HOUSE OF COMMONS

International Development Committee

Oral evidence: Humanitarian crises monitoring: Ethiopia's Tigray region, HC 1289

Thursday 18 March 2021

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Watch the meeting

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

Questions 1 - 48

Witnesses

I: Edward Brown, National Director, World Vision Ethiopia; Paul Turnbull, Deputy Country Director and Representative in Ethiopia, UN World Food Programme Ethiopia.

II: James Duddridge MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State (Minister for Africa), FCDO; Dr Alastair McPhail CMG OBE, British Ambassador to Ethiopia, FCDO; Dr Christian Rogg, Head of British development programme in Ethiopia, FCDO.

Examination of Witnesses

Witnesses: Edward Brown and Paul Turnbull.

Q1 **Chair:** Thank you for joining the International Development Committee's session specifically looking at Ethiopia and the Tigray region. The Committee is very concerned about the current situation in Ethiopia, which is why we wanted to have this session to get some of the concerns into the public domain. As well as the ongoing geopolitical tensions, we are aware of food shortages, internal conflicts and internally displaced people, as well as refugees. We then have the forthcoming elections on 5 June.

We are very fortunate to have two panel sessions. The first panel is Edward Brown, national director of World Vision, based in Ethiopia, and Paul Turnbull, deputy country director of the UN World Food Programme in Ethiopia. Welcome to both of you. I wonder if we could ask you to start by saying what you think is the current humanitarian situation in Tigray.

Paul Turnbull: The situation, in so many ways, is really dire. We expect the number of people who need food assistance, which is the area that the World Food Programme specialises in, to be at least 4 million, and it could rise even more quickly than that. It is a very severe food security and nutrition security crisis in Tigray as it stands.

Q2 **Chair:** Eddie, what is your analysis of what is going on right now?

Edward Brown: Paul stole my word "dire", which is the first word I was going to use. The second word is "complex". This is one of the most complex emergencies I have been part of, and I have been in Africa for over 20 years. With the geopolitical and logistical aspects, it is very complicated on multiple levels.

Q3 **Chair:** I need more detail from you. What is complicated about it? How is it different from any other humanitarian situation?

Edward Brown: There are multiple actors—Amhara, Tigray, Eritrea and Sudan—as part of the equation. It is not just an internal conflict but regional in many senses. Tigray had been relatively well off and peaceful over the years, so it does not have as much infrastructure as other parts of the country in terms of mobilising a quick humanitarian response. We have warehouses and logistics, particularly with the WFP and the NGO pipeline, but this was a quick-onset emergency and it is now protracted and complex. There are no easy solutions.

Q4 **Chair:** Paul, would you agree with that? Is it just the Tigray region that we should be focusing on, or are you concerned about the whole of Ethiopia?

Paul Turnbull: That is a good question. We are concerned about the whole of Ethiopia. Tigray is definitely the most complex and most difficult to address at the moment, and I agree with everything that Eddie has said. We are seeing crises unfold in other parts of the country like

Metekel and Benishangul-Gumuz. Drought has increased the number of people needing assistance in Somali region. As we go up towards the elections, we can expect there to be more conflict and displacement. We really need to be ready for that. It is difficult to be juggling so many different crises in the country, not only from the point of view of the authorities in the country but for our supporting donors outside the country. It is hard to focus and to prioritise when the demands are so big. A humanitarian response plan will be issued. It is currently under review at the highest level of Government. It will give people an idea of the scope of the crisis this year. We would say that, at the moment, in complexity and human risk terms, Tigray is the worst.

Q5 **Mrs Latham:** A number of key relief agencies are working there in response to this crisis. Is it a well co-ordinated response? Is the money that people like the British Government are giving getting into Tigray as well as going elsewhere?

Paul Turnbull: There are a lot of agencies on the ground now. The humanitarian NGOs were there throughout the crisis; not many left. There were about 500 staff there throughout the crisis, and there has been a big injection of additional staff from the UN and the NGO community into Tigray since, so there are a lot of people on the ground at this point.

We still have some way to go in terms of co-ordination. Although structures have been set up, the great problems are the communications. We are limited to VSATs, and a few, selected ADSL and fibre lines have been reconnected. This makes co-ordination extremely difficult, especially in a Covid environment, where face-to-face meetings have to be limited in numbers of people, with spacing. It is quite difficult to co-ordinate under these communication restrictions.

I would not worry about the money not being used correctly in Tigray. There are huge demands for it and, while we are facing difficulties in some sectors in terms of co-ordination, that should not be an impediment to addressing these huge needs in that region.

Edward Brown: There are 56 international humanitarian organisations operating in Ethiopia as part of a HINGO Forum network. We invested over $680 million last year, directly impacting 28 million people. Prior to the conflict in November in Tigray, there were 17 operational international NGOs, primarily focused on development. There are now 24, with nine more coming in as space has opened up. We have already been able to reach over 1.2 million people with food, predominantly through the NGO pipeline, and well over a million other beneficiaries have benefited from health, water, shelter, non-food items, multipurpose cash, protection and nutrition services. The need is still far greater than the current response, but we are scaling up as fast as we can and I would say that we are doing so in a very efficient manner. We cannot know everything or be everywhere, but we are doing what we can, where we can.

Q6 **Mrs Latham:** We have seen some hideous news items in the evenings, where people have been murdered and buried in shallow graves, with lots of burned out vehicles with guns on. Is that just in a small area or is it a huge area?

Paul Turnbull: The evidence at the moment is very anecdotal. There are definitely a lot of incidents that have been reported. We do not really have a full picture of what it is like everywhere in the region. We are getting more humanitarian access in Tigray. We had permission from the Government to go anywhere, and internationals can go anywhere, but lots of security issues are still being faced. A lot of fighting is still going on, which is limiting effective access. Even if the Government have given permission for international agencies to move, we have to be careful where we go, given the insecurity in the region.

There has been a declaration by the Office of the Prime Minister that independent investigations will be allowed, but, when they say that, these are ones by the Ethiopian human rights agency. To some extent, they may not be seen as independent, but they have offered that UN agencies would be able to join these investigations. They have not happened yet, but they have indicated a willingness for UN agencies to join those done by the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission.

Edward Brown: Throughout Tigray region—west, north, east and south—there has been widespread violence and conflict, and civilians are suffering every day. That has not stopped. It is very fluid and unpredictable, but, every day, I am dealing with security incidents on a regular basis. We had 82 staff in Tigray before and during the conflict, and we have scaled up significantly since. We are in the process of hiring a couple hundred more staff. Last year, before the conflict, our total spend in Tigray was about $3.9 million; this year, we expect it to be well over $25 million, just to give you an idea of the scope of expansion—basically, a five or sixfold increase in terms of humanitarian expenditure.

It takes a lot of communication, co-ordination and courage, because you do not always know what you are going to find when you get there, but we have been pushing the envelope and, thank God, our staff are all accounted for. In the refugee camps where other NGOs work, a lot of things happened, particularly at the beginning, including NGO staff perishing, so I do not want to downplay the insecurity and humanitarian crisis that is still ongoing.

Q7 **Brendan Clarke-Smith:** Good afternoon, everybody. Eddie, how easy is it to get personnel, equipment and supplies to where they are needed? What are the main logistical challenges with that?

Edward Brown: Paul can answer the logistical piece, in so far as the WFP and the UN logistics cluster are very active and he has broad scope. As far as World Vision is concerned, we have seven bases across Tigray, everywhere except western Tigray. We have opened new offices since then in Adigrat and Aksum. You can move around and do some things.

For example, we have distributed $450,000 of multipurpose cash. That is easy. It is not low risk, but at least it is not a 30-tonne truck going down a road. We have done what we can, where we can.

In general, the humanitarian community has been focused on urban areas, because those are more accessible than rural areas. In the case of World Vision, we have staff in rural areas, but they have been there the whole time. We have a huge network of volunteers who follow up on our sponsored children in the communities that we have been serving for over 40 years, so that has enabled us to do a bit more in rural areas than other agencies. That said, there are still a lot of places that need to be reached and a lot of work that needs to be done.

Q8 **Brendan Clarke-Smith:** What needs to happen to enable that? You mentioned rural areas, so what more can be done to tackle that in terms of humanitarian access?

Edward Brown: In the case of World Vision, we have primarily been using private funds and frontloading to do what we can. More public funding needs to come in, which will enable us to do more. As Paul alluded to, there is freedom of movement in principle. The only constraint is security, which is very dynamic. Most of us have worked in warzones over many years, and there are ways and means, with civ-mil co-ordination and communication, to try to see where we can go and when. As far as I am concerned, as the humanitarian community and as the United Nations, we are doing everything we can to get everywhere we can, but maybe Paul can pick up that specific logistics question, because there are some practicalities. Djibouti port is no picnic, but I do not know if there are any quick solutions to open up in terms of the logistical pipeline speeding up.

