countries had under the European Union, and that has broadly been done. We await to see whether or not the UK intends to try to give them better access than the European Union. As somebody who used to be in charge of trade for DFID, I know that we were often asking the European Union to go further, so I do hope that the UK does go further in terms of access for those countries.

As Melissa was saying, and I was trying to say earlier, we also need to think about the micro-impact on different people—on the most vulnerable



HOUSE OF COMMONS

and on women—and not just about the macroeconomic results of that trade access, and make sure that it is access that comes with dignified work, good environmental protection, and gives everybody an opportunity to be part of it. It is probably still early days for seeing whether the Government's trade policy covers all of those things. Let us hope that it will.

Professor Leach: I agree with that. I would also add that trade and investment policies need to be very deliberately aligned with creating good partnerships and with investing in knowledge sharing. This is crucial, making sure that intellectual property agreements and so on enable countries to participate. They also need to be aligned very strongly with co-operation and collective action around global sustainability. There is a really key opportunity to make that real this year around G7 and COP 26, just as there is around trade and vaccines. It would be very good to see the UK seize this moment to think about trade policy not just in terms of its benefits to the UK and the UK's growth, but actually in terms of these global commitments to challenges that affect everybody.

Q70 **Theo Clarke:** You both mentioned tackling poverty. I would be interested to hear from you what evidence you think there is that economic growth in low-income countries is what will help tackle poverty in those countries, as that is clearly a focus of this Government. Mr Lee, would you like to comment on that?

Laurie Lee: It is always risky to try to identify one policy alone that will reduce poverty. We are not going to reduce poverty without economic growth, but on its own it does not guarantee that we reduce poverty because you have to make sure that it is inclusive as well. One thing I might add on the trade front that I did not earlier is that, alongside dignified work, supporting full recognition of collective bargaining for workers and the role of unions—formal and informal—is one of the ways in which you ensure that that economic benefit translates into poverty. That is very consistent with what the Government have been talking about with open societies.

Professor Leach: Economic growth needs to be a means rather than an end, and there are circumstances in which economic growth can be very important in contributing to poverty reduction and wellbeing, but equally it can also increase inequalities. One of the things we have learnt is that the effects of economic growth on poverty are much lessened in countries and situations where you have higher levels of inequality, whether those are along class lines and economic lines, or around gender and other horizontal forms of inequality. This needs to go along with tackling gender inequalities, inequalities by place and inequalities by ethnic group, if economic growth is to deliver on reducing poverty and increasing wellbeing.

Likewise, the rights-based agenda, which is one of the positive things, to some degree, in this review, and the emphasis on human rights coming



from Dominic Raab's own interest in this area could well be coupled up with an economic focus on economic rights. That is a connection that is not made at the moment, but economic rights as well as economic growth could be an important focus of the future development strategy.

Q71 Mr Sharma: Taking the poverty theme forward, I know everybody has previously touched on the subject. Do you think that the integrated review gives sufficient weight to tackling extreme poverty?

Laurie Lee: I do not think it does, and that reflects what we said earlier about the overall lack of focus on development in the integrated review. Hopefully, the next development strategy will have a much clearer focus on poverty. It is referred to a few times and it is at least once mentioned that tackling poverty is about our shared values, but most of the rest of the time it is seen as more of a cause of other problems, or development assistance is seen as a solution to other problems.

I was slightly worried to read the part where it says, "After the immediate shock of Covid-19, the momentum towards poverty reduction is likely to resume". That is arguably a little complacent. We are not expecting rich countries to bounce back from the economic consequences of the pandemic that fast, so we should not expect that of the poorest countries, where, according to World Bank estimates, extreme poverty is going up by 16%, when it has been going down for 30 years; it is going to take time for that poverty reduction to resume again. It is not just going to take time, but actual active intervention. We cannot assume that that historical trend is going to kick in again next year without a real focus.

One of the things I hoped we would see during 2020, when there were cuts made to the aid budget, is that that would be used as an opportunity to increase the poverty focus of aid and to reverse the trend of more and more of UK aid going to the upper-middle-income countries. We do not yet have that information from the provisional data released last week, but the work that Development Initiatives has done on what happened in 2020 implies that the aid for the upper-middle-income countries and the very least developed countries was both cut by about the same percentage, which means that actually much, much more aid was taken away from the least developed countries than from rich countries.

