



International Development Committee

Oral evidence: [Recovery and Development in Sierra Leone & Liberia](#), HC 1204

Tuesday 13 May 2014

Ordered by the House of Commons to be published on 13 May 2014.

Written evidence from witnesses:

- [Institute of Development Studies](#)
- [Save the Children](#)
- [Marie Stopes International](#)

Watch the meeting: [Tuesday 13 May](#)

Members present: Rt Hon Sir Malcolm Bruce (Chair); Hugh Bayley; Fiona Bruce; Sir Tony Cunningham; Pauline Latham; Jeremy Lefroy; Sir Peter Luff; Mr Michael McCann

Questions 1-69

Witnesses: Dr Jeremy Allouche, Research Fellow, Institute of Development Studies and Alex Vines, Head of the Africa Programme, Chatham House, gave evidence

Q1 Chair: Good morning and thank you very much for coming in to give evidence to us. I just wonder if, for the record, you could introduce yourselves.

Dr Allouche: I am Jeremy Allouche. I am a research fellow based at the Institute of Development Studies.

Alex Vines: I am Alex Vines. I am one of the research directors at Chatham House and also head of its Africa programme.

Q2 Chair: Thank you. This is our first oral evidence session of our inquiry into Sierra Leone and Liberia. Of course the background to all this, as everybody knows, is that there was what was regarded as a very successful military intervention that the UK led, which ended a civil war. The word is that that has led to post-conflict recovery. I think we want to establish how true that is, how successful that is and how secure that is. That is the basis of the questioning we will have.

Ban Ki-moon described it as one of the world's most successful cases of post-conflict recovery, peacekeeping and peace-building. Do you agree with that, firstly, and if you do, what makes it so special?

Dr Allouche: I think it really depends on whose perspective we take into account. From an organisation's perspective—so from the UN's perspective—I think, in terms of integration, that it has been one of the most successful integrated peace-building missions. Also, from DFID's perspective, it was really important in the sense that Sierra Leone was probably one of the first examples of the broadening out of DFID's agenda following the changes in the International Development Act 2002. It really shows how and to what extent DFID can have a role in security sector reform and so on. In both of these respects, it was really successful.

If you take it from a pro-poor development perspective, the benefits of stability are still to be met, especially for the youth. Sierra Leone has a really large youth population and many problems are still linked to this.

Alex Vines: My view is that it has been a success. It is a model to draw upon for other interventions. It is important to recognise the progress that has been made in Sierra Leone. It is a country that I was personally working in as a UN sanctions inspector during the civil war. I have seen how much it has improved since then.

There are major challenges that remain in Sierra Leone, and Dr Jeremy has highlighted one of them, which is about the lack of inclusive growth. We have very impressive growth figures for Sierra Leone. I believe this is really important for the Committee to look at—16.7% based on natural resource extraction. But it is the story of a lot of Africa: it is not inclusive. You have this massive youth bulge that does not make Sierra Leone any different from any other part of the African continent, which is under-employed or unemployed. Although Sierra Leone has had three successful elections—and that is another statement of the success of the post-conflict peace-building in Sierra Leone—increasing youth restiveness, as we will also hear when we discuss Liberia, is probably the single most serious issue.

Q3 Chair: You are saying that the UK, through Defence, the Foreign Office and DFID, has contributed to that, but, as we know, countries that have come out of conflict often slide back into conflict. Given the challenges, what is the risk of that happening? Can you give us any indication of how the approach in Sierra Leone and Liberia differ, and what might be learned from that, because they are two sides of the same conflict, but with one led by the UK in terms of post-conflict and one led by the United States? Is there a perceptible difference in approach?

Alex Vines: Perhaps I will go first on this as I have worked in both countries. With Liberia, I was also a member of the UN panel of experts on Liberia. I think one of the key issues regarding differences of approach between Sierra Leone and Liberia is the approach on security sector reform. The much more integrated, long-term UK approach, with the embedding of British military, technical expertise, and an inspector general in the police force in Sierra Leone, is quite different from the privatised approach that we saw in Liberia.

Also, the approach with the security forces in Sierra Leone was often to work with people who were already there, including the officer class, whereas there was an attempt to completely remodel the armed forces of Liberia, for example. I do think that the learning that comes out of the Sierra Leone experience plays well in terms of Sierra Leone and

post-conflict reconstruction and development. The fact that Sierra Leone has been able to deploy its armed forces abroad now, including in Sudan and in Somalia, where it is currently operational, is also a testament to the training and investment. The question is: as the security sector interventions wind down, is the capacity that has been built up in Sierra Leone sustainable? That is a more important question.

Chair: I think Hugh Bayley is going to put that to you in a minute, so you can elaborate then.

Alex Vines: Compared with Liberia, of course, we have also had longer to assess. That is also a difference.

Dr Allouche: I would like to add by focusing especially on the future risks that one could identify. My work is focused on Sierra Leone and not so much Liberia, so I am not going to draw any parallels for the moment. I would identify three major risks, in some ways; the first one is actually linked to a new DFID–ESRC project I am going to start leading, which is essentially linked to large-scale investments and peace-building.

In Sierra Leone, there are many issues linked to land—mining; iron ore—and to more broader infrastructure development, which will radically transform, in some ways, the agrarian landscape. This, if not managed properly, could go either way: it could be very successful in the sense that Sierra Leone will benefit from these large-scale investments; or it could clearly go on the other side as, in some ways, the previous civil war has shown, with its link to diamonds and so on. That is one major risk. Iron ore, which is now Sierra Leone’s major resource, is an important risk.

Another one is what I would identify as new forms of violence, because I think we have a shift from more state security-type violence to new emerging forms of violence, which are in peri-urban areas very much linked to youth, music and gangs and all this type of violence. One wonders to what extent the Office of National Security has the capacity to deal with these new forms of violence. Also, in some ways, what is problematic is linked to that: the proliferation of small arms, which is also something really important.

And then finally—this is one major point I will come back to throughout the evidence—there is the regional dimension. ISAT’s role now in focusing on regional security strategy is really welcome. One can see, if you look at the region, that it is very problematic to isolate Sierra Leone from Liberia, but also from two other countries: Côte d’Ivoire and Guinea. There is a whole regional dynamic that one has to understand to better tackle the root causes of violence in the region, because of cross-border linkages between all these countries. One might remember that, for example, in Liberia the origins of the civil war—the attack from Charles Taylor—originated from the Ivory Coast. Obviously, the origins of the civil war in Sierra Leone were clearly also in Liberia. There is a domino effect, and one has to be really careful in terms of managing these threats.

Q4 Hugh Bayley: First of all, is it mistaken therefore to try to develop a nation-by-nation security strategy? If you need a security strategy across that arc of instability or historical instability in West Africa, who would lead it from an African perspective, and therefore what African leadership would donors, UN agencies and others work with? Or is that impractical and should one therefore look at national security strategies?

Alex Vines: Absolutely this should be looked at through a regional lens. Obviously, the United Kingdom reopening its embassy, having an ambassador in Monrovia and having a DFID office in Liberia is already an acknowledgment that it is a regional issue. It is actually all about protecting the legacy of British investments, both developmental and political, in Sierra Leone, so that makes good sense.

The reopening of the British embassy in Conakry and having an ambassador there is the same logic: it is about the regional aspects of this. But the core pillar to the strategy is obviously Sierra Leone because of the political and developmental investments there. In terms of the UK architecture responding to the regional crisis, the centre is Sierra Leone and it moves outwards from there. That continues to be the strategy. I do not disagree with that. It argues for continued engagements regionally and that decisions that are made about Sierra Leone are integrated in terms of a regional approach. A regional framework is really important, and country-policy strategies need to be framed through that prism, in my view.

In terms of who can lead in terms of security within the region itself, obviously there is a sub-regional organisation that has not played a particularly effective role in peace and security: the Mano River Union. That may be a good reason to re-look at that in terms of where there would be some capacity. It certainly had a role—sub-sets of it, including the civil society aspect of it—in mediation, for example, and the women’s network of the Mano River Union has been effective. Of course, there is the regional economic community—ECOWAS—that can play a continued role through its good offices, so there should be continued investment at the ECOWAS level.

There are other common issues obviously that involve human security in this region. Again, the UK is engaging. The British defence attaché in Freetown is actually responsible for the whole of gulf of Guinea in terms of being the focal point for illicit fishing and piracy. That makes perfect sense to me. There has been some very good work done in Sierra Leone, but also further along the coast in the region, on IUU. If you look at the demographics, combating illicit, unreported and unregulated fishing is actually truly strategic because, yes, iron ore is important, but at the moment it is going to employ only 3% or 4% of the population of Sierra Leone. The extractive sector is employing a tiny number of people. The economy remains basically agricultural-based when it comes to employment, so other sources of nutrition and commerce are going to be important. I would highlight fishing as one of those.