Paul Turnbull: The situation in November and December was really terrible. It was not until about the middle of December that ICRC, and then WFP, could deliver anything from outside of Tigray. There was no movement from the stocks that were already in Mekelle, because there was no fuel. There was just no way to move things from Mekelle to the other areas.

It has picked up. We have been able, for example, to deliver about 20,000 tonnes of food for the Government that they needed some help with on procurement and transport. WFP was able to deliver that into Mekelle in January and February, and that was for the Government's own relief programme. We have also been able, through the logistics cluster, to deliver food and non-food items into Tigray reasonably easily since the middle of January, so things have definitely improved.

We are currently in a situation where there has been a lot of movement into the main urban areas, and we have not fully tested some of the more remote areas and those occupied by foreign forces. We are told that the transitional regional government in Mekelle is fine with agencies going into the Eritrean-controlled areas and delivering assistance. We have not

really tested that to see how easy it is to distribute once we get there. The logistics cluster has been delivering through checkpoints that have foreign troops manning them, and they have not given them too much hassle. They have been able to get across. Delivering and distributing assistance has not been tested well enough to be confident about it, but we really have to try.

The next few weeks are going to be a situation where we are really probing to push the envelope, as Eddie puts it. We are not going to be able to find out until we try. We would like as much security as we can guarantee our staff and partners. We are not allowed to have armoured vehicles here, unlike some countries. We may be able to get radios, but most agencies rely on satellite telephones, which we are terribly short of, especially on the NGO side, so that is something we really want to push hard. We have been pushing with the Government at the highest possible level, and we have had some success in increasing telecommunications, but, unfortunately, the sat phones are still stuck. That is absolutely essential, if we are to have access with safety.

Edward Brown: Paul is being a little humble. The head of WFP, David Beasley, came recently, and that was a real watershed. That high-level diplomacy has really borne fruit, in that, within a week of that visit, some of these things opened up in terms of logistics, bureaucratic impediments and the communications issue. A few NGOs now have internet in Mekelle, which I learned about this morning, and that is good progress. As Paul said, there are still corners of Tigray, particularly in the west, where we are not sure how bad it is. We know that a lot of people have fled from there. When I was in Mekelle in January and February, most of the people had come from the far west. Some of the people from the far west, up in Humera, had tried to go back and were pushed back. There have been multiple displacements. The situation in the west is the most unknown and perhaps the most severe at this point.

Q9 **Brendan Clarke-Smith:** On that particularly, would you say there is an issue with having the necessary data to establish the level of need in particular regions?

Edward Brown: I am little hesitant. A lot of people are pushing "data, data, data." We know it is very bad. We know that 4.5 million people, or over 80% of the population, are in dire need. Even before the conflict, there was a high need for humanitarian assistance. It is a fluid situation, too. I know that some donors are asking for "data, data, data." We have a lot of information. We know the needs. We have staff on the ground. We have been there ourselves. It is an imperfect situation.

The general approach, particularly with food on the ground, is general, broad distributions under the assumption that an overwhelming majority of the people, particularly if they are displaced, need food. Then we can more tightly target in subsequent months, but I would not want humanitarian assistance to be delayed by more assessments or more

data, because, frankly, it is a humanitarian emergency and we need to do what we can, rather than using a lack of information as a reason not to.

Q10 **Mr Sharma:** Eddie, what are the key challenges that you face in your day-to-day work?

Edward Brown: It sounds like a job interview question. As I said, there are security incidents every day. I would say logistics and communication, because, for a long time, the whole region was cut off from communication. It is just the nuts and bolts. This is a huge, complex organisation. We have over 1,500 staff spread across the country. Banking has been a big problem. It has gotten slightly better, but that has been a big constraint on the ability to transfer money, to pay staff or to buy things that can be of use and service to the people we are serving. It is these practical, day-to-day things that have been a real challenge.

Paul Turnbull: It is everything that Eddie has just said, plus the fact that so many of the line ministries in Tigray have become dysfunctional. We hear that about 70% of the health centres in Tigray, for example, are no longer working. These basic structures used to give us ways to reach the vulnerable people, and now they just do not exist. If government staff are still in their position, they have not been paid for months. Once you get out of the main towns, the banks are not working. The lack of that basic infrastructure that we normally rely on is a huge problem to implementing a response. We are really having to do things in a very different way, and it is certainly not business as usual any more.

The NGOs especially have been very good at innovating ways of reaching the people who are in need. Their grassroots representation and deep field presence has been a real benefit in mounting a response. As Eddie said earlier, NGOs in Tigray have typically had more of a development focus than an emergency focus. Having said that, most of them also had emergency experience that they could draw on, so they already had a footprint and were able to expand and scale up their operations towards the scale that is really needed.

I would add one more thing. The funding has not really been that great, considering the needs on the ground. We know that many donor countries we have relied on in the past are having a very difficult time in terms of their own economies, so the timing in terms of the response for Tigray is rather difficult. A lot of Governments do not have the same sorts of funding levels for overseas assistance as they used to have. That is causing us all a problem.

Fortunately, WFP has the facility to borrow from its internal resources, so we have been able to borrow about $30 million against the likelihood of high-probability forecasts from donors. That is allowing us to move quickly. If we did not have that facility, we would not have been able to buy and transport a thing so far. We have really depended on that advance financing facility in order to respond as we are doing now.

Q11 **Mr Sharma:** You said that one of the resources is the funding that you

are borrowing. Is there any other resource that you need to overcome these crises or challenges?

Paul Turnbull: The resources that the agencies have in country and what they can draw on from other parts of the world, as inevitably happens in these situations—we draw staffing from other sides of the world—are adequate. Telecommunications are still a problem. That really is affecting the ability to co-ordinate the safety of our staff. Funding would make a huge difference in terms of being able to respond quickly to this crisis.

Q12 **Mr Sharma:** Eddie, to what extent does Covid-19 and its secondary impacts affect your operations?

Edward Brown: Over 100 staff have been infected since the beginning of the crisis. We had a peak in July/August, with some more over the last month. Most have been asymptomatic, but it does force us to work from home and not be as mobile as usual. Under normal circumstances, I am in the field two or three times a month for upwards of two to four days.

With Covid, it is limited. It affects footprint and staff capacity in so far as it affects our staff as well. It is like the 10 plagues of Egypt, and Covid is now probably eighth or ninth on the list. We had desert locusts, and now we have conflict and hunger. In relative terms, Covid has gone down the list but is still in the background and, potentially, rearing its ugly head. It has certainly had a massive economic impact. It is like the perfect storm, everything that could have gone wrong has gone wrong.

To add to Paul's previous answer and give an idea as to scale and scope, the average ask in previous years in terms of humanitarian has been about $1 billion. It is probably going to be closer to $2 billion. While the needs have doubled, the available resources have shrunk from both the donor side and, to a certain extent, from the Government side, because they are dealing with Covid, with desert locusts and now with conflict. I cannot overemphasise how bad it is. Paul has been in this neighbourhood for decades. We were having a conversation earlier this morning. In relative terms, how bad it is, how big the needs are and what an existential crisis we face is historic.

Q13 **Chris Law:** I have been looking at the numbers: 1.4 million people have been displaced through violence, which is set to increase by another 500,000 in this last year. What is the current humanitarian crisis for internally displaced persons?

Paul Turnbull: It is one that has been boiling for a while. Probably since 2017, it really has become a huge issue in Ethiopia. It is extremely political as well. We have faced times when up to 3 million or 4 million people were displaced. It was the fastest rate of displacement anywhere in the world in 2018. While that has calmed down to some extent in other parts of the country, it has become really huge in Tigray. We do not really have a full idea of the total populations, but we are probably looking at something like 500,000, which may be a conservative

estimate. This makes it extremely difficult to respond to the needs of those people, because they really come with nothing.

It needs a comprehensive response, which is quite difficult to mount in the context of Tigray at the moment. It is a crisis where there are agencies that have experience in IDP responses in Ethiopia already. They are here. The Government also take a lot of responsibility for the IDPs, and particularly, for example, around Shire. Between the JEOP partners and the Government, there is food going in there, but we need a very comprehensive response if we are to reduce the loss of life of people who have travelled with nothing but the shirts off their backs.

Edward Brown: An average of 1,500 internally displaced people have reportedly been arriving at Shire town every day in recent days, including hundreds of unaccompanied minors. According to the Bureau of Labour and Social Affairs, BOLSA, in Tigray, the estimate is over 900,000 internally displaced people, which is a huge percentage of the overall population. It comes on the heels of other mass displacements and ongoing displacements. Metekel in Benishangul-Gumuz was mentioned earlier. There has been a lot of displacement in Oromia and in the southern region over the last two or three years. The IDP crisis is ongoing and, in many ways, worsening.