Linking this back to the Indo-Pacific tilt again, it feels wrong and inconsistent with a focus on poverty that we might still be giving China £50 million, £60 million or £70 million in aid—it is hard to see that that buys us any influence on China—when we are cutting aid to the worst humanitarian emergency in the world in Yemen by even more than that amount. Yes, there are reasons to be concerned that poverty is not a consistently high factor in making the choices that are being made.

Professor Leach: To take a slightly different angle on this, one of the things that concerned me most was looking at the priorities that are there. In each case there is a potential really important interaction with



poverty that is not picked up. For gender, the focus is very much on girls' education, and yet if you do not tackle poverty, those girls' education outcomes are not going to be achieved. Likewise, tackling girls' education in the right way can be incredibly important for poverty.

On climate change and biodiversity, we know very well that the structural causes of climate change and poverty are very similar, and they have to be tackled together. If you do not help people to build their way out of poverty they are not going to be able to adapt well to climate change. Likewise, we have seen too many cases where climate and biodiversity policies, protected areas and carbon schemes have actually worsened poverty, and that interaction does not get a look in.

Just to take one more, a lot of focus quite rightly in the review is on global health, but, as we have learnt through Covid, a lot of the causes of poor health outcomes in this pandemic, in others and in ongoing neglected diseases are because they are diseases of poverty, so we are not going to achieve the global health outcomes and priorities without also addressing poverty. Likewise, tackling vertical technologies for delivering on epidemics in a siloed way is going to undermine people's wellbeing in ways that increase poverty.

It is these interactions that are actually where the heart of an integrated review should lie, where poverty is seen as both the cause and a consequence, but then also tackling poverty is a mitigator of these other global challenges. That is what I would have liked to see, and I am worried and concerned about the missing, misunderstood nature of these interactions.

Q72 Chair: I was listening really attentively to that, and the whole way through I have been hoping that the strategy is in place and that it just has not been articulated very well in the documentation. Do you think there is, or should have been, an analysis about the long-term impacts of both the cuts to ODA and the focus on the integrated review, and have you heard that there is such a thing?

Professor Leach: There should have been. Stepping back a bit, the integrated review was prepared with remarkably little consultation, or at least the consultation that did happen, which was raising points of these kinds, was not taken on board seriously. Some of the decisions were then made before the integrated review was published, such as the decisions about the aid cuts and the earlier decisions about the merger, which were all things that one might have expected to be outcomes of a proper integrated review of Britain's contribution to these three areas. They were actually pre-made. Things have happened in the wrong order, frankly.

There has obviously been a lot of protest and pushback against the aid cuts in general from many different angles. Those are important and need to continue, but we still do not fully know where they are going to fall, because the actual process of budget-cutting in the various



departments has been untransparent, to say the least, so we are still waiting.

The analysis that is coming out is a little bit piecemeal, and it is an analysis of hearsay and snippets of information that have reached the public domain. There will need to be a reckoning, and a proper analysis of the impacts of these cuts is going to be a necessary element of shaping the new development strategy that we are now promised is going to happen. Equally, it would be an important part of thinking about the next spending review and whether the Government will be able to meet their apparent commitment to go back to 0.7% or not.

Chair: I can assure you that, one way or another, there will be a reckoning coming.

Q73 **Kate Osamor:** Lewis, the integrated review emphasises the combined power of diplomacy and development. What do you think this looks like in practice, in your experience?

Lewis Brooks: When it works well what you have is a toolbox of solutions, particularly to challenges like conflict prevention. This includes both top-down measures, anything from diplomacy around a peace process through to, where necessary, targeted sanctions on human rights perpetrators, combined with bottom-up approaches that are about rebuilding the social fabric or creating dialogue and approaches that support marginalised voices that address conflict from a bottom-up approach. Where things work well you bring that selection of tools together.