Dr Allouche: If I may add, there are different ways to look at it. One is to look at it through institutions and what kind of institutions we could put in place or are useful at a regional level. Alex Vines mentioned a few of them: the Mano River Union and also ECOWAS. There are also other interesting examples in terms of UN mission co-operation between, for example, Liberia and Ivory Coast right now. One could imagine three different UN missions with some kind of integrated policy and framework.

But it is also about policy design—to reinforce Alex’s point—essentially around the idea of having a presence in most of these countries. It is also about focusing beyond the centre and going towards the peripheries, where most of the unstable dynamics are present. It is really about focusing on these border regions and trying to have a better grip of what is going on. Rather than just having headquarters in Freetown or Monrovia, one

could have some kind of office in the border regions. That may be useful. It is a different kind of institutional set up, in some ways.

Q5 Hugh Bayley: It has been suggested to us in some of the evidence that we have received that the problems in Sierra Leone and other countries in the region are the problems of an incipient conflict and are similar to those in North Africa—in Tunisia—before the spark that set alight the Arab Spring. Yet DFID seems not to see security as central to its development task. Is that your assessment? Should more UK development co-operation focus on security sector reform? If so, who should be in the lead: the conflict pool or the DFID budget? Which works more effectively?

Dr Allouche: I am not really convinced about the comparison with Tunisia, to be fair. It does not strike me as a parallel example. It is a different kind of setting. I would say that, in terms of the focus on security, one has to put it into the context of what Sierra Leone and Liberia have been through in the sense of moving out from fragility. Then the question is to what extent security still has to be a key priority. I think it does, but in a different way because of how violence is evolving to new forms of violence, as I stressed before. One would need to shift towards a more human security focus, as Alex Vines has emphasised. I would think that DFID would be well placed to lead such a focus in some ways. That is my opinion.

Alex Vines: I do believe that Sierra Leone continues to be a place where best practice and learning can take place because of the investments that happened previously. The commitment to consolidate peace through substantial financial allocations to security sector reform, linked to a large UK military advisory presence, as we discussed, through the Africa conflict prevention pool, which you mentioned, was truly important. That was buttressed by efforts to rebuild the state, concentrating on governance reform and direct budget support. They are all tied together.

We are now, of course, moving away from that direct, large-scale intervention, but I do think there are going to be niche areas that we need to look at as part of that trajectory. Community policing, I think, is one area that is really important. We have got good evidence coming out that DFID interventions and support for community policing in other parts of Africa have significantly seen crime decrease. There is a good example that has recently come out in Namibia from one of the peri-urban areas of Windhoek. I would recommend that the Committee looks at this very seriously: innovative, different ways of supporting community-level policing. That is not the traditional approach on policing. Often, if you ask Sierra Leoneans, “Oh, there’s been a robbery. Are you going to call the police?” they would say, “No, actually the police could be part of the problem.” So, I would recommend that as one area, particularly in Liberia. Recent studies, including by Human Rights Watch in Liberia, show this is equally a problem there and that the American efforts at reforming the police there have not been too successful either.

Hugh Bayley: Could I ask just one further question?

Chair: Yes, but Michael is about the pursue the police point.

Q6 Hugh Bayley: It is not about the police, but when one talks about security sector reform, one often forgets the justice sector—the courts; the prison service. A year or so ago,

I was in Monrovia and sat in on a fascinating discussion with women in a centre for dealing with domestic violence. They had split views about the courts and prisons. Some thought one should blow the whistle on violent men because they would be locked up and lost in prison for a couple of years before their case came to trial, and that would deal with the problem. Others had no faith at all in the courts and felt that somebody would bribe their way out of prison very quickly and come and beat them up for sending them to prison. What should DFID be doing to reform the prison and court system in these countries?

Alex Vines: Well, institution building, which includes the judiciary, is clearly a really important part of any engagement. In fact, it ties in to the wider concept of development, including what the current British Prime Minister talks about: golden threads. I see this as integral to that.

To have a rule-based society that is conducive also for investment and development needs good investment in the rule of law. The streamlining of law itself is something that DFID has invested in in the past, be it criminal or commercial law in Sierra Leone. That is something that I believe needs to continue. There are other areas that clearly are yearning for further support, including supporting processes for more expeditious trials. The number of people who are in jail in Sierra Leone for lengthy periods on remand and never get to trial is a massive burden on the criminal justice system in Sierra Leone. These are practical things that a continued human security approach towards development can provide.

Dr Allouche: I will just add one little point linked to that, which is essentially linked to a bigger issue that touches on decentralisation and perhaps the role of the traditional chief. There has been a long debate in Sierra Leone about to what extent it was a good idea to introduce this institution following the end of the war. One of the problems linked to the justice system and the customary system is the trust and faith in traditional chiefs in reaching some decisions and some of the politics behind it. There are clearly some issues with regard to this that are worth looking into and pursuing. DFID has actually been one of the lead agencies on security and justice reform, and has had a major programme on that. That is something that is clearly important and that should be followed.

Q7 Mr McCann: Good morning, gentlemen. Can I ask a general question about the public sector? How much has the capacity within the public sector in Sierra Leone improved and what more can be done if there are any gaps that need to be improved upon?

Alex Vines: The public sector needs continued support. If you look at Government capacity, you often get efficient, very talented officials right at the top and then, in the middle area, there is a dearth of expertise or trained cadre. This is not unique to Sierra Leone. We are not talking Liberia here, but if you look at Liberia, its skills base is tremendously low, so hiring quality Liberians into key public sector jobs is very difficult. The Committee may have seen the figure from 2013 that, of all the 25,000 students who stood for exams to get into the University of Liberia, none of them passed the exam. The reason for that was actually partly a good news story: corruption surrounding passing exams had been tightened and they had changed the exam system. But that gives us a real insight into the problem here.

What this does raise is the importance of continuing to invest in education. It is something that DFID is doing certainly at the primary level, but it needs to be at all levels, including tertiary education level—technical level. That is really important. Many of the mistakes, in my experience, in Sierra Leone are to do with the lack of capacity to deliver, so human capacity is overstretched. There are not enough skilled people. It is not just about political will or corruption where there is trouble; it is actually about capacity.

Dr Allouche: I completely agree with Alex Vines on this. One may add that there is also a contradiction in terms of public sector capacity in the sense that, if one goes, for example, to Freetown, one can see the omnipresence of the international community. This has positive but also negative effects in the sense that all the most qualified Sierra Leoneans end up working for DFID through NGOs or through the United Nations agencies because they are better remunerated and so on. This has an important effect. At the same time, it is quite contradictory in the sense that this is encouraged in terms of giving more local ownership of these programmes to Sierra Leoneans and so on. So there is quite a contradiction.

Q8 Mr McCann: Is there recognition that there is effectively a brain drain going away from the public sector or the Sierra Leone Government and moving into international organisations simply because they pay more?

Dr Allouche: I suspect so, but I cannot be affirmative in the sense that I do not have statistics or evidence to support that. I would think that is something at least to inquire about and look into.

Q9 Mr McCann: Could I ask another question about the police and corruption? We mentioned this a few moments ago, but a suggestion has been made to us that the police are slipping backwards and corruption is returning. Therefore, in terms of DFID's role as a major donor, what can be done to address that? The fear is that a victory has been achieved in terms of the violence in the war that took place, but there may be a danger that there is no consolidation of the advances that have been made.

Dr Allouche: I was looking through the written evidence that was given by DFID. That is an issue that they point out and actually recognise as key. In some ways, it is not an easy issue to tackle. However, it raises some questions about, in some ways, budget support and about whether one should focus on a more centralised form of budget support or whether one should go for more project-type support and so on. There are questions around corruption regarding these types of support but, at the same time, it contradicts the larger logic on state building and building robust institutions. There are, again, dilemmas unfortunately between building strong institutions and, at the same time, the link between corruption and how to deal with corruption.