Q14 **Chris Law:** With this situation worsening, what is the pressure like for the camps where they are going to and the host communities?

Paul Turnbull: The communities have been absorbing and assisting to a greater degree. As far as I know, Eddie, there are not too many large IDP camps of the like that we saw in Somali region, for example, which are still there after three or four years. The communities' capacity to help their relatives and neighbours will be stretched to the point that it will break. Those people do not have much capacity to assist. We probably can avoid camps, if we are able to provide enough services to the IDPs and their hosts in all areas. We would definitely like to avoid setting up camps like we have in Somali region, such as Koloji with 70,000 people. It is a city, but it does not have the resources or facilities of a city.

If we are able to get enough food and other assistance in, it might stop people crowding into the urban centres. There really is pressure on us to get assistance out into the rural areas, so that people can stay on their farms. If we are able to do it quickly enough, some people at least would be able to stay on their farms, plant their crops and even harvest something at the end of this year; otherwise, we will just have this cycle of displaced people who will get into a camp and, after years and years, will still be there. It is really important that we intervene now.

Edward Brown: "Camp" is a misnomer, in so far as most of the IDPs are living in schools or open spaces and, as Paul said, with host communities. For example, I have visited multiple schools. World Vision has built many schools over the years in Tigray. There is no school system at all. The schools are being used either as garrisons for troops or as camps for

IDPs. Again, education is not even being talked about, because most kids have not been in school since before the Covid crisis, but that is another cost of the conflict.

Q15 **Chris Law:** What tensions is it causing in neighbouring countries and their refugee camps?

Paul Turnbull: About 60,000 people left Tigray to go into the Republic of the Sudan. They have been welcomed and pretty well looked after. In fact, the response to the refugees who crossed into Sudan was pretty well organised. From what we could see from here, the conditions were pretty good over there. The Eritrean refugee dynamic is much more difficult, and we still do not really know what has happened to the refugees from Hitsats and Shimelba camps, which were basically destroyed.

We know that many of those people either have crowded into Shire town or have been relocated to the camps of Adi Harush and Mai Aini in the southern part of that zone. We do not really have the numbers to be sure of where those people ended up. We think there are about 35,000 people now in Mai Aini and Adi Harush; there used to be 25,000, so 10,000 appear to have ended up there. We do not know to what extent people have gone to other parts of Ethiopia. We know that some of them have ended up in Amhara region, and some may have ended up back in Eritrea. There are a lot of unanswered questions about the whereabouts of the refugees from those two camps.

Q16 **Chair:** Paul, it sounds a very concerning situation that you do not know where these people are or, indeed, what situation they are in. Is that just because of a lack of access to the region to be able to get that information, or is that information being withheld in some way?

Paul Turnbull: It is a lack of access. That area was very badly hit. Some NGOs have had some access to Shimelba and Hitsats camps, but it has only been in the last week that UN staff were able to get there. I assume that UNHCR has just recently got some reports about that. There were some refugees who just stayed there. There were 6,000 people from the Kunama ethnic group who just said they were not going to move. They were just going to stay where they are in Shimelba and manage somehow, but they did not want to be relocated to the other two camps. That is another piece of the arithmetic, but there are still some huge gaps there that are unexplained.

If the facilities in the two southern camps are upgraded, or if another camp is established where the conditions are good, some of the scattered refugees around the Shire area might volunteer to be relocated to those camps, but we are not certain about that yet.

Q17 **Mr Sharma:** Eddie, how is the crisis affecting the delivery of essential services such as education, health and vaccination programmes?

Edward Brown: As I said, to my knowledge, no education is happening formally. World Vision had reading camps that operated even when schools were closed, using volunteers and parents, but to my knowledge no formal education is happening. On immunisation, I do not know. I know that about 80% of health posts and hospitals have been impacted. It had, before the crisis, some of the best health systems and staff in the country, so it has gone from a very high level to a very low level in a very short time. My big fear now is disease outbreak. Particularly with rain coming, et cetera, access to water is going to become a huge crisis. World Vision has been doing water trucking, which is not ideal. It is expensive and not a permanent solution, but at least it saves lives. Those are very big issues. The focus now seems to be on food and security, but there are a lot of other huge needs as well.

Paul Turnbull: The health system has collapsed at a time when we have Covid surging in Ethiopia. You will probably be aware that flights from Ethiopia to London were cut today because of variants, and we have noticed a huge increase in cases among our own staff. This is the only way we can monitor. There is so little testing done in the country now. As Eddie said, Covid is such a low priority for the general population. In fact, the head of the WHO said that the first casualty of the conflict in Tigray was Covid-19 risk reduction measures, because they have largely been abandoned. As responsible humanitarian agencies, we try to insist on physical distancing and to make sure that PPE is worn, but, apart from in those situations, you will not see the general public adhering to these measures much any more. The Covid crisis is one of many, but the collapse of the health system in Tigray is going to cost a lot of lives.

Q18 **Mrs Latham:** Eddie, do you have any concerns about the impact of the crisis on women and girls? How can we best protect them?

Edward Brown: As a father of two daughters, and having taken my daughters to different parts of this country, that is an emotional question for me. I have talked to children in Tigray, some of whom we have sponsored over the years. I do not know where they are. I am deeply disturbed. You just hear the most horrible reports. I was in Sierra Leone during the war, and Angola after the war, so I am not new to this kind of context, but it never ceases to break your heart and I am deeply disturbed.

A quick answer to your question is presence. In other words, the more staff we get on the frontline and in these rural areas, the more protection it provides. That is huge. There is also a huge need for counselling. Our staff have had psychosocial counselling. They were traumatised. Everybody there is traumatised. So many of the people I talk to insisted, "Yes, I am hungry; yes, I am thirsty, but I am also angry. I want you to tell my story, because horrible things happened to my children. Horrible things happened to my wife. We need our dignity. We need our humanity."

Q19 **Mrs Latham:** Is there any specific support for women and girls in Tigray?

Do your team hear anything about trafficking, sexual violence and gender-based violence specifically in that area?

Edward Brown: I do not know about trafficking, but there is definitely gender-based violence and rape as a weapon of war. We do dignity kits and we have child-friendly spaces, but, again, it is primarily in urban areas, where the lucky have managed to escape. We have a lot of concern for areas where there is not that access.

Paul Turnbull: Sadly, it is a huge cost of unleashing a lot of different troops throughout the region. Unfortunately, the lines of command and control may not be strong enough to keep the combatants responsible. It is quite hard to control, once you let the cat out of the bag, so to speak. There are ongoing fears because of the lack of law and order. The police force has largely collapsed. They are trying to re-establish that, but there is a certain impunity to all forms of crime at the moment in much of Tigray. Mekelle used to be one of the most orderly towns. You could wander around, even at night, without problems and you were just not harassed, whereas there are now security incidents all the time. We just get them reported by our staff, but we can imagine just how bad it is for people who are much more vulnerable than our staff.

Chair: We have just been joined by the Minister, which is perfect timing for the last question from Chris Law.

Q20 **Chris Law:** I hope the Minister can listen to this question. Paul, I suppose you have heard a lot about the FCDO's changes and its current and future strategy. If there was one change you could ask the Minister and FCDO to make, what would it be? The pressure is on.

Paul Turnbull: You caught me off guard there, Chris. We have been a beneficiary of DfID and FCDO. If we look at the last decade, DfID contributed over $400 million to WFP Ethiopia. In fact, even last year, the funding increased slightly from what it was in the previous year. We would urge that funding be provided to curtail this humanitarian catastrophe that is unfolding in Tigray and that an eye be kept on Ethiopia as a whole, given the huge humanitarian needs here. That may not be as specific an ask as you would like, but, if I am talking to a donor at the moment, funding really is a serious issue for us. We expect fair burden-sharing among donors, but we can testify to a very serious situation that has unfolded in Tigray.

Edward Brown: My advice would be women and children. To me, that transcends the politics and the complexity. It is very compelling and urgent, whether it is funding it or advocating around those issues. That can have impact and, in some of the personal diplomacy that I alluded to earlier, it has had an impact at the highest levels here. That would be a huge step forward and a huge point of emphasis that can have an immediate impact.

Chair: Paul and Eddie, thank you so much for this session. Please relay our absolute thanks and gratitude to your team on the ground for the

work they are doing. It must be unimaginably challenging out there and we are just so grateful that you keep on going with it, so thank you very much.

Examination of Witnesses

Witnesses: James Duddridge, Dr Alastair McPhail and Dr Christian Rogg.