There are two big problems we have at the moment. There is still a lack of clarity about how the UK Government bring those different tools together post-merger and post-integrated review. When you look at those cuts to the Conflict, Stability and Security Fund and the aid to conflict-affected countries that was reported by openDemocracy and Channel 4, you have a situation where the toolbox looks half-empty because the development approaches have been cut.

We can see this in some live examples. If you look at Myanmar right now, you have a situation where there has been a military takeover, threats to fundamental freedoms and escalating violence. We know those cuts to the aid budget have already hit certainly our work and therefore our partners' work, as well as Myanmar civil society, including legal associations and women's associations working to look after communities and working with them to support their security needs and to engage in dialogue. Effectively, what has happened is that, despite the commitment to open societies and conflict prevention, the UK aid cuts mean it is walking away from Myanmar civil society. Yes, the Government are using some of those top-down tools. It is using a diplomatic approach where possible and it is using things like targeted sanctions, but it is cutting the bottom-up approach. That is really problematic.



Q74 **Kate Osamor:** Do you feel this combination will allow the UK to work in ways it previously has not, or will it undo the good work that has already been laid out previously to this change?

Lewis Brooks: It is slightly too early to say. The potential to join this up well is certainly there. You need a set of coherent objectives that diplomacy, defence and development can work to together. It is not just a diplomacy and development thing; you have the Home Office, the National Crime Agency and the MoD also working in those same locations, so you need them to be working towards, say, a conflict prevention objective. In part of that is a development approach, because we know there is a link between conflict, poverty and exclusion, poor governance, and those kinds of issues. You need to address those as well.

At the moment there is some promise. We have seen that the review delivers a strategic framework that has open societies and conflict resolution in it, and those objectives are somewhat there. You have also seen a commitment to take a political approach and address the issues driving conflict, but exactly how those different tools all work together is not laid out in the review. We will have to wait and see, if there is a conflict prevention strategy, to see if that is the case.

The other thing to say is that if you go back to the speech post-merger where the Prime Minister announced it in the House of Commons, he referred to cross-Government strategies for different countries and regions that would decide how the UK would bring its tools together. The Government also have national security strategies that do that for priority countries and themes, but those strategies are not in the public domain. There was a 2018 commitment by the Government to make certain parts of those strategies publicly available, but that has not happened. Until parts of those strategies are in the public domain—there are some security considerations, which are fair enough—it is very difficult to tell in any given context whether those tools are being used together, and whether diplomacy and development are being joined up.

Q75 **Mrs Latham:** Melissa, we have touched a little bit on the integrated review and its tilt to the Indo-Pacific, but what does it say about the extent to which the Government place importance upon the development priorities compared with trade and security?

Professor Leach: I have already alluded to this in terms of the sheer quantity of pages and text that is devoted to each of these priorities. For an integrated review of three different areas, development gets a vanishingly small look-in; that is not where the focus lies. One could read some areas of development implicitly into some of what is being said about defence and foreign policy. Read in a sympathetic way, what this review actually does is say that all development and defence, as well as diplomacy, is political; this is all about politics. That is important. Many of us in the development sector have, for a long time, been talking about the need to think and work politically to get away from the idea that



HOUSE OF COMMONS

development is just about providing technical solutions: drugs, agricultural technologies and so on. You actually cannot intervene in development questions, whether they are about women's rights or people's relationships with democracies, or even their abilities to secure food and livelihoods, without appreciating the politics of those processes. Some of that is implicit. I would have liked to see it much more explicit, so that this opportunity to join up and to do development diplomacy, both at the national level but also crucially through localisation, could really come to the fore.

There is an opportunity; connecting development offices up with embassies much more closely in-country could be a way forward for a much more joined-up approach, and also one that could work well with the move towards localisation, and leaving more development in the hands of local people and organisations working well with local government, civil society, mayors in urban areas, and with many of these grassroots groups who we know are crucial to delivering on development. Much of this is possible, but it is not explicitly talked about in this review. I would very much like to see it be a key part of what comes next.

Q76 Mrs Latham: Maybe Laurie Lee or Lewis Brooks would like to comment on what specific development challenges exist in the Indo-Pacific region.