Alex Vines: Corruption is an absolutely central part of any discussion. A 2010 poll by the Sierra Leone Anti-corruption Commission highlighted that 94% of Sierra Leoneans rated corruption as one of the prominent issues that worried them. There are some positive signs in some areas. The Ministry of Health, for example, indicted 29 officials regarding the misuse of donor funds, but this is something that has always been visible in Sierra Leone. It, at times, becomes a little less visible because of donor pressure and reaction, but then it pops up

again very visibly. Given the poverty of the country, you can understand why it is so pervasive. The question is how to work out the incentives and structures to make Sierra Leone's state more efficient and less corrupt. But embedded in politics in Sierra Leone is a neo-patrimonial system, which is designed to re-distribute benefits to those who are part of these networks, and changing that behaviour is a very long-term project. I tend to believe that Sierra Leone is better on corruption than when I first—some 20 years ago—was involved in the country, but it is still a very pervasive issue, which is also reflected in Transparency International's current corruption perception index. I think Sierra Leone is 123 out of 176, which is very low.

Q10 Chair: Just on the point about how the Sierra Leone and Liberia operation works, there is a small office in Liberia working as a satellite to Sierra Leone. Does that work? Other operations are run out of London—for the smaller operations. Is it the case that, on the basis of the analysis, they said, “Well, we are operating in Sierra Leone, which is our lead, but because it is a related conflict, we ought to be in Liberia,” but it was a bit of a token afterthought?

Alex Vines: This is a really important question for the Committee to think about, because it is a much wider one—it is a philosophical, strategic one, in that DFID tends not to like small offices. It says they are costly.

Chair: Like Burundi.

Alex Vines: Exactly, or it cut the programme in Niger, or you could argue it cut Angola. The whole issue is about headcount so, as DFID puts it, it is costly; they are not getting good benefit from having one individual or two; it is managing small amounts of money. Where it is missing the point is that small offices can be very innovative. They can be very creative with amounts of money that can be targeted and used as false multipliers. Big is not necessarily beautiful, so it is not a fast-track way for us to hit our commitments of 0.7%, but it can be tremendously transformative if the right person is deployed in one of these small satellite offices. My experience of the DFID operation in Monrovia is that it is a false multiplier. I was, even last night, speaking to somebody from Monrovia at dinner who said that one small grant, to assist the regulatory body for the emerging oil industry there, was tremendously enabling to get other donors involved and interested.

Also, DFID provides thought leadership. A good individual can mainstream some of the ideas, learning and best practice from elsewhere in the DFID network. If you do not have somebody on the ground, you cannot influence in that way. In terms of Liberia also, yes, Monrovia is a satellite office, but, as we have already in our presentations to the Committee argued, you have to think regionally. Actually, Liberia is, in a sense, an extension of the investments in Sierra Leone, so I argue very strongly that it is a small amount of money, yes—it is a tiny UK operation. At the moment, it remains that Britain will maintain a footprint in Liberia because of the legacies of Sierra Leone but, if we want lasting peace, prosperity and security in the Mano River Union, DFID's presence in Liberia is integral to reaching that goal, so I do not complain about what I see in Monrovia.

Q11 Chair: We hear that there has been a high turnover of staff. Are you aware of that? That slightly undermines your argument.

Alex Vines: That is why I am saying that you need the right personnel. Hiring for these sorts of small-post positions is difficult. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office finds

finding the right people difficult, too. It is also the incentive system in DFID, to be honest, Sir Malcolm. Are you going to shine in Monrovia when everybody, including your Ministers, is saying, “Move lots of money quickly”? There is that issue to be considered also. Will the brightest put their hands up and say, “Yes, I would like to go to Monrovia”?

Dr Allouche: I completely agree with Alex Vines. The issue is not so much the office per se, but what the role of the office would be and how it could be seen in a larger regional strategy. I suspect that could be better articulated. I got the impression that it still very much looks in a bilateral way, and it still misses the regional dynamics. I think the policy mandate should be expanded to look at cross-regional issues. In this sense, it would be a strong argument for DFID’s presence in Monrovia.

Chair: That is very helpful in terms of what we should be looking out for when we are there.

Q12 Jeremy Lefroy: First, I should declare an interest because I lead the Conservative party’s social action programme, Project Umubano, in Sierra Leone. I have also helped to set up a business in Sierra Leone, so I have, to some extent, first and second-hand, in the latter case, experience of corruption, which is what I want to refer to now—it has already been raised.

We heard last week that the Anti-corruption Commission is perhaps not as effective as it might be. I wonder if you would comment on that, and perhaps comment on how DFID might persuade the Sierra Leonean Government to take this issue more seriously.

Dr Allouche: As we emphasised before, it is very difficult question. There is a history of what has been called a “shadow state”—another state beyond the official state—so you are tackling a whole system and how to change it. One attempt, I would say, has been through decentralisation policies. I link it to decentralisation in the sense that the networks are very strong, and the way to reform the system would be through a decentralisation policy. I am afraid that the decentralisation policy, given the political economy of the system, has been somewhat diminished in its impact.

Another way to fight corruption is to build more accountability and civil society representation and action to tackle these. DFID has been investing in different civil society initiatives, like Search for Common Ground and so on. It is difficult to measure the impact of these groups and how successful and effective they can be in bringing more transparency and accountability to the Government in this respect, but these are the two potential strategies to deal with corruption, in my view.

Alex Vines: I already mentioned that all the indicators are worrying about resurgent corruption in Sierra Leone, and two things last year highlight it in my mind. One is that Sierra Leone’s bid for membership of the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative was suspended because of the lack of action in that regard. Also, probably more directly and immediately important for Sierra Leone was that, in December, the Millennium Challenge Corporation elected not to reselect Sierra Leone for development of an MCC compact because of its inability to pass its “control of corruption” indicator. There are indicators. We have also then seen surveys and polls inside Sierra Leone itself, and also the Afrobarometer survey, which, in 2013, had moved from having people saying that the Government was doing “fairly” in its fight against corruption to “very badly”.

What can be done? In the end, this is clearly an issue of political will. The Anti-corruption Commission could work if there was the will to make it work. This is

something that the High Commissioner, Ministers and others need to hammer on about, and also show the Government of Sierra Leone that they are losing sympathy, support and funding. The current Government in Sierra Leone are on a trajectory to lose an election, longer term, if they do not address this. I cannot see anything other than being very consistent that this is not in the interests of Sierra Leone, let alone politically, longer term, because we cannot assume that the current Government would be re-elected in the next election. One of the good things about Sierra Leone is that there have been surprises. The electorate begins to show that it is more discerning on these issues, and corruption is one of the issues on which it decides whom to vote for.

Q13 1Jeremy Lefroy: Would you say that it also had an impact on investment in Sierra Leone? My own experience is in particular with the port of Freetown, where we suffered huge losses due to corruption. Clearly, it is really the only effective port, and anybody wanting to invest in Sierra Leone is likely to want to make use of that facility.

Alex Vines: A number of world-leading companies are not going into Sierra Leone because they are fearful, including British businesses. We have tightened British provisions on anti-corruption issues. This is a significant barrier. You see that in terms of who is actually investing there. Okay, there has been progress on iron ore, but there has not been, for good reason, in some of the other sectors. Indeed, in oil, of the three bidding rounds that have happened, half the winners of the last one in October 2012 had reportedly no offshore exploration track record at all; that is one of the reasons for the problems with EITI. Again, it suggests that decision making is not in the national interest; there are other incentives that are playing a prominent role in the business decision making of the Sierra Leone Government.

Dr Allouche: I would like to add two points. As clarification on the EITI, I was just doing a bit of my homework, and, two weeks ago, Sierra Leone was reinstated in the EITI process, so there is some progress in terms of transparency. What this transparency will lead to is a bigger question. I think you are right about the negative effect it has in terms of different types of investment because, for the moment, you have large-scale investments essentially around resources, but other types of business are hardly developing in Sierra Leone. We are talking about natural resources and agriculture but, apart from that, it is very limited. It is a really important problem, and I think it is recognised by DFID, which has been trying to develop private sector development initiatives, but this has been clearly limited, and there are clear limits to this approach in itself. That is an important point to pursue.

Q14 Jeremy Lefroy: Finally, turning to Liberia, there was a leaked report by USAID that showed vast numbers of ghost schools and ghost employees in the Government. I wondered how DFID had been tackling this and whether, in fact, DFID's programmes had been directly affected by this corruption.

Alex Vines: Ghost workers have been an historical problem in Liberia. It is a very pervasive problem. I am not aware that DFID has been directly impacted by this in its programmes for infrastructure, maternal health, waste disposal and other things it is doing in Liberia. I would say it is not really a problem in Sierra Leone. There are people on books who have moved on, but that is about inefficient book-keeping. It is not endemically corrupted in the same way as Liberia, so these are in fact two different stories. I do not think DFID is exposed in the same way in Sierra Leone.