Q21 **Chair:** I would now like to turn to our second panel, which is led by the Minister for Africa, Minister James Duddridge. Thank you so much for joining us. I wonder if you could start by introducing your team. We just heard Eddie Brown from World Vision say, "I cannot overstate how dire the situation is." We have been hearing about the grim reality of it. I know you are abreast of it, Minister, so it is really good to hear your thinking about how we try to stabilise this region. I know you have a statement that you would like to make at the beginning, so I will hand over to you for that and for you to introduce your team.

James Duddridge: Sadly, Eddie is right. It is a grim situation, so, if you were looking for reassurance from me and HMG, you are looking in the wrong place. I will introduce my team but, right at the outset, I will say that Ethiopia matters massively to me and to Her Majesty's Government. It is the largest bilateral programme in the world for UK aid. In the last financial year, we spent just shy of £300 million on UK aid. I do not profess to be an expert but, as you say, I have brought some experts along with me.

I visited Ethiopia for the first time in 2006, when I was a member of the International Development Committee, with the Committee, so I knew it a little from then. I have visited four times since, most recently last July, when I was hosted by Dr Alastair McPhail, our ambassador, who joins us here today. At the time, he explained to me that the country and the neighbourhood were complex, and that was before the current crisis that we are examining now in Tigray.

It is grim. The conflict is having a profound and devastating impact on the region, and on civilians specifically. Over 4.5 million people are in need of life-saving aid, and the UN assesses the humanitarian response to be deeply inadequate. Huge numbers remain beyond the reach of the aid agencies, and we can go into the whys and wherefores of that.

Recently, officials from our embassy based in Addis travelled to Tigray, on 4 and 5 March. That included our political lead, Sam Sherman, our development director, Dr Christian Rogg, who is also with me today to give evidence, and our humanitarian expert, Dan Ayliffe. To be frank, listening to the stories that they came back with was harrowing second and third hand, let alone what it must be like in reality. They witnessed the complexities of a very difficult operational environment, but also very clear civilian suffering. There were a huge and harrowing number of

accounts of abuses and areas where progress was being hamstrung by Government obfuscation. There is an inability to keep up with the needs of the area.

The conflict has caused a collapse in all essential services: health; water; sanitation; basic, life-saving, maternal healthcare and vaccination. The core of development work is not deliverable. Furthermore, there have been egregious reports of really awful humanitarian rights violations. It is clear that there has been widespread murder, rape and looting, pillaging and destruction of property. Her Majesty's Government are clear that there needs to be an end to this impunity in the region. It gets worse. Humanitarian workers, right from the outset, were targeted. Sadly, five Ethiopians working for international organisations that received UK funding were killed early on in the conflict while putting their lives at risk trying to help others.

It is complex, and I am sure we will want to probe Eritrea's role in the conflict. It is deeply troubling. The presence of Eritrean military personnel in Tigray is destabilising for Tigray, Ethiopia and the region. The UK Government call for an immediate withdrawal of the Eritreans from Tigray. That is a point I made personally to the Tigrayan ambassador earlier this week.

We are closely engaged. The Foreign Secretary visited in January with his team. While he was there, he visited the humanitarian hub and addressed the political situation through several meetings with Prime Minister Abiy, where, in particular, he raised the importance of humanitarian access. Without that access, we cannot do the business of helping people and we do not know what has happened; otherwise, we are just operating on second-hand reports. Access is absolutely key, which is why we have been calling for access since November.

Recently, the Government of Ethiopia introduced a new system that means humanitarian organisations can notify and then go, rather than waiting to receive permission. We will work with humanitarians to see how this enables them to get out and about, and reach more of Tigray, but most of Tigray is inaccessible.

Let me conclude by saying that, without a marked improvement in access and a drastic scaling up of assistance, we will see a significant deterioration in the humanitarian situation across Tigray. That is likely, in all probability, to make the situation in Ethiopia and, worryingly, across and on its near neighbours more complex and less stable. We have to get this one right.

Chair: The Committee shares your concerns, which is why we are having this inquiry. We want to highlight what is going on there and to try to apply more pressure, because the knock-on consequences, if we do not act swiftly, are pretty horrendous and unimaginable both for Ethiopia and, as you say, for the surrounding areas.

Q22 **Mrs Latham:** It is good to see you, Minister, and good to see Alastair again, whom I met in Sudan, I think. I cannot remember. I have met you a couple of times. Of course, I met Christian as well, so it is good to see the team.

Minister, we know there are difficulties in FCDO at the moment, because of the amount of money that is being cut drastically. Can you tell us what money the UK Government have pledged, in the current financial year and next, for this humanitarian crisis caused by the conflict in Tigray? What budget line does that money come from?

James Duddridge: As the hon. Lady knows, it is quite a complex question, given that some of the numbers she is asking for have not been decided on. Some have started to be decided on but have not been announced, and the figures, historically, are complex. In terms of the perspective, the figure was £300 million in the last reporting period, which was 2019-20. I will ask Christian to come in and give us a bit more detail. If I am right, the hon. Lady has been following the ambassador through Palestine, Sudan and now through this meeting, so multiple interactions.

Mrs Latham: Yes, I have seen him several times over several years.

James Duddridge: Christian, can you give a bit more nuance on the numbers, and particularly the targeted numbers around humanitarian rather than the economic development work?

Q23 **Mrs Latham:** While you are doing that, could you also tell us how much of the money that has been promised has been disbursed?

Dr Rogg: I am very happy to build on the Minister's remarks. The amount that has been allocated specifically to the humanitarian response in Tigray is £15.4 million over the last three months. As the Minister was saying, further discussions are under way, but that amount has been announced and disbursed already. Just to give you an idea of what we are supporting here, we are trying to support the humanitarian co-ordination in general. As was mentioned, there is a huge question over the data on how many people are in need, and the large number of humanitarian agencies that are trying to establish or re-establish their presence, so we are supporting both the UN and its humanitarian agency OCHA to support the co-ordination.

We recognise that food supplies are critical, so we are working with WFP on food. We also very much recognise some of the other challenges that were mentioned, particularly by our colleague from World Vision. Some of the funding goes through UNICEF to look particularly at child protection issues and at some of the wider civilian protection agendas. That came out very clearly in the first panel.

Q24 **Mrs Latham:** You talked about the last three months. Was anything used for the humanitarian crisis before January?

Dr Rogg: The humanitarian budget, both through the UN systems and through the safety net programme and other channels we are using that are targeted at refugees, was well over £100 million in the current financial year. We do not know the exact numbers yet, because the year is not yet closed. The amount I mentioned is only for Tigray and only since the crisis started.

Q25 **Mrs Latham:** How much of that funding has gone to local agencies, how much to international NGOs and how much to multilateral agencies like UN WFP?

Dr Rogg: It is a combination of those. The Government-run system that a large number of development partners contribute to, the productive safety net system, which reaches 8 million people in Ethiopia, is a vehicle that we have been building up, both for regular support and for emergency support. That is complemented by money we are putting directly into the World Food Programme, which is used by the World Food Programme, as well as by money that we are putting into the UN Ethiopia humanitarian fund, which the UN then allocates to organisations like World Vision. I would need to look at exactly how that money is distributed, but we are using all the channels that you mentioned.

Q26 **Mrs Latham:** Would it be possible for you to let us know after this?

Dr Rogg: Yes, sure.

Q27 **Brendan Clarke-Smith:** Good afternoon, everybody. Minister, in terms of the humanitarian interventions, what is the UK funding at the moment? Could you give us some more details about that?

James Duddridge: To be frank, I am struggling to go beyond what Christian has outlined. As we move forward, more can be done in Tigray, if greater access is provided. Was there anything in particular that you were looking at? The other elements of the programme that Christian has not gone into are things supporting economic development and open societies. As I said earlier, it is a complicated situation. We have elections coming up in June in Ethiopia, and a lot of the spend is in other areas. In fact, when I was there in July, the key flashpoint was in Oromia, not Tigray. The budget is quite widely spread beyond Tigray.

Q28 **Brendan Clarke-Smith:** What about co-ordinating the UK's response with other donors, for example? What are we doing to make sure there is no duplication of effort there?

James Duddridge: I engage with the internationals. I have spoken to David Beasley from the World Food Programme on a regular basis throughout this crisis. I have also spoken at a special meeting of the United Nations on regional co-ordination. I have done work with the African Union, both directly through the old commissioners and the new commissioners who have just been appointed through Chair Faki, and through the president: less directly through Cyril Ramaphosa, the outgoing president—my interlocutors were people within the Ministry of

Finance—and more directly with President Tshisekedi of the DRC, who is now president of the AU.

A lot of this work is done on the ground, either at a very detailed level with the humanitarian and development director, Christian, or through broader-brush co-ordination at a political level between the ambassadors. When I was there last, I met a number of international players. The US has just appointed a new ambassador to Ethiopia. I believe Alastair has met her within the last week or two. Our bread and butter is getting out there, passing the baton from these visits that Christian has been on, and going back and telling the other internationals where we have and have not been, as themes to follow up. In the early days of the crisis, I was getting as many reports from international counterparts via the embassy as I was directly from the embassy, so there is a strong degree of co-ordination.