Laurie Lee: It is not a completely clearly defined region, including in the integrated review. By most definitions, it is about a third of the world, so there are a lot of potential issues. We have just been talking about Myanmar, which is in that region. I am quite happy to see a tilt back towards India. That has been an unhelpful political football in the last few years in terms of whether aid should be going to India or not. There is still a huge number of very poor people in India. It is a democratic country and a trading partner, so it should be part of that integrated approach in a place like India. As I said earlier, tilting towards giving China aid these days seems a very strange thing to still be doing.

We will see Africa more prominent when we get the development strategy, but Africa itself would have preferred to have been prominent in the integrated strategy. It wants the whole relationship with the UK to be about security and trade and economics as well as development, not just to be seen as the development recipients of that relationship. That is unfortunate in terms of the way that may be coming across.

Pakistan and Afghanistan have been very big parts of UK development policy over the years, and it is not very clear if they are considered part of the region or not. The needs in both of those countries are going to be great for a long time to come.

Bangladesh is obviously also one of the biggest development partners for DFID in the region, and is hugely integrated with us in terms of trade, as well as in terms of people and culturally. It is good there is going to carry on being a focus there. There are obviously very big links to climate change in Bangladesh. Climate and the Indo-Pacific go together quite



well; a lot of the more extreme climate events that we are seeing in the world are happening in that region. It is a big enough region that there are a lot of development challenges that can rightly be prioritised there, but I would still very much hope to see Africa much more equally represented in a future development strategy.

Q77 **Mrs Latham:** Lewis, do you have anything to add to that?

Lewis Brooks: No, not too much. Laurie gave a good overview of some of the challenges. I would add that they are often interlinked; you have links between climate change and poverty, and links between climate change and conflict. Understanding what the UK needs to do is to understand how certain shocks such as conflict and the declining situation I mentioned in Myanmar can suddenly exacerbate those other issues. You have seen increased number of people being displaced or fleeing violence in Myanmar at the moment, and that particular issue is obviously going to drive further humanitarian challenges as well. Understanding how those issues all link in together is going to be vital for the UK.

Q78 **Brendan Clarke-Smith:** Good afternoon, everybody. What does the integrated review tell us about how the UK's approach to aid is likely to change now?

Professor Leach: It suggests that some of the things we have been talking about are pulling back from the poverty focus, which is actually quite difficult because that is enshrined in the International Development Act and in the ODA rules. It suggests a greater focus on trade and on linking aid up with the UK's own national interests, particularly economic and trading objectives. It suggests a focus on the places that are more relevant to the UK's foreign policy. We have also seen a focus on aid to global institutions, which I would support.

Tackling some of these global challenges requires international institutions, whether one is talking about climate change or the World Health Organization for health, but if that comes at the expense of bilateral programmes that can really work with people in the countries, in the places where development will be in and problems of conflict and poverty are being experienced, that would be a huge loss.

That is the missing area that I see at the moment in this integrated review. It said very little about actually what the UK has become known for, which is the bottom-up, partnered approach, working with and through local development partners, whether they are NGOs, grassroots groups, civil society or local government, to deliver development that is really responding to the priorities of those beneficiaries. That is supported by evidence of those needs, gathered through programmes, tried and tested participatory action and research tools and so on, to make sure that the evidence of the needs is really coupled up with what is done.

A move towards treating things at the macro level and losing this more fine-grained, bottom-up approach could be a very serious problem. It



could have repercussions into the future, both in terms of a lost ability to deal with development challenges that require local as well as global solidarities, and, in the long run, a loss to the UK's reputation, because the force for good agenda, which is talked about a lot, has been largely achieved through these bilateral and comparative relationships. It is not only bilateral; the UK is also known as a convener of people from multiple countries of transnational and translocal alliances, to learn from each other and tackle problems together. It brings together people from Bangladesh and Uganda to think about girls' education and rights, for example. This requires an alliance of bottom-up approaches, and I really hope those are rescued as we move forward.

Q79 **Brendan Clarke-Smith:** I was going to ask you about the opportunities and risks, so thank you for elaborating on that; you covered that really well. Following on from that, is the approach of moving from this grant system towards other financing models the right approach to tackling global poverty?