Dr Allouche: I am not really aware, as Alex mentioned, so I cannot really provide comments or evidence on this.

Q15 Pauline Latham: How can the extractive industries in Sierra Leone continue to benefit the whole country? Their GDP has increased by it, but are we sure it is benefiting the people of the country?

Dr Allouche: That has been the major dilemma in terms of different forecasts. When you look at the growth forecasts, you have a spectacular economy that is growing but, at the same time, limited numbers of people benefiting from it. The key to it is really what we have been highlighting in terms of the formal and informal systems behind the Sierra Leone state: the patrimonial networks that are here and that are having obviously a very negative effect on the distribution of growth to the population.

Q16 Pauline Latham: Why?

Dr Allouche: Why is it having a negative effect? It is having a negative effect in the sense of incomes. I will perhaps give you one example—that is easier—rather than looking at the bigger picture. If one focuses on diamonds, for example, there have been many reforms in this respect, but one of the initiatives, through decentralisation, has essentially been that small and medium-scale artisans have been taxed through local revenue authorities. There is then a benefit, in some ways, to the local population, but larger-scale investment is not under the Local Government Act. It is part of the remit of the traditional chiefs and central Government, and that is essentially where most of the large investments of money are flowing and the system is not benefitting the local population, which could benefit from it.

Q17 Pauline Latham: When you say “the investment of money”, what exactly do you mean?

Dr Allouche: The large-scale investments that are made are not benefiting the local population from the area.

Q18 Pauline Latham: So are local people not being employed in the mines?

Dr Allouche: It is very limited, as we argued. It is not employment deriving from mining that is important; it is more the tax revenues that are extracted from it.

Q19 Pauline Latham: Nobody is collecting the tax revenue, are you saying?

Dr Allouche: It is collected, but it is allocated to a more informal system.

1Pauline Latham: Sorry, I do not know what that means.

Dr Allouche: Basically it goes into a very corrupt system, especially around large-scale investment.

Q20 1Pauline Latham: So the equivalent of the Chancellor collects the tax, but then what does he do with it? Does he just give it away to people? Does he never spend it on health, education and other things; is it just given away so people can put it in their back pockets?

Dr Allouche: There are some of these networks that operate, but it very difficult to produce evidence for this or substantiate it.

Pauline Latham: You cannot substantiate that.

Dr Allouche: No.

Q21 Pauline Latham: Who could we ask that could substantiate it?

Alex Vines: Let me try to help on this. Transparency of production helps. Sierra Leone is where the Kimberley Process to stop conflict diamonds was born. We now know a percentage of the production of diamonds goes through the official process. It is certified as Sierra Leonean; it goes to Antwerp or Dubai, and we know that, last year, diamonds brought in around 163 million in revenue.

Pauline Latham: To?

Alex Vines: To the Government of Sierra Leone. In terms of revenue for the Government of Sierra Leone, we know that is what they accrued. It is then about transparency of the Government budget and how the allocations occur. The main question here in terms of extractive industries is the deals that they make with the host Government, with the Sierra Leone Government: what are the taxes and royalties that the Sierra Leone Government extract from that; are they to international best practice; and then how do the Government allocate those within their budget provisions like any normal Government do? That is part of where I think DFID has been helpful in Sierra Leone: by providing advisers and supporting initiatives to have the Sierra Leone Government re-look at contracts, or at least to consider what the best practice is. There are cases, especially related to iron ore, where there have been some improvements. We have to ask what happened in the oil licensing round, because it seemed very opaque and not up to international best practice at all.

Another part of the equation, to answer your question, is that Sierra Leone needs to become much better at its own tax collection. There have been some reforms here. The introduction of the 2009 goods and services tax tried to streamline things, but this is one area where the Government of Sierra Leone need more efficiency. At the end of the day, this goes back to the wider issue: the wider population is saying, "What's happening to the wealth? We don't see any benefit from it." The human development indicators are stubbornly low for Sierra Leone, despite these impressive growth rates based on iron ore. The single most important question is how to get inclusive growth in Sierra Leone, and that is not happening. It is the big scary message of Sierra Leone at the moment that there are way too many people who do not have anything to do and are not benefitting from the iron ore boom, diamond revenues or other things that are taking place.

Q22 Pauline Latham: Is that lack of transparency why they were taken out of the EITI?

Alex Vines: Lack of transparency was the reason they were suspended from EITI. Obviously, they have, in recent months, taken some actions to try to get back into that process. They have not been validated by EITI. That is a long, drawn-out process. They have to prove a number of things, but at least they have clearly seen that that was counter-productive for Sierra Leone, and are now trying to re-enter that process.

Q23 Pauline Latham: That would be good for people in Sierra Leone, provided the Government then spend the money on the people.

Alex Vines: The Government need to spend money on people and use their natural resource endowment windfalls, including in iron ore, for poverty reduction and those sorts of priorities, if the country is to remain stable and grow, which is what one assumes the Sierra Leone Government's ambition is.

Q24 Pauline Latham: Is that the same in Liberia?

Alex Vines: Liberia is behind in terms of its post-conflict experience. The war in Liberia finished only in 2003. There is not windfall yet in quite the same way as the iron ore investments that have been happening in Sierra Leone, although several companies are involved in Liberia now. ArcelorMittal is one of them; you should certainly look at what they have been doing. At the moment, Liberia is much more international-development reliant even than Sierra Leone. I have to say, in terms of peace, security and stability, that that is the country that I personally worry much more about in the short to mid-term than I do about Sierra Leone. The border area between Côte d'Ivoire and Liberia is unpredictable and unsafe; there is even a UK travel advisory that UK citizens should not travel to that area. The problem is that people who were very close to Charles Taylor remain operational there, using ex-combatants, mostly for farming, but, as we move closer to an election in Liberia, they may be remobilised. The politics of Liberia and its future trajectory are much more uncertain post Ellen Johnson Sirleaf than what we see in Sierra Leone, which is, in my view, another reason why an antenna office of DFID is really important to be maintained in Monrovia.

Q25 Pauline Latham: How close is Liberia to getting accepted as part of EITI? Is it likely to?

Alex Vines: I do not know. I know that Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, the President, has been very active on this issue. I actually did not check whether it had been validated, but I think it has made more progress than Sierra Leone. That is something I recommend the Committee checks, or I can check it straight after this meeting and send that information to you.

Q26 Jeremy Lefroy: I have just a very quick one, Chair, because I realise the need for speed. When I had a meeting with the Minister of Finance in Sierra Leone last September, he mentioned that one of the real problems they found was expertise in negotiating extractive contracts with multinationals. Is that something that you have come

across as being a real problem and where DFID could potentially be of assistance? In fact, it possibly already is.

Alex Vines: DFID has already been assisting in this. This is something where DFID and other parts of the UK Government have been very helpful, not only to Sierra Leone. The UK, in different ways, has been providing advice to the Government of Guinea. The reappraising of contracts and ensuring that contracts are negotiated for good deals for host Governments is really important. There can be politics in this. When there is a change of Government, Governments can sometimes want to revisit all the contracts that the previous Government have signed. That adds insecurity and uncertainty, so a more open, transparent, accountable process from the outset makes it much more difficult to revisit it when there is a change of Government. That long-term stability once a contract has been signed, especially for some of these extractive industry investments, which are very long term, is really important. We have seen some businesses baulk because they are unsure, if they entered a deal now, whether, in a couple of years' time, it would remain as such.

Q27 Mr McCann: We are running out of time, so I will try to be as crisp as possible. Has budget support been effective in Sierra Leone, and can it really work in a country that is riven with so much corruption?

Dr Allouche: It is an issue I already spoke about a bit earlier. It underlines the need for budget support, on the one hand, because of the need to rebuild central institutions to have a strong central state and Ministries, which was a natural priority in the aftermath of the conflict. One now wonders whether one should shift this budget support to be more sectoral. I know it does not fit with the overall shift of how DFID is operating, but one wonders what would be the best way to proceed in terms of fighting corruption and whether still to go through a centralised route.

Q28 Mr McCann: Is British taxpayers' money being corrupted?

Dr Allouche: As we said earlier, in terms of evidence and in terms of transparency, there is much more that can be done for Sierra Leone, so that is clearly an issue. That is also recognised by DFID in its written evidence about the need to tackle corruption.