Alastair, are there any other ways in which we should be co-ordinating where we are not, or any other good examples of where we have co-ordinated to great effect?

Brendan Clarke-Smith: That detail is very welcome, Minister. Thank you for that. It is nice to hear that you have been having such dialogue on it and that duplication is not happening, so thank you very much for that.

Q29 **Chair:** Minister, could I push you a little on that? We heard from the earlier witnesses that both the health and education systems have pretty much collapsed. They are two of the Government's seven key priorities. Looking forward, will you be looking to plug those gaps to meet your priorities?

James Duddridge: I will ask Christian to come in, but I will also give some context. One of the problems is that there is just no access, so we do not even understand the nature of the problem. Another is trying to gain consistent access and not being blocked by Eritrean soldiers, and the complexity around the provisional government and perhaps outlining what the regional authorities—I am being loose with my terminology—are doing. Some of the territory that we would describe as Tigray is under the control of the Amharans or is inaccessible.

Before this detailed planning and co-ordination, fundamental is getting that access and understanding. To a degree, it is a little premature to talk about the detailed solutions before we have even seen the nature of the problem.

Christian, could you come in and explain a bit more about what you saw with boots on the ground? I would have loved to get up there myself to understand it. I was unable to, but perhaps we can through your eyes.

Dr Rogg: Yes, I am happy to do so and to provide a bit more information on the specific questions about health and education. Both of those areas feature very prominently in the portfolio of the Ethiopia development

programme here. The issues as far as Tigray is concerned are very different. Aside from the work that we have already discussed on the humanitarian side, we are working very closely with the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Health, because the long-term solution that has to be discussed is the re-establishment of those basic services, in addition to any urgent food requirements.

As I said, the situation is very different. From the perspective of the health sector, the previous witnesses already said that the majority of facilities are not functional at the moment. A key challenge there is that they have been looted. Another challenge that was mentioned is that many health workers are no longer there, so you have this combination of missing equipment or damaged facilities and lack of personnel. Literally today, we were having conversations about how you operate in a space like that. If you were just to ship medicines, it is not clear that they would reach the beneficiaries. There are lots of discussions about mobile clinics that have the medicines and distribute them, but do not leave them in locations, and, likewise, the deployment of health workers and the provision of other things that have disappeared.

For education, it is very different. As the previous witness from World Vision said, the education sector in Tigray was closed because of Covid and has not restarted since then. Because of the large displacement of civilians who have fled the conflict, many are in the schools themselves. Following up the invitation from the Minister, when we were in Mekelle, the capital of Tigray, we visited one of those schools and met a lot of displaced people in that location. It was a normal school that now has 3,000 displaced people registered there. They were, on the one hand, receiving relatively good shelter, just because it was a permanent structure. On the other hand, it is impossible to restart education when the schools are occupied, if you want to use that word, by people who have been displaced.

The stories we heard were very much those that you heard from the previous witnesses: large-scale conflict, serious human rights violations, extrajudicial killings, rape and other atrocities that have been reported quite widely.

Q30 **Chair:** What I am hearing from you is that they remain priorities, but it is so unstable in some areas that you are not able to deliver them at the moment. Would that be a correct assumption?

Dr Rogg: On education, the conversation is about how we restart in a place like Tigray at the moment, whereas, in health, the question is how we work with the facilities that are there and complement them without the money being lost due to looting or further damage.

Q31 **Mr Sharma:** Minister, are you seeing the level of humanitarian access that you would like in relation to Tigray?

James Duddridge: I am not seeing the level of access that we would like and we would need. Until we get full access, we will not know the full extent of the problems. Just to go back a little to the Chair's summation around education and health being priorities, they will be, but access has to be key. There is nothing predefined. The conflict has not ended, and we are not going in there to sort things out and build back immediately. There is a significant chance that things could go backwards.

The TPLF has not put down its arms, so it is about stabilising the region, getting access, getting an understanding of what the needs are and then providing, in a sensible order of priority, against needs. Sadly, some of the needs will be very basic—and even more basic than the right to education and a health service. Just getting clean water and food to people, and stopping the rape and the forced removal of people from areas, will be critical. At the moment, I am unclear about when we are going to get to that point, but critical to that is the Eritreans leaving, and getting that access and stability.

Q32 **Mr Sharma:** Do you see any conflict when you talk to the aid agencies at ground level and they say, "Minister, we have these needs; how do we access this?" and, when you talk to the Government level, they give you the total opposite to what the grassroots people are saying? Do you see any conflict in that?

James Duddridge: I deal at both the ministerial and ambassadorial level. In a lot of these dialogues, there is a desire to put the context. The Ethiopians talk a lot about re-establishing law and order, and about longstanding issues with the TPLF, the history and putting context around it, which is helpful but is sometimes used to justify their activities. Some of the activities of all the players are wholly unjustified. It is inconceivable that any player in this environment has not committed atrocities or actions that we would find quite shameful and be wholly critical of.

In relation to the stories on the ground, I will defer to Christian, who talks to these people. As well as the aid organisations, there is increasing access from news agencies, both local and international. I have seen some pieces from the BBC and Sky in particular that show the devastation: the killing, the burned-out buildings, the burned-out military vehicles, the shallow graves, and the volume of bullets piled up that have come out of the machine guns. You shudder to think of what happened there months ago.

Christian, do you have anything on the local feedback from NGOs that are going into places that were inaccessible even to you?

Dr Rogg: It is fair to say, as was mentioned, that there are diverging perspectives on the situation that we hear about from people who are in Addis versus people who are travelling in the region. To give you an illustration of that, as the Minister and previous witnesses said, there has been progress on access in moving from a system where it is required to

have a permit to a notification system, which was hugely welcomed and made a big difference.

Most of the airports in Tigray are now closed, so people coming in are flying into Mekelle and, from there, it is road movements. As you also heard previously, it is very likely that you will encounter roadblocks, which are sometimes manned by the Ethiopian military, sometimes by the TPLF, sometimes by Eritreans and, in other places, by Amharan special forces.

You have a situation whereby you have multiple actors and, even though you have a notification system, and you can fly to Mekelle and get into a car, you will find very quickly that the situation becomes unpredictable, including the security situation across the region, as people were saying, being very fluid and changing from week to week or month to month. That is part of the reason why you hear very different descriptions of the situation.

Q33 **Mr Sharma:** Minister, what are you doing to improve humanitarian access to Tigray? What kind of challenges do you face in doing so?

James Duddridge: The key is repeating the message at the international level and having an honest dialogue, as I did with the Eritrean ambassador and I have done with various people, from the Deputy Prime Minister and across the Ethiopian Government, in co-ordination with people from the World Food Programme and others, to explain what we need to help.

We need to have a careful, balanced relationship between being clear and public about what is going on, and having a private dialogue to try to encourage all participants to have an open dialogue, with not just the obvious participants but other regional and international players that are involved or interested, to try to get to the root problems. My fear is that the situation in Tigray will develop alongside other neighbouring problems, so this will become more and more difficult to deal with.

My focus is on stabilising this situation. East Africa is a focus of the British Government across Africa. We want to put more focus on that area and the long-term relationship. The situation in Tigray is working against rather than for that, and it is sucking up not just international money but focus. That is probably the bigger worry: that other things will go wrong around the region, because the international community is so focused on this, diplomatically and in terms of brain power. It is totally separate to the arguments around money. The humanitarian solution is money, but the problem is fundamentally one of politics and diplomacy.

Q34 **Chair:** Minister, that leads me nicely into the question I wanted to ask both you and Alastair. I agree with you that Ethiopia is a keystone in the region, which is why this Committee is so concerned about its long-term stability. Could you both speak about how you prevent both what is happening in Tigray spilling into the rest of the country, and what is

happening in Ethiopia impacting on the rest of the region? Could you talk a bit about the political and diplomatic steps that you are taking, to prevent that and to enable humanitarian aid and development work to start, in order to stabilise the region after that?

James Duddridge: I will do a superficial tour of the problems and some of the mitigations, and Alastair can add more detail. We have spoken of Eritrea, and I will not deal with that again. There was a flood of people across the Sudanese border and then back. The Sudanese made their 1902-03 border much harder than it had been, pushing back Amharan farmers who were tending lands on the Sudanese border, so there is a potential flashpoint there. Sudan is still a relatively new and progressing democratic nation, with the balance between Hamdok and the Sovereignty Council. There is a separate diplomatic effort around that.