Professor Leach: To be honest, I do not fully understand what is meant here. There are a number of different instruments that can be useful. Grants and contracts of various kinds can work; equally, various forms of impact investing can be crucial and effective. The key thing is that the principles driving these need really to be adhered to. Those are principles around partnership, agreed goals and inclusivity. The question is less the financial instrument but more about the intent, mechanisms and purposes through which it is applied.

We probably need a flexibility of different instruments into the future, an agility to be able to move across them, and an approach to development that is actually quite adaptive. If Covid has shown us anything, it is that a single blueprint that everything runs from is unlikely to be effective. Adaptive development approaches that bring together a multiplicity of different tools and allow flexible moving across them are likely to be more resilient—that is another word that the review majors on—into the future, given the challenges we are likely to be facing.

Q80 **Chair:** I wonder if I can build on what Melissa was saying. The integrated review was actually meant to arrive about this time last year. In the intervening 12 months we have seen the merger of DFID and the Foreign Office. We have seen cuts in July, and more recently the cuts announced in November. We were told that all of this would be explained in the strategy put in place with the development strategy, which was meant to be coming this year. That has now been batted back to 2022, and all we have to understand the Government's thinking is the seven priorities, which are very broad and do not seem to have the oversight or the impact analysis alongside. How do you think the development strategy that we are meant to be getting in 2022 should be formulated, and what things do you think it ought to contain?

Laurie Lee: Can I just check that we are not going to see it until 2022?



Chair: That is what we have been told.

Laurie Lee: Goodness. That is alarming, although perhaps we will be a bit clearer on the aid budget by then, and hopefully we will have restored it to 0.7% by then. That might assist a longer-term look in a strategy, and it is important that any such strategy is longer-term. It is really important that it is framed around the sustainable development goals, as several people mentioned at the beginning of this meeting. It is really important that it is a development strategy and not an aid strategy. It cannot only be about aid, and therefore it needs to be about coherence across all of these pillars, which of course is what we all hoped the integrated review would be but it has not been, so it is an opportunity to do that.

The countries the Government want to partner with want a more modern version of that partnership. The Foreign Office and our whole international aid sector need to figure out what that means, but we definitely need to be deracialising and decolonising aid. Making aid an instrument of foreign policy is going in the opposite direction to that.

Brendan was talking earlier about the different modes, and one of the things the review talks about is maybe we could give fewer grants and offer more expertise, but a modern relationship with other countries is going to appreciate the fact that they have their own expertise about what is going to work in their country. What they want is some support to implement that, not always to be told that we know better how to do things. While there is going to be a role for UK expertise at times, the idea that it could all become about that would not be right.

A modern strategy absolutely needs to have a big focus on gender equality. The UK has been a good leader on that in the past in development issues. We have talked today about how that is very absent from the integrated review. That would need to come back into this. That is right in terms of it being aligned with UK values, but it is also aligned with open societies.

Q81 **Chair:** If I can interrupt you there, the Government would argue that having girls' education as one of the seven priorities is their nod to gender equality. Would you say it needs to do more?

Laurie Lee: Yes. I mentioned earlier that the DFID strategic vision on gender equality, which the Government say they have taken on, had five pillars, of which girls' education was only one. The other four are really important, and Melissa has also talked about how these things support each other. Without addressing women's economic rights, political rights, social rights and reproductive rights, education alone is not going to free them to achieve gender equality and their full potential. It is not actually going to help the economies of these countries, or the world, be better after Covid if women are not fully included in the economy.



One positive thing we can say about the integrated review is that it talks about aligning all ODA with the Paris Agreement on climate. That is a good thing. Let us see it happen in practice. As I mentioned earlier, the cuts to ODA at the moment rather undermine the COP 26 presidency attempts to get other countries to put more money into adaptation.

Lastly, we need to improve the transparency of international development policymaking in the UK. We have historically been very good at that. In the last IATI rankings DFID was almost at the top, but unfortunately the Foreign Office was almost at the bottom. We were very worried, when the two were put into one Department, that we were going to level down rather than up, and the experience of the integrated review, getting information about the cuts last year and this year, indicates that we are nearer the bottom than the top on the approach to transparency at the moment. The whole process needs to be much more open.