Alex Vines: If you are rebuilding a collapsed state, which is what Sierra Leone was—what had happened there was terrible—direct budget support to allow the Government then to make some choices with some of the other funds they get is an important principle. The question really is: what are the checks and balances and, if there are red flags, how does DFID respond very quickly to them? We can assume that Sierra Leone, which is not unique, has all sorts of major challenges regarding transparency and accountability systems in government. How does DFID therefore work in that environment? Where does it have best practice from elsewhere internationally and where has it learned from mistakes that have happened in the past in Sierra Leone to ensure that British taxpayers' money is protected and not used corruptly?

Q29 Mr McCann: Do you think the Mutual Accountability Framework between the Government of Sierra Leone and its development partners will help to improve governance?

Alex Vines: As DFID says, it is important as a recasting of the relationship between Sierra Leone and the international community. I do not think there is an option to hold up our hands and say, “This is too troublesome. We cannot give a 100% guarantee to British taxpayers.” The onus, though, is on this being a Mutual Accountability Framework, so very much seeing how accountable the Sierra Leone Government can be with the new signing of this agreement, and holding the Sierra Leone Government to account to explain what they are doing, how they are doing it and how they will honour that agreement.

Q30 Mr McCann: Tax collection is pretty woeful in Sierra Leone. It has been increased from 8% to 12% of GDP, but the sub-Saharan African average is 24%. How effective is DFID’s work in revenue collection? Is the USA doing the same thing in Liberia? Are you aware of any practices, knowledge or lessons learned that are being shared between USAID and DFID? There are loads of questions in there, but I thought I would package them all together for you.

Alex Vines: Yes, I know we are running out of time. Tax collection is woeful in Sierra Leone, so you are absolutely right in that regard. This is an area that DFID needs to be focused on and to work more on with the Sierra Leone Government. It is truly important for the future of the country. In terms of Liberia, a new body entitled the Liberia Revenue Authority has been created in an attempt to bring cohesion to the operations of the Liberian Government by limiting duplications and gaps. There have been multiple arbitrary taxes in the past, so the theory of this is that that will make it more centralised and efficient. That is something for the Committee to look at, because it has only just been launched—earlier this year—so it is too early to judge. I am afraid I do not know, in terms of exchanging experience on tax collection, if there has been a conversation between USAID and DFID.

Dr Allouche: I can just reinforce the point that Alex has been making—that it should clearly be an issue to follow up on, given the spectacularly low percentages and figures you have been quoting.

Q31 Sir Peter Luff: I think, gentlemen, your earlier answers have hinted at many of your views on this question, but I will ask it none the less. How will the private sector drive growth in both countries? Is there anything you want to add to your earlier comments?

Alex Vines: The private sector is going to have to play a really important role, but it is also about how the Governments use taxes and royalties to create other opportunities. If it is iron ore that both countries are reliant on, that is going to employ only maybe 2%, 3% or 4% maximum of the working population at best. There is then the issue of beneficiation, skills and training, and not only how Liberians can get the skills, therefore, to work in those industries in those countries, but how those skills can then migrate where there are wider markets that will need that sort of expertise. I am thinking of Guinea, regionally, for example, and other places, despite the language barriers that exist between French and English. This is strategic, which is why it is right that DFID looks at private sector growth and how it can assist that in terms of encouraging best regulatory frameworks and those sorts of issues.

Dr Allouche: I agree. I just wanted to add something we had not covered yet, which is essentially a link to agricultural development, because that is another major dynamic field in the Sierra Leonean economy, especially biofuel development.

Sir Tony Cunningham: Is this palm oil?

Dr Allouche: Yes. A Swiss firm has invested in large sections of land in Sierra Leone. Again, it is problematic in the same way as iron ore and diamonds. To what extent are these investments going to benefit the population? Are there larger processes that will ensure growth, but growth that will not be inclusive? That is another area to watch out for in biofuels development.

Q32 Sir Peter Luff: On the wealth creation programme, DFID's funding in both countries is significant. It is about 10% of Sierra Leone's, so about £8 million a year, and over half that in Liberia—about £4.5 million a year. Do you think that money is being spent effectively? Do you have any assessment of how well it is working?

Dr Allouche: On my side, I do not have any assessment of that.

Alex Vines: I cannot comment on that.

Q33 1Sir Peter Luff: How would you like it to be spent? Training is an issue we have covered just now.

Alex Vines: Yes, absolutely. Training and getting more skilled people is one of the big deficits in both countries.

Q34 Sir Peter Luff: I am rather confused by the Government's targets; I do not understand them. They said in their operational plan they are trying to create 18,000 jobs by 2015 but, in their evidence to us, they said they hoped to create 30,000 jobs or opportunities to generate income. Do you think these kinds of targets for jobs created by specific donor programmes have any real meaning?

Alex Vines: No. These sorts of targets are because Ministers want targets. I cannot see how they are going to be accomplished. I know you have to have a target and that these sorts of formulae therefore appear regularly in different documents. In fact, achieving the development goals and long-term poverty reduction is a much more complicated process, and these targets are a bit of a distraction when that is really the end goal.

Dr Allouche: I completely agree and would echo exactly the same.

Q35 1 Sir Tony Cunningham: I have the last two questions. DFID is the largest donor to the Electoral Basket Fund in Sierra Leone. In your view, is this the best way of spending money on the area of democracy, or is there an alternative?

Dr Allouche: I am trying to think of what would be a sensible alternative to put forward.

Q36 Sir Tony Cunningham: Is it a good way of spending the money?

Dr Allouche: Overall, it has been quite successful in bringing some change and stability to the country, but then there are all the issues we have been raising throughout, in terms of to what extent it will bring inclusive growth. For the moment, perhaps there is a need to shift some of the priorities we have been going through in terms of skills settings and so on. That is a point I would like to raise.

Alex Vines: Elections are really important moments, for sure. We have had three in Sierra Leone. They have been mostly peaceful. At the last election, the fact that there was a change of Government surprised everybody. That is definitely good. If we look at elections and what happens elsewhere in Africa, if we do not monitor them and invest in those processes, they can be dangerous, especially in a context like that of Sierra Leone. Tensions rise; a lot of the political game, years in advance, is building up to elections. Therefore thinking about elections and working with parliamentarians and political processes, including supporting election monitoring on the day, is very important, so I do not think it should be ignored.

One of my colleagues at Chatham House had the benefit of being an election monitor, funded by DFID but through the US National Democratic Institute, which deployed a team. It was a good experience, but the feedback was that having international monitors on the ground in very remote constituencies helped to raise confidence in the electoral process, and it was a disincentive to violence, so there are good reasons to continue that sort of support.

Q37 Sir Tony Cunningham: We talked about the role of Parliament. Do you have any views about the Sierra Leone Parliament, and have you heard of any of the work that DFID is doing as far as institutional strengthening is concerned? There was a recent report saying Select Committees had very little in the way of help, support, training, research facilities, ICT, transport and so on.

Alex Vines: There are perfect areas for people like the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association and others to be involved in. Whether or not that is where DFID should be using organisations like the CPA—I have to admit, I do not know whether the CPA can take DFID's money for this sort of thing—I think that is important in building up institutions and systems that hold the Executive to account. That plays back to this wide conversation we have been having about the need for stronger institutions and accountability mechanisms in Sierra Leone, be they from civil society, within Government itself or through the parliamentary process.

Dr Allouche: I think UNDP has been running a programme to support the capacity-building elements in the Parliament, but it is a question of priorities and goals. Is reinforcing the Parliament the best strategic way in terms of checks and balances? If the goal is more accountability and transparency, is the Parliament the best way to reinforce these?

That is a fair question to ask, but there are other means, essentially through civil society organisation, and one wonders what the best balance between both is.

Chair: You will not be surprised that this Committee, as parliamentarians, is rather keen on supporting parliamentarians to be more effective.

Dr Allouche: Yes, I was very surprised by that.

Q38 1Hugh Bayley: I was struck by the answer you gave at the start of this session about the importance of a region-wide approach. Just beyond Guinea-Conakry is Guinea-Bissau, of course, which is an extremely weak or failed state. I think of Guinea-Bissau's problems as being the drugs trade and organised crime, but there is not a huge difference between organised crime with blood diamonds and the criminals taking over the state, and organised crime with drug running and criminals taking over the state, so should a regional approach encompass Guinea-Bissau as well? Whether the answer to that is "yes" or "no"—you may say it is a different type of failed state—what is the role of the EU, given that it presumably has a presence in each of the four categories?