I mentioned the Oromo people and we can go into more detail about the situation with Amhara. More broadly, the ambassador has warned me that Tigray is only 6% of the population. The elections probably will not happen there anyway, but the majority of the election and the electoral risks and opportunities are out in the rest of the country, so it is about deploying resource more widely there, as well as broader diplomacy around issues like the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam, which is very controversial in the Horn, given the flows of water around Egypt and Sudan.

Those are some of the dynamics that we are engaging with. I have not even started on the issues coming across from the Middle East and the Red Sea. We have appointed an envoy sitting not above but across some of these issues, because it is really complex. In classic diplomacy, you can pick up a pin, stick it in any place and look around that, and the world would look very different if you stuck a pin at the other end of the country.

That is a beginner's guide to what we are doing. For the full version, can I turn to Alastair to correct my inaccuracies subtly?

Dr McPhail: We are extremely active within the country but also in the region. We co-ordinate with other embassies here in Addis. We co-ordinate with all sorts of players in the region, including our embassies and high commissions in neighbouring countries, so we can see both sides of the telescope, whichever way you are looking at it. Here in Addis, for instance, we have been working on Tigray. It is huge. It is a big challenge to the country. It is also a big challenge to the way the Government has tried to operate as we come up to three years since Abiy took power.

In that time, one of the most interesting phenomena that I have observed is the changing relationship between the central Government and the regions. Whereas, before, there was authoritarian government from the centre, that has changed dramatically. Tigray is the most extreme version of that, but it is not the only one. The Minister has

mentioned the conflict in Oromia and in Amhara, but there have also been conflicts in places like Benishangul-Gumuz and Gambela, which continue.

We are trying to keep across all of that. We travel as widely as we can. It has not been easy because of Covid, which has restricted not only our presence in the embassy, which we had to draw down last year, but our ability to travel around the country. It is picking up a bit at the moment. Ahead of what we see as almost a perfect storm from June, where we have the elections happening at the beginning of June—as the Minister said, probably not in Tigray, but certainly in the rest of the country—we are trying, in co-ordination with colleagues in our embassies in neighbouring countries, to make sure that any possible cross-border difficulties are being mapped by us, and that we are not only messaging to each of those Governments but doing it in co-ordination with partners, which change from country to country.

What the Tigray crisis has also done for our international engagement here is to make sure that we co-ordinate with anyone who might have influence. That does not necessarily mean our traditional partners such as the US and the EU, but others closer to the region who have key interests at stake. We are trying to make sure that the co-ordination is good and that the analysis is as full as possible. That means drawing on sources. We have not always been able to in the past. It also means that we have different types of conversations with countries that were previously reluctant to do so. I do not know if that answers your question, but I am happy to take more.

Q35 **Chair:** It does. I wonder if you could speak a little more about the elections and why they are a point of concern for you, for the country's stability but also from a development and humanitarian position.

Dr McPhail: The elections were always going to be a problem. Even before Covid, we were concerned about how they could be held with the huge logistical challenges and the fact that, when the elections were first due to take place, the capacity of the National Election Board of Ethiopia was minute; it was tiny. UNDP is the international agency doing most to support the elections. When the then Foreign Secretary, Jeremy Hunt, was here in 2019, he announced some significant financial support to UNDP, but that was mainly around the security of the elections, and that remains a concern.

While we have so much insecurity and logistical difficulties, and while you have opposition parties boycotting the elections, as they have just announced, it is very difficult to run a credible and safe election, particularly in June, when we are getting towards the rainy season. The logistical challenges that there would have been anyway could well be complicated if the rainy season arrives early.

There is massive insecurity across a lot of the country, not only in Tigray. In June 2019, for instance, the regional president of Amhara was

murdered. On the same day, the chief of defence staff was murdered here in Addis Ababa. In June last year, a young activist was murdered in Oromia, which led to great insecurity that is still being played out. Oromia is a concern, because it is a third of the population of Ethiopia, so you are talking about 36 million or 37 million people just in that region. Amhara is still in difficulty, and that is before we go to the other regions.

We are concerned about the ability of the election board to run a safe election, in terms of getting the ballot boxes and training enough people so that people can vote safely on the day, and then, afterwards, the people who do not win, if they have taken part, accepting the result of it. There are all sorts of risks attached to the election.

Q36 **Chris Law:** Minister, we have already seen a diminishing UK aid budget diverted away from countries such as Yemen and South Sudan, which are racked by war, extreme poverty and on the verge of famine. Given what you have been hearing today with regard to the challenges in Ethiopia and what is happening to neighbouring countries, I wanted to know what your thoughts are in terms of what impact the announced cuts to UK ODA will have on aid provision by UN agencies, NGOs and the FCDO in Ethiopia.

James Duddridge: Having made a decision, because of the UK's financial position, to move from 0.7% to 0.5%, that has consequences for the existing programme and what we can do going forward, but also, crucially, the flexibility that we do not have, but did have, with a rising GNI and a quite rapidly rising budget over the last six years.

There is a big difference in terms of the impact of that directly on multilaterals and our bilateral programme. On the multilateral programme, while it might be a statement of the obvious, our full contribution, as was last time, is a small percentage of the whole, so directly in financial terms there is not a massively significant impact on the overall multilateral spend within the region. The multilateral spend will be a lot of our commitment, whereas our bilateral spend will be more flexible.

One of the key challenges with a reduced budget is making sure that bilateral spend is right, and that is where I will be spending more time to make sure that we get the most benefit. Also, the development expertise of the UK is preeminent in the international community. I know others will have different views, but the merger of the Departments tried to bring that together with diplomacy to make it even better, not to diminish it, and to make sure that that leveraging role is still there.

Looking at the budget, you naturally look towards the very obvious humanitarian situations. The challenge will be to make sure that we leave enough of some of the other, smaller programmes to work with the long-term development of civil society, the long-term stability of elections, the media and so forth, as well as the big ticket programmes. These are the types of programmes that, as you go beyond aid, you put more money

into: less humanitarian, less volume and less money, but more programmes, more technical, more specialist and more leveraging of the development heritage of the UK.

The other thing at play is that we have said we will focus on east Africa, which particularly means Kenya and Ethiopia. Notwithstanding the Tigrayan conflict and a reduced overall budget, we would want to pay particular attention to make sure that we still have an ability to control those levers in Ethiopia. It is quite a complicated answer, but it is quite complicated.

Q37 **Chris Law:** It might be complicated, but cuts have consequences. People die. Bluntly, what I want to ask is this: will you be defending the budget for next year to maintain it at least the same as it has been this year, particularly in the light of what is happening in the Tigray region, or are we to see cuts? Let us be honest about this: this will mean the loss of many thousands of lives.

James Duddridge: We made the decision to go from 0.7% to 0.5%, and that clearly has consequences. My job as a Minister is to maximise the upside of the spend and minimise any downside. I cannot, at this stage, make any commitments to thematic programmes or countries specifically. What I can say to you, which is in the integrated review launched by the Prime Minister on Tuesday and referenced heavily in the speech by the Foreign Secretary on Wednesday, is that there is a long-term commitment to Ethiopia. You cannot name check every country in the world, but those commitments were made in early drafts predating even the situation in Tigray.

I suppose I will end my answer where I started my statement: Ethiopia is incredibly important to us, is our biggest bilateral programme and is going to remain very big in our programming.

Q38 **Chris Law:** Nevertheless, sympathy does not save lives. Moving on to get a bit more detail, how have UK-funded programmes in Ethiopia changed in response to the crisis in Tigray?

James Duddridge: I will ask Christian to come in on this, because there are some things that we would be doing that we physically cannot, so programmes need to morph with flexibility. He talked about the £15 million as well.

Dr Rogg: As a specific example of how the programmes have changed, we have put additional resources into the areas that we discussed at the beginning of the call. Previously, there was no humanitarian crisis in Tigray as such. There were quite a few people who were dependent on food aid and on safety net, but that was very much managed. The additional funding that I mentioned at the beginning of £15.4 million, for example, included working with UN agencies and with organisations like the International Committee of the Red Cross specifically on those new challenges in Tigray that we did not have to work on before.

At the same time, as a result of the fact that, as was mentioned, the administrative structures in Tigray have broken down, it was not possible to channel some of the money that had previously been allocated to those mechanisms. We have been making adjustments in light of the fact that we still want it to reach beneficiaries there, but we were no longer able to use the same, often Government co-ordinated, mechanisms that existed beforehand.

Q39 **Chris Law:** In what ways has this crisis made you think differently about your approach to conflict prevention and peace-building programmes? Christian, maybe you can tell me what effect you think cuts to UK ODA are going to have on being able to adapt and change your approach.

James Duddridge: I will come in on the general point and come to Christian on the ODA. I began in this role a year ago. You start by thinking about territories and regions, but the people matter enormously. Abiy won a Nobel peace prize for stopping the war between Eritrea and Ethiopia, and for investing in relationships and in people. Of all these situations that we have talked about—we have not even mentioned Somalia and the Ethiopian influences there—the one constant is political leadership and getting a closer understanding of the people involved, their motivations and their histories.