Q82 Chair: Lewis, how should the development strategy, whenever we get it, be formulated and what would you like to see in it?

Lewis Brooks: Your question is very pertinent. The key thing in it is the how and the who rather than the what. The strategy needs to engage with those communities that Melissa talked about—those grassroots organisation in the countries that are trying to develop themselves. You need to engage them, understand what their needs are and understand how to support them to deliver sustainable development. In a conflict setting you need to go to the organisations, civil society, women-led organisations, youth activists and engage in dialogue and mediation efforts and speak up for marginalised communities. For the solution to conflict prevention and resolution, you need to talk to them. That needs to be the starting point, and it needs to be done early so that what they have to say and what they need in order to deliver sustainable development or to deliver conflict resolution is taken into account in the strategy early enough that we will see it in the end result, rather than late in the piece where the decisions have already been made. That is a key thing.

Laurie touched on the other area, which is around joined-up Government. A development strategy, rather than an aid strategy, is right as well. We know that other areas of Government and other activities benefit from a development approach. That is why there was a Secretary of State both in Cabinet and in the National Security Council prior to the DFID merger. That is a key thing. Joining up some of those areas that are linked to development, such as a conflict prevention strategy, should it happen, and the existing national action plan on women, peace and security, which the Government already have, is important; we need to make sure that those strategies are speaking to one another.

There is an area there of wider coherence as well. For example, we know that other areas of Government have an impact on development. One particularly negative case of policy incoherence is arms sales to Saudi Arabia in the context of the war in Yemen, and huge amounts of



HOUSE OF COMMONS

humanitarian aid and some support to Yemeni peacebuilding as well. There is an incoherence there about arming one side of the conflict and then trying to support the negative impact of the conflict and resolve it. First, it is addressing the who, and then that strategy needs to join up with other parts of Government policy as well.

Professor Leach: I agree with what colleagues have said. One can think about this both in terms of the what and some of the processes. In terms of the what, yes, I would like to see it relate to the SDGs, but one can almost boil that down to four really big areas of global challenge, which we absolutely have to address. The first is climate and environmental justice. The second is tackling poverty and inequalities, including gender inequalities and others. A third is supporting health and wellbeing in its broadest sense, not just responding to the latest pandemic, but supporting broader notions of wellbeing. The fourth is fostering open societies and inclusive democracies, and accountable citizen-state relations.

If you took those four big cross-cutting areas, which also relate to each other, one could then also think about some processes and principles that need to be there. One is about thinking and working politically. A second is about responding to local perspectives and priorities, and the ways those big challenges come to have meaning in different places. A third is about building both local and global solidarities; we have seen both as really important in Covid, and they can work together. Another is about resilience, and I like that emphasis in the integrated review. The final one is about transparency and inclusivity, both in the ways that development is delivered, but also in the ways that a strategy is developed.

I would, with others, say that what we should be seeing, if it is now a year in which this is to happen, is that it needs to be something of a reckoning of what has happened over the last year, but also now a broad consultative approach that brings on board stakeholders in many places, in many countries across the world and from many different settings, and actually begins to build a strategy that everybody can buy into and that is truly accountable to those diverse perspectives.

Q83 **Chair:** Melissa, would you say that consultation should be about all the ODA spend or just the bilateral aid spend?

Professor Leach: It needs to be about all of the ODA spend, because it is also about the balance between the bilateral and the global. I would also add the research and evidence spend, which happens across a number of different Government Departments, including UKRI and BEIS, as well as the Department of Health and the FCDO. It is really crucial to the UK's offer and its ability to do development well in a way that is evidence-based and responding to facts, not just to fashions.

Chair: Thank you very much. Witnesses, that has been absolutely fascinating. Next Thursday morning at 9.30 we have the Foreign Secretary, Dominic Raab, in front of the Committee on this very topic; we



HOUSE OF COMMONS

will channel your thoughts and ideas, which have been incredibly relevant and helpful for that. The Committee is also doing an inquiry into the culture and philosophy of aid; again, the thoughts and ideas, particularly around empowering people, are something that we really want to take forward. Thank you so much. Thank you very much, Committee members, for your questions.