Alex Vines: It is good to hear Guinea-Bissau raised by a parliamentary Committee here. The final round of elections is this Sunday, in Bissau. I am hopeful that it will mark a change in the trajectory of Guinea-Bissau; it is much marginalised, much forgotten. It ties in with a different sub-system. If you are thinking regionally, it is more involved with Senegal, the Casamance issue, the Gambia and a bit of overspill into Guinea-Conakry, rather than Sierra Leone or Liberia. That is how it sits with the politics.

The issue of the international drugs trade and transnational crime is, of course, an issue that threatens and has penetrated both Sierra Leone and Liberia. In fact, there have been drug busts at Lungi airport in Sierra Leone. What it tells us, though, is that the drug trade does what it always does when you investigate and draw scrutiny to an issue: it balloons elsewhere, so we have seen some of the trade that was going through Guinea-Bissau, with pressures and more accountability in the short term in Bissau, going through Guinea and then looking at other easy entry points. The conclusion is that there needs to be vigilance across the region. Certainly, the Serious Organised Crime Agency, as it was, has been very active in a number of these locations. In terms of organised crime, there clearly needs to be a much broader regional strategy, which does actually already exist. I do not think that it makes much sense putting Guinea-Bissau in with the Mano River Union, which should be the core for any strategy; in the centre of it, for the UK, is clearly Sierra Leone, and then it moves out from there.

Chair: Thank you both very much. It was a very useful insight on the issues that we have to tackle. We are grateful to you for that. If there are issues that arise that you can feed back in to us or connect with the Committee, we would appreciate it, as we continue the inquiry. Thank you very much indeed.

Examination of Witnesses

Witnesses: **Simon Wright**, Head of Child Survival Policy and Advocacy, Save the Children, **Catherine Slater**, Regional Director, Marie Stopes International, and **Tanya Barron**, Chief Executive, Plan UK, gave evidence.

Q39 Chair: Thank you very much for coming in to help us with this inquiry. For the record, could you just introduce yourselves?

Tanya Barron: Hello, I am Tanya Barron. I am the CEO of Plan International UK.

Simon Wright: I am Simon Wright. I am head of child survival for Save the Children UK, which is health policy and advocacy work.

Catherine Slater: I am Catherine Slater, and I work for Marie Stopes International. I am the head of a regional programme, funded by DFID, which includes Sierra Leone. I have also spent three years living in Sierra Leone.

Q40 Chair: Thanks to all of you for coming in. When we were preparing for this session, it was made clear to us we have had very little evidence for this inquiry, which has the effect of making us think it is even more important that we conduct it, rather than less. Given what has been said about Sierra Leone in the past, particularly that this was a success and we are rebuilding it, we are really rather surprised that so few people seem to want to tell us how wonderful it is and how successful they are. Does that mean that Sierra Leone has fallen off the priority list, either for NGOs or, indeed, for the multinational agencies? Is it becoming forgotten?

Simon Wright: We are obviously an organisation that did submit on it, so we have an interest in it and it is hard to speak on behalf of the ones that did not. Clearly, we know that they are important countries for DFID. Catherine was saying a moment ago that it is stable in the way that DFID has been supporting it for quite some time. It is perhaps not one of the most controversial countries in terms of DFID's support; maybe you saw, in your Middle East inquiry, there were perhaps more exciting questions.

There is certainly an issue for us, which is that we see quite a bit of emphasis on countries with large populations. There is now an acceptance that, if you are going to try to affect things like global Millennium Development Goal numbers, you want to make the change in the countries with the biggest populations, because there is a single state you can work with. Of course, that ignores the fact that, for an individual living in Sierra Leone or Liberia, the risk of mortality or health problems might well be higher than it is for Pakistan, India or Nigeria. However, because the populations are quite small, that potentially drives attention away from the countries.

Q41 Chair: Before the others respond, one could obviously say it has been a success and is just about to graduate, but I do not think the first session entirely showed that to be the case. Perhaps another way of saying it is: the UK in particular, and the international

community in general, have concentrated on wanting to provide support to tackle countries emerging from conflict, of which this was a classic example. Wouldn't you have thought, that being the case, instead of saying, "There are bigger, brighter and better challenges," people would see this is a unique opportunity to demonstrate that we can take a country, stop a civil war and then build it to successful development? Isn't there a worry that we have lost sight of that long-term vision?

Tanya Barron: I thought it was very interesting that there were so few submissions, but I absolutely agree that, for most of us, there is a great deal of work going on. I have heard several agencies saying that their offices are so busy that they are almost saturated in Sierra Leone. There is a lot of good funding from DFID and the European Union, so I would sense—and we can only sense it—that people are reasonably satisfied with what DFID is doing. I do not know anybody who thinks that it is time to pull out or go away. There are huge structural problems, still, in Sierra Leone, and perhaps even more so in Liberia. I would say it is not a lack of interest; I would perhaps say it is almost business as usual.

Catherine Slater: I agree. We were discussing this earlier. It is maybe not as controversial as some of the other countries. There are still a lot of agencies operating in the field who may not have submitted because they are getting on with business, and they are happy with how DFID is operating.

Q42 1Chair: There has been quite a lot of turnover of DFID staff on the ground. Has that had any impact on any of you?

Simon Wright: It has for Save the Children. We think that, in the sectors in Sierra Leone where we are working on water and sanitation, and on education, we have had very good engagement, but maybe we have not had much of an overview of the social development sector in Sierra Leone. There is a new head of programmes coming in to Sierra Leone, whom I know my colleagues there are looking forward to working with. Liberia is a different situation, because it is a small satellite office. I can ask my colleagues whether they think there should be more capacity for DFID in Liberia, and they would like that. They would like to see DFID more engaged in monitoring and working on the programmes they are supporting, but they also think, if DFID is going to have an influence among the donors and a good dialogue with Government around the policies they have, particularly on health, that they should have more capacity there, certainly.

Q43 Chair: I appreciate that you are providing services for DFID and you are a client of DFID, so we are not necessarily expecting you to put the boot in, but there may be constructive comments to be made. I think we are talking about four heads of office over the course of a year. That does not sound like an office that is in full flight.

Catherine Slater: In terms of MSI, I do not think so, because we have had consistent health advisers over the period I was there.

Q44 1Chair: So at the level that you are dealing with, you have had continuity.

Catherine Slater: Absolutely, and consistency, and seen through the contracts. We have had regular engagement, which has been helpful—we see it as genuine engagement—in what we are doing. At that level, that has not been an issue.

Tanya Barron: It is a Sierra Leone problem as well, not just a DFID problem. Let me speak for Plan. If you looked at several of our offices, there is a lot of turnover. A lot of good staff get pinched to go and work for much bigger payers so, for locally-employed staff, it is a huge problem. The capacity is low. As I say, lots of our offices are absolutely saturated with work. There is still a lot of donor interest, and the competition for good staff is very high. That is a problem. Some of the DFID staff would probably be turning that around and saying, “It is really hard working with you guys, because your staff keep turning over.” There is a lot of churn.

Chair: No doubt we will find out more when we visit, which we should be doing next month.

Q45 1Jeremy Lefroy: Could I ask what you believe the prospects are for either Government—Sierra Leonean or Liberian—funding essential services like health, education and water themselves in the long term, over the next 20 to 30 years?

Simon Wright: Clearly, that is the direction the Governments want to go in, and it is the direction we would want to see them go in as well. Liberia is quite often talked about as perhaps ending its aid dependency by 2030, which is an ambition that Ellen Johnson Sirleaf has set out. Sierra Leone is engaged, at the moment, in looking at how it continues to deliver health services with less reliance on donor money coming into it. These are very important but, as we heard in the last session, these are still extremely poor countries with really quite weak governance systems and a low tax take coming in, especially in Sierra Leone, as was talked about earlier, so it is very clear that donors are going to continue to be a very important part of the profile and resources for these countries for quite some considerable time, which puts a lot of importance on how those donors operate. How they work together and they support the Government, and the balance between project support and budget support, are all, therefore, incredibly important. We all aspire in that direction. We are working with Sierra Leone around a social health insurance scheme that it is looking at bringing in. We have a lot of views on the style of how it should do that but, clearly, it is a direction it should be moving in: making sure that the extractive industries are benefiting the social sector, and that there is a fair system of raising funding and pooling it in order to pay for essential public services. At the moment, the amount of Government expenditure on the public sectors such as health is very low.

Tanya Barron: Again, I would like to hark back to what Mr Vines said earlier. I would separate out, in a sense, your question into two bits, because I think they are different. The question of whether the Government can afford to run services is one issue—I am probably less qualified to answer that—with the taxation and so on. The other is whether they have the capacity. That is a really serious issue: the lack of state or the smallness of state that is there in Sierra Leone. I worked there in the 1980s for quite a long time, and there almost was no state. The lights were all on generators, even in the city. There is very little feeling of a systematic state beyond the big conurbations, such as they are. You are really dealing with these two systems. They referred frequently, earlier today, to the informal system, the Paramount Chiefs and the fact that there are still two structures, and, if you go up

to places like Kabala, in the north, you will see most of the services are, in a sense, under the jurisdiction of the Paramount Chiefs, and it sort of works.

That was a rather long answer. I think there is still quite a way to go, certainly, to what would feel to us like a state system of delivery of services.

Q46 1Sir Tony Cunningham: Can I focus on health care in both countries? How important, from your perspective in both countries, is free health care, and how can it be sustained?

Simon Wright: Maybe I can answer a bit on this one and be let off a few a bit later, because this is the area we are particularly interested in.

1Sir Tony Cunningham: Which is why I want to focus on it.

Simon Wright: Sierra Leone and Liberia are fascinating situations that we find ourselves talking about globally all the time. Here are very weak countries, very aid dependent with very poor indicators, particularly on child and maternal mortality, but which have made commitments to the principle of health care that is free at the point of use. They have listened to the evidence. They have also listened to international partners, including DFID, which played a very big part in encouraging those moves. Clearly we think that the evidence works and, if you look at Liberia, you have some very good improvements in indicators, which have certainly speeded up since the removal of direct payments for health care. In Sierra Leone, the evidence is not yet completely clear around outcomes, but there have certainly been big increases in the use of services; that seems quite clear.

Clearly to the earlier discussion around security and the role of the state, this is key to the relationship between citizens and their state in terms of whether public services that people want are being provided, and whether people understand they have an entitlement to it. In both countries, DFID, as I said, has played a very important part. There are a lot of question marks around the future of that, though. In Sierra Leone, the support that was given to increasing health sector work force salaries was instrumental. I went to Sierra Leone several times in the aftermath of the Free Health Care Initiative to talk to different partners who had been involved in it, and that stood out. The work that DFID did in reviewing the payroll, removing ghost workers, and then putting in recurrent funding committed through to 2015 to allow an uplift in salaries was vital. That money comes to an end. We are not quite sure exactly whether some of the other pots of funding will continue to make sure that the Free Health Care Initiative and the salary bill is covered, and that was crucial for reducing informal payments—staff demanding cash from patients when they attended.

In Liberia, the situation is perhaps a bit more worrying, because DFID was so crucial in setting up the Health Sector Pool Fund. It put in the resources and the capacity, and provided staff to help to get that set up. As we said, we think that has been a very big success, and you can see that already in the indicators for Liberia. DFID's contribution to the pooled fund finished at the end of March, and we are waiting for a review that DFID is doing of its portfolio in Liberia to decide whether health will even be a priority next year. Save the Children did a campaign last year when we had people writing to Justine Greening and expressing a concern that Britain should carry on being involved in health, particularly

because Britain has a very different experience from other donors. Sometimes we hear from DFID that it wants to leave the US to lead on health in Liberia. That concerns us a bit, because we think Britain probably has the best model for how you can develop and aspire to run a health system, so we are keeping that pressure on DFID, and we hope, when it does come back and says what its portfolio review has concluded, that will include health care and a commitment to free health care.

The Liberian Government have already introduced a policy that says they will reintroduce some cash payments for some health services. It is not clear that essential maternal and child health services would be protected, and we think they should be. We have also asked for an agreement from the Secretary of State to say that she believes in the principle of free at the point of use, and she also said that she could see the reintroduction of cash payments, in some cases, as being justified. That is something we do not agree with. We think one success in Liberia has been blanket free health care.

Q47 1Sir Tony Cunningham: Could I ask whether donors are doing particularly good work in both countries on health system strengthening?

Catherine Slater: I would just like to touch on the previous question. I think, absolutely, the Free Health Care Initiative has been a great success, and the team really welcomes it in terms of providing access. There is a long way to go, though. When you look at the DHS that just came out in 2013, it suggests that there has been a doubling of women who are attending deliveries within a facility. I hesitate to say “safe”, because, if you look at the data that have just come out from the WHO, it suggests that maternal mortality has gone up, so there is obviously something going on there in terms of women deciding to go to the facility, presenting on time and, if they get there, whether they are really still getting quality care.

DFID has put a lot of money into infrastructure. In 2010, there was one facility that did emergency care in Sierra Leone; now there are 20. There has been a lot of input, but there is a long way to go, because the health outcomes are not now being reflected. The Health For All Coalition, whom DFID supported, did some research, and there are still informal fees being paid. If people go to the facility, it costs money, and that is a hindrance to people accessing it, and they also cannot afford the drugs. So, yes, it is a success, but not without its issues, and I think the DFID-funded health care evaluation will be really insightful in terms of lessons learned.

Q48 1Sir Tony Cunningham: It is certainly something we will be looking at when we visit. It has been suggested that Liberia has made much better progress than Sierra Leone in the number of child and newborn deaths. Could you explain or try to give some rationale as to why?

Simon Wright: It is not an easy one to try to answer. There are differences between the two countries, and we heard a bit earlier about, perhaps, the capacity of government in Liberia being higher than that in Sierra Leone. Certainly, what Liberia did at a much earlier stage was to make a commitment to reform the health sector and very actively involve partners in it. In both Liberia and Sierra Leone, because of their size, because of the

weakness of government and because of the low budgets, donors have been incredibly important. Liberia was very proactive in the pooled fund, and in steering donors into a pooled fund that they could manage and control, but then contracting out. For quite a long time, Save the Children was one of many NGOs delivering health services. We were doing it in three counties. Those have now gone back more under the direct control of Government, with the Government paying the salaries of the health workers, but our role is still there supporting and developing those health services.

So perhaps that was done at an earlier stage, more comprehensively, with a bit more commitment from the donors into the delivery of a whole package of health services and perhaps some different models of delivery that helped Liberia through that period. In Sierra Leone, the Free Health Care Initiative has come later and, as Catherine was saying, the indicators of outcomes are not yet clear enough. Maternal mortality may be being documented in a way that it was not before if deaths were in the community and were not being documented, so there is still a lot to watch in the model for Sierra Leone, and perhaps lots for it to learn from Liberia.

Q49 1Sir Tony Cunningham: Could I finally ask, from the point of view of Marie Stopes, why there is an increasing number of pregnancies in girls under the age of 15 in Sierra Leone, and what can we do to deal with it?

Catherine Slater: Under-15 teenage pregnancy is not something that is well documented in terms of the data, although 15 to 19 is, and the DHS data that has just come out suggests that the fertility rate has dropped in that age group of 15 to 19 from 146 to 125 out of every 1,000, so there is a slight decline—it is nowhere near enough, but there is a decline. In the same report, you are seeing that the contraceptive rate has increased, I think from 6 to 8, so it is a very small increase but, within that age group, there is an increased use of contraception and lower fertility rates.

Q50 1Jeremy Lefroy: I have a supplementary question. By my calculation, according to the figures we have been given, there are fewer than 2,000 doctors, nurses and midwives in Sierra Leone—under two per 10,000 population. I wondered what is being done to train more staff in both countries, given that this seems to be a major factor in the poor health statistics. Also, do you by any chance know—there is no reason you should—how many Sierra Leoneans are working in the national health service?

Simon Wright: On the second question, we do not have that, although you hear anecdotally quite a lot of comparisons between the numbers of medical staff from other countries working in the UK. We can certainly try to look for that, and see what we can find of the most recent, up-to-date data. In terms of specific action on the health work force, I do not have an answer for you about that, but could maybe get some information and send it to you. Certainly, we know that part of the Free Health Care Initiative in Sierra Leone was to do that. When I was visiting just after that, I was hearing quite a lot from the Ministry of Health and Sanitation about the importance of recruiting. They were bringing some retired health workers back into the system. They were even, at one stage, quite excited that maybe people who had gone and worked in the private sector wanted to come back and work in the public sector, once the wage bills looked like they were going to get paid, so people were

going to get their salaries, and there had been some uplift for nurses and doctors. There was certainly a lot of enthusiasm at that point.

I do not have an answer for you about what they are doing in terms of investing in education and, then, the specific health-worker education, but I will find something for you.

Catherine Slater: I am glad you raised it. It is one of the direst challenges that we have in terms of provision. From talking to the team when I was there, I think there are under 100 doctors within the whole of Sierra Leone, so there is a link between that and maternal mortality rates now. It is a real challenge at the moment for Marie Stopes. We have to bring doctors over from Ghana to provide services. There really are not the health workers available to provide the services. There are some solutions other than providing doctors. There are some procedures, for example, that a clinical officer could do. We have permanent methods that we have to bring people over from Ghana for, but in Uganda, a clinical officer would do. Working with the Government to shift that down a cadre would increase access, if their standards allowed that. I think it is a challenge to get doctors to come, to stay and then to be retained, even within the private sector. Within that, then, we have to find innovative solutions to provide access by shifting the cadres of providers that are required for different procedures.

Q51 Jeremy Lefroy: When we visited the Aberdeen Women's Centre in Freetown, we noticed that quite a lot of the trained medical staff were from other African countries, and particularly from East African countries—Kenynes in particular. I wondered if that was an increasing trend: we are seeing other African countries provide them and, where they have if not a surplus but perhaps more trained medical staff, seeing migration within Africa.

Catherine Slater: I think that is the case.

Q52 Pauline Latham: It seems to me that the life of women and girls in Sierra Leone is pretty grim. They do not have many opportunities. The education is getting better, but it is not perfect. It is difficult to inherit land. There are even fewer female Members of Parliament than we have, and we are not good at that. Many women have no education, and sexual exploitation and gender-based violence is rife. Also, FGM is at a very high rate in Sierra Leone. What can DFID do to change attitudes to domestic violence and FGM in Sierra Leone? I am not sure what the situation is in Liberia, but maybe you could explain that. Are they doing enough? FGM is entrenched. It is a very difficult situation. It is a cultural thing. How can we get people to accept that it is child abuse and not just cultural? It is child abuse and it needs changing. Could you tell me if you know if Sierra Leonean girls from this country are taken back to have FGM done in Sierra Leone, or does it happen here?

Tanya Barron: We might need to divide that question up.

Pauline Latham: Yes, absolutely.

Tanya Barron: Thank you. There is still a persisting, huge problem about gender-based violence in Sierra Leone and Liberia, and all those things that you have just mentioned. I think still over 60% of Sierra Leonean girls are married underage—the figures that we have suggest at least 60%. FGM is absolutely rife, especially further north. One positive thing, though, I would say is that the Sierra Leone Government set up something called the

Family Support Unit, which would really be worth going to look at and to talk to people about. It was a very good initiative, some of it supported by DFID, which started in 2001. They have had some very good results. They work with the police. They train the police and have also trained social workers, which is a first. What we have found is that there is a really good result of a great increase in the reporting of rape and violence. There is very poor—almost non-existent—reporting of child marriage, and almost nothing on FGM. The reason I have a small bit of optimism is that at least they have put in a structure.

Q53 Pauline Latham: If it is being reported, though, what is being done about it?

Tanya Barron: On rape, there is evidence that there are prosecutions and that they are taking it seriously. It does feel as if the social norms are still absolutely accepting of FGM and child marriage, but are not accepting of rape and certain other aspects of sexual violence. As I say, there is modest cause for hope, but because there is a structure there, one of the things that we know is that it is underfunded and needs more support. In a very practical sense, that is something DFID could look at and see how we can use that system—it is there and it has been quite well bedded in, over 12 years—and how we can make it a vehicle to get to these really serious issues.

If I can just tag on to that, we know the other side of the same coin is keeping girls in school. DFID has done a good job on education in Sierra Leone. The Global Partnership for Education, to which DFID is the biggest donor, has also done a really good job. Gender parity is almost there in primary education in Sierra Leone, which is really interesting. There is not bad retention in primary, but it is appalling in lower secondary—for girls, maybe 25%. Of course, the relationship with girls dropping out at lower secondary age and early marriage is known.

Q54 Pauline Latham: Is part of it because they do not have access to sanitary protection and they can go only three weeks out of four, not four weeks out of four? Instantly they start to drop behind. Is that something that could be addressed over there to help girls to stay in school longer? That is something that happens in other African countries and, if you can provide them with some form of sanitary protection and proper latrines that are separated from the boys', they are more comfortable about staying in school.

Tanya Barron: Yes, and there is also evidence we have, because we have a lot of youth groups in Sierra Leone, that the additional problems are that they are not comfortable with people knowing that they are menstruating. The whole thing is culturally difficult.

Q55 Pauline Latham: It is embarrassing for teenagers.

Tanya Barron: It is embarrassing, exactly.

Pauline Latham: It does not matter where they come from: it is embarrassing.

Tanya Barron: Yes, so private, lockable toilets and sanitary protection are very important. There are, however, also the cultural issues that, when a girl hits puberty, in some parts of the country it is assumed that that is just fine, and that she has grown up and ready to get married. It is complex, isn't it?

Catherine Slater: Just to add to what you were saying, I have a couple of points around FGM: as you say, it is huge. In a recent DHS, 97% of rural girls have had the procedure. It is one of the highest countries, I think, globally, so it is a huge issue. My understanding is that UNICEF is currently providing a strategy on FGM, and CARE is leading a consortium and there are some agencies working on it. My understanding is that, at the moment, DFID is not directly funding anything on FGM. The suggestions are that there are a few key strategies that it could take to address it, looking at encouraging the increase of the age of initiation within the societies.

Q56 Pauline Latham: What age is it currently?

Catherine Slater: I knew you were going to ask me that. We are advocating that it is increased to 19. I can find out for you what the starting age is now.

Pauline Latham: Increase to 19?

Catherine Slater: It is about 14.

Tanya Barron: It is about 14.

Q57 Pauline Latham: That is fine. We saw a very good project in Ethiopia where, although it was being done with funding from DFID, it was a bottom-up approach in a village where the village elders—the men and the priests—as well as the women all worked together to decide themselves that this was the wrong thing to do. It was slowly changing in villages, and that was then going to be spread out to other villages. It has to be bottom-up, though; it is no good the Government saying, “You have to change.” They need to do that as well, but they have to change the culture. Clearly, then, this is a major problem and it is going to take generations, probably, to change, but do you think DFID should be tackling that at this stage, or are there too many other things for them to tackle? It is abuse.

Tanya Barron: I think DFID absolutely should be. I think it is such a crime against human rights. It is criminal, and it is criminal in that country, too. I think that DFID will have to think about it, as we all will, and PLAN is involved in working against FGM in this country and overseas. It is a very difficult subject, and changing social norms is difficult, but we are not going to be put off by the notion of not stepping on people’s cultural norms, because, as Naana from FORWARD said so wonderfully, culture is manmade and it needs to be changed.

I do think, though, that one of the things that we really would ask DFID for is that it takes seriously the idea of putting a gender lens on all its work and not having, again, stand-alone Girls’ Education Challenge programmes. They are fantastic, but we are celebrating the International Development (Gender Equality) Bill here tonight, and I do think that we need to crack on with working with DFID to make sure that gender is not a standalone issue. It must spread its way through all works.

Chair: They claim it is, of course, but we have to pursue the practicalities of what they are doing on the ground.

Q58 Pauline Latham: What is the answer to the question about whether girls from Sierra Leone who are here are being taken back for FGM, or is it happening here?

Simon Wright: The event that DFID is going to run with the Home Office at the end of July is going really to highlight this, I think, about interlinks in travel. A woman was arrested at Heathrow at the weekend who was accompanying a young girl coming back here. She has been arrested for conspiracy to commit FGM. I do not think it is bringing Sierra Leonean girls here; I think the traffic is the other way, generally.

Q59 Pauline Latham: There are girls who now live here who have come for whatever reason—immigration—into this country and are too young to have had it done. Are they being taken back to Sierra Leone to have it done, or is it happening here?

Simon Wright: There are a lot of views that girls are being taken back. They are taken out of school and they disappear for a while. There was a big campaign whereby Michael Gove has now written to every school to make them more aware of sudden absences of young girls of African heritage and to be raising questions about where they might be going and letting child-protection services know about that, if that is happening. That is incredibly important. It is undoubtedly happening. We do not know a lot about it or have reason to have any arrest at all in the UK on FGM, and the renewed attention that has been given to it by this Government has really helped to put it in the front of people's minds. If immigration is now starting to watch what is happening, that is really important.

It is part of a whole package, however. You were right to introduce your question by talking about the systematic levels of discrimination and abuse of young women. Early marriage is one that is a very serious problem, as is early motherhood. The President has set up a campaign. His latest campaign is Let Girls Be Girls, Not Mothers!, and Save the