Almost every time I go back to an area, I look back on my old self from my previous visit, say how naïve I was and add another layer of complexity. It is therefore about having people on the ground for longer periods of time, having that corporate history, having ambassadors and development directors who go somewhere early in their career and then come back but also do posts that are nearby, as Alastair did in South Sudan, so there is that context and longevity of relationships. We have people like Stefan Dercon advising the Foreign Secretary on some of these issues. He has spent hours with President Abiy to have that understanding.

Christian, can I ask for your reflections on the crisis and on the changes in ODA spend?

Dr Rogg: I will also come back to the specific question of how we think about the conflict and handling that. I have said as much as I can in terms of how we have adjusted the approach to humanitarian spending as well as the vehicles that we are using in light of the Tigray crisis.

It is fair to say that, since the crisis in Tigray started and over the past three months, we have been very quick in supporting the different agencies that either play a critical co-ordination role, like UN OCHA, or are ready to provide emergency support, like the World Food Programme. I cannot comment on the future, as the Minister was saying.

I want to come back to the point on conflict. The approach to Ethiopia has changed, unfortunately, in the sense that, for many years, the key challenges in Ethiopia were natural disasters around drought and, more

recently, locusts. Over the last two or three years, we have seen increased humanitarian need, but also development need, as a result of conflict. The figure of 2.7 million people displaced in Ethiopia before the Tigray war is already quite staggering, but even more staggering is the fact that 68% of them were displaced by conflict.

What we have already done over the last two years is, first and foremost, to build up the capacity of the embassy here to engage on those issues. When I arrived in Ethiopia, we did not have conflict specialists in the embassy. We have brought in that expertise and, in fact, we are recruiting to maintain and build on that expertise to allow us to engage in conflict analysis. Likewise, we are building up the capacity in some of our partners who have traditionally worked more on drought issues, for example, to engage with conflict dynamics in a way that they were not prepared for before.

Q40 **Mrs Latham:** I want to make a comment, Minister. Twice in your evidence, you have said, "We have made the decision to cut the aid budget from 0.7% to 0.5%," but Parliament has not yet.

James Duddridge: The distinction is a fair one. The development Act allows for 0.7% not to be met. We are looking to get back as soon as we can, fiscally, to 0.7%. Listening to the debate on Tuesday, I appreciate that lots of Members feel very passionately about that, and there is a very active debate around these issues, the timescales and the interpretation of that Act. I am not going to get all legal on the situation; that is a debate to be had at a different time.

Mrs Latham: There is a difference in the interpretation of the Act. The Department has one interpretation and some others of us have a different one.

Chair: That will probably be played out in the courts, the way things are going.

Q41 **Mr Sharma:** Minister, how is the FCDO planning to support a transition to peace and stability in Tigray?

James Duddridge: Peace, stability and, basically, stabilising feel like a long way off. We cannot even get into the country. It is going to be a multi-layered approach, at ministerial and at international level. I would hope the region plays an even greater role. I know that, informally, a number of discussions have been going on. The African Union sent three wise people—ex-leaders of Sierra Leone, Liberia and Botswana, from memory—to encourage Abiy to engage.

No amount of effort dealing with the humanitarian travesty as a result of this is going to stabilise the region. The problem is a fundamentally longstanding political conflict. The Tigrayans, who represent 6% of the population, were running the country for a number of years, and things seem to have been turned on their heads now and have played out in a very different way.

I am conscious, Chair, that I have not drawn heavily on our ambassador. Can I ask him to come in? If there is anything that he feels I have not mentioned, he can come in on a slightly wider piste.

Dr McPhail: Minister, would you like me to address that particular question or something else?

James Duddridge: Feel free to address that question. Also, if you feel that the International Development Committee does not have all the information or particular angles, answer the questions that have not been asked but that you as ambassador think are important, which we should be asking as parliamentarians and I should be asking as the Executive.

Chair: There speaks a former Committee member. Thank you, Minister.

Dr McPhail: What I would say in answer to the question is that we are doing a great deal of planning to see how we can support any future peace in Tigray. We have made it clear from the very first day that there is no military solution to the difficulties between the central Government and the TPLF. We have made that absolutely clear, and not everyone has done that.

We have also been at pains to make sure we are co-ordinating in the closest possible way with those who have influence and, to be honest, to identify who does not have influence. We have made it clear that we will play any supportive role to whoever drives this forward, and it is quite clear that this, as with so many other difficulties on the continent, will have to be led by Africans in the first place. The African Union continues to have a conversation with Abiy and others. The neighbouring countries are doing what they can, and we are keeping in close contact with them.

The regional organisation, IGAD, is slightly quiet at the moment, but we are trying to press it to get involved, if and when the AU decides to go down its usual route in regional conflicts. It has this principle of subsidiarity in which responsibility devolves to the regional organisation. We are trying to support both of them in identifying what will need to be done. We stand ready to provide any sort of advisory, experiential or even technical knowledge that we have. I have worked on four peace processes, as part of the mediation and not as an observer.

We have pretty good contacts with the people who would help. We do a lot of scenario planning, as you would expect, just to map out how things might go. We are not short of ideas or, indeed, of energy. We are co-ordinating with those who also bring the same sort of experience, but, primarily, this will be solved and resolved on the continent.

In terms of what the Minister may have been alluding to, which is tensions, one thing that we have not really touched on but is a real difficulty is the border tension with Sudan. Sudan is going through a transition and would like to be able to focus on it, no doubt. This border tension is, in our view, quite dangerous, if it is not reined in, so we co-ordinate very closely with our colleagues in Khartoum to do our utmost,

with others, to press both sides to deescalate that particular situation as well. I am quite happy to take any further questions that you might have.

Q42 **Mr Sharma:** That leads nicely into my next question, on the peace-building and stabilisation process, which you say has started already. One section of the community is always ignored: women and girls. How do you see your role, or that of the FCDO, in making sure that their contributions are not left out or ignored in the peacekeeping and stabilisation process?

Dr McPhail: That is a very good question and one that we press everyone on, including the African Union. We have not talked much about the African Union at all. The African Union has a group known as FemWise, which are female peace negotiators. It has a team in the AU, with which we are co-ordinating very closely. We would like to see that particular process grow and for female negotiators to deploy to peace negotiations, not only so they bring a different angle to the negotiating team, but so they can better draw in the women and girls in the communities who might feel more comfortable speaking to female negotiators than to the usual male negotiators they face.

Q43 **Chair:** Minister, we keep hearing about the horrific levels of sexual violence and rape that are going on in the country. Do you see it being deliberately used as a weapon of war?

James Duddridge: That is what people are saying is happening, and I have no reason to believe that is wrong. There are verbal accounts of what has happened, but getting the solid evidence is tricky. I know that sexual violence was reported to Christian and his team. Where you draw the line between it being just something that is horrific, where it is targeted at a population and where it becomes a weapon of war. It is a horrific act, however one categorises it. It is clear that evidence needs to be collected. There should be no impunity because, if people feel they can get away with these types of behaviours, they will be repeated, within the region, the area or internationally.

Christian and Alastair, have you seen any particular evidence that NGOs on the ground have uncovered?

Dr Rogg: As the Minister said, we definitely heard those stories when we spoke with displaced people, in a way that echoed what we had previously heard from humanitarian agencies or from journalists who had been to the region. It is difficult to judge when it is a weapon of war. One gets into legal terminology there as well. One of the encouraging things to point out is that, because Ethiopia has quite a few women in important leadership positions, the President and half the Cabinet being women, those stories have been picked up. Both the President and some female Cabinet members have spoken out about the fact that it is completely unacceptable for rape to happen on that scale on Ethiopian soil.

One of the things we are doing, in addition to the specifics we have already touched on, which is working with the UN on the protection of

children and displaced people, is trying to see how we can operate in the space that has opened up, with senior Ethiopian politicians having spoken out and having, in a way, created that opportunity to engage at a more senior political level.

Q44 **Chair:** Will that leadership lead to a reduction in FGM and child marriage, and to a focus on trying to prevent the trafficking particularly of women into the international sex trade?

Dr Rogg: It is fair to say that the opportunities are there to discuss those issues openly in Ethiopia, which is not the same for many other countries that I have worked in. We also have good technical co-operation with the Ministry of Labour and the Ministry of Women, Children and Youth Affairs on issues, for example, to do with women migrants going to the Gulf, supporting that to be legal and to be happening in transparent ways, and complementing that with activity to tackle the smuggling that is happening alongside. It is an area where there is quite a lot of work to do but also where we feel, at both the political and technical level, we have the ability to work and to make a difference.

Chair: Thank you. That is very heartening to hear.

Q45 **Brendan Clarke-Smith:** Minister, you were talking earlier about the importance of Ethiopia and our commitment to it. How is work to achieve peace and stability in Ethiopia and the wider region going to contribute to work on other development challenges?

James Duddridge: Everything is quite closely linked, so getting that stability allows the resource, whether that is the African Union or the diplomatic resources of a country, to project outside. Listening to Christian talk about the President and the female balance in Cabinet, it was not a long time ago—less than six months—when we were talking about Ethiopia really motoring in the right direction, with talk of gender balance and liberalising the telecommunications sector.

I know that sounds like a technical thing, but with that comes opportunity to communicate and trade in different ways, potentially as a building block to liberalising the financial marketplace. That allows for transformational change, for leadership in the region and for saying there is a different way of doing business, in an open and democratic way, and getting on that trajectory. I would like to think that, having started saying it is grim, it does not have to be that way. There are some very strong counternarratives that could come through but, at the moment, the slightly grimmer narratives are holding forth.

In terms of peace and security in the region, the first thing that Ethiopia can do is to take itself out of the problem category and put itself back as the shining, glossy example of what you could do. The reforming Abiy, the Noble prize winner, liberalising marketplaces, bringing elections to Ethiopia and peace to the situation in Tigray, that was the narrative six

months ago. It seems wildly optimistic to get back to that within another six months, but that is the thing that will help the region.

Q46 **Brendan Clarke-Smith:** In terms of some of the long-term programmes that have been going on to reduce poverty, hunger and the impact of climate change on vulnerable groups, such as the productive safety net programme, will we be continuing with those?

James Duddridge: Aid has been a great success. I remember the 1980s, with Live Aid and Band Aid. This is the region we are talking about: Tigray. It has been a great success in the sense that, when there is food insecurity, significant amounts of resource are generated through tax programmes in Ethiopia, which then fund the provision of basic services as well as the straight development spend.

The programme of cash transfer that you talk about has been very successful. Instead of food and goods being bought from elsewhere, they are bought on the marketplace, so it not only provides for the individual, but they buy what they need rather than what we think they need, so there can be differentials. Because it is being bought locally, it can be quite transformational in creating micro-economies of people buying in bulk, then selling on and making a slight profit to feed their family, in the way that a normal market economy would work.

Overall, cash payments are probably something that we will see more of, but perhaps more at a multilateral level than a bilateral level. That is not to say that we should not do them at a bilateral level and, in fact, we have been at the cutting edge of demonstrating the value of these programmes. We have also been at the cutting edge not only of passing them on to multilaterals but of embedding them within the country's system, so that any social payments the country is making can go through these models. We can also flex them. When that distribution method is there, it is relatively easy, metaphorically, to press a button during a famine, a food crisis or a cyclone, and to put more money through that distribution system.

Where, for financial reasons, we might be paring back the amount of money going through that system, I would very much want to be retaining it as a distribution mechanism for the multilateral and for the Government, and, sadly, in the case of need. Although Ethiopia tends to be more resilient now, there are repeated problems of famine, locusts, cyclones, climate change and conflict. All these programmes will change over time, but that is the point. No country wants to be a permanent recipient of aid, but it is not always a question of doing a programme that was right and then closing it; it is about transitioning it to the state and a productive economy.

All these problems mean we are shifting money towards dealing with short-term issues and away from the bigger-picture technical and economic development assistance that will help grow the economy in the longer term. It is a real paradox. Chris Law was talking about taking

money out of the system and that having a direct impact on not feeding someone. To a degree, that has always been a challenge within the development budget, not just because of the reduction in budget but because of the balance between feeding someone today and feeding them over many days through contributing longer term.

Q47 **Chair:** Minister, could I give you a concrete example? Last week, I met a project funded by Christian Aid, the South Sudan Council of Churches. It has been receiving money through the conflict and security fund to work with the various groups to try to maintain peace in that region. Its money ends at the end of the month; it has only just found out. In terms of transition, it has had none. It has had three weeks' notice. That is one project. The consequences of that for the stability of the region are pretty scary, because it is a house of cards that could start collapsing quite quickly in that region. Could I ask you personally to have a look into that particular case and see if there is any transitional funding, so that it does not fall off the cliff edge and the peace process does not go down with it?

James Duddridge: I can certainly commit to looking at that specific programme. I was in South Sudan recently. As Alastair said, he knows that area as well. In terms of the current programme, I will look at that. A lot of programmes were timed to fit with the financial year, so it is a pinch point and we are having to look at a lot of these things at the same time.

There is a lot of interaction between the different elements of funding. There is multilateral and bilateral. There are programmes that are run centrally and those that are bought locally from the multilaterals. We heard of the situation where what appears to be a multilateral spend of UK Government money is ultimately spent on the ground by local NGOs. Looking at the changes in budget, and working those all the way down and all the way back up, is not a one-shot process but a reiterative one. With the size of the budget, it will not be something that anybody is going to get 100% right.

I would, through the Committee, encourage examples to be worked through. Some may need to change quite quickly; others will be part of how we build back. Even at 0.5%, even the most pessimistic of individuals expect quite a rapid growth in GNI, so the number, even before we start to look at the 0.7% issue, is going to come back. We should not necessarily just reinstate programmes that were already there. We should look at this as a fresh opportunity to see how we do development, particularly with the fusion of development and diplomacy in the overall mix.

I am also very conscious that, within the relatively short period of time of four years, we will be making spending decisions on money that is currently going through the EU. Yet again, this is another opportunity to use our development expertise and to shift to a different development model. That sounds like we have had a bad development model, but talking to one of the senior people who has worked for us for a number of

years, and who is retiring, her message was to me was to keep challenging the development budget and doing things in different ways. I apologise if I have misinterpreted her comments, but it stuck with me as part of an exit interview. Keep innovating.

Chair: This Committee's concern has consistently been about that overarching strategy and the complexity of all the different areas that DfID and now FCDO have funded, or the multilaterals that they have put support into. It is those unintended consequences, and we have not seen the strategy about where that funding is going in the future, and where gaps are going to be plugged or the transition period supported, which is why I raised that specific example. You will be very interested—and, hopefully, delighted—to know that this Committee is doing an inquiry now on the philosophy and culture of aid because, like you, we want to make sure that money has the best impact, empowers local people and has a long-term impact. We will be feeding those thoughts and recommendations through to you.

Q48 **Chris Law:** You mentioned locusts, climate, war, persecution and cyclones in Ethiopia. I want to ask a really blunt question: budgets are already down, given the drop in GNI and in remittances. Minister, I know you cannot commit but can you pledge that you will attempt to defend the existing budget, given the dire situation Ethiopia is in?

James Duddridge: I was expecting remittances to drop through the floor during this time. Surprisingly, some of the evidence is to the contrary and they have gone up in some areas, which is really good news. In many countries, remittances dwarf the overall budget. Most people find it easier to give money away and spend money. Increasing a budget is always more comfortable than decreasing it. When I talk to people within the Department who are passionate about outcomes, they say it is much better, for development outcomes, to be making difficult decisions and choices, transitioning to a lower budget and getting us on a stable footing to transition back to 0.7%.

I will be a strong advocate. I can commit to that 100%. Although I have always been a proud Member of Parliament for my own patch, also in my DNA is a bit of Africa, along with the malaria. I cannot be anything other than a defender of the continent. Longer term, I worry that, of the world's poor, Asia is growing fast, and more and more of the world's poor—and you can pick any statistic—are African. That is going to get up to 95% within something like a 20 to 25-year period. Yes, Africa is growing, but it is growing more slowly than the OECD average.

That is to say that, in relative terms, the bottom billion are still getting poorer, despite the progress they are making. That troubles me greatly. Doubling our international aid budget, or, indeed, the aid budget of the whole global community, will not solve that problem. It has to be much more than just the money, which is why "A force for good", the open societies work and the economic development work is a massive part of the solution. It is about getting economies that make money and pay tax,

with politicians standing in elections, as we do, and saying, "This one will tax you more and spend more, and this one will tax you less and spend less." Those normal dynamics just do not exist in many parts of the continent.

I can promise you passion and a strong defence of Africa. I suspect we would defend different things in different ways, but that is inevitable.

Chris Law: I agree with all the points you have made, the key point being that, in the strategic review, the tilt is to the Pacific and not Africa, so Africa is going to come out worst of all in this review.

Chair: Thank you very much, Minister. I would also ask you to advocate on behalf of Ethiopia with your international colleagues, as it is a dire situation and, unless there is a cohesive and coherent international response, I fear for what might happen both to that country and to the region.

Thank you very much. You have been very gracious and gone well over time, but I know this topic is one of passion for you, so thank you for making that investment. Thank you very much, also, Alastair and Christian, for the work that you are doing out in Ethiopia at the moment. Committee, thank you for your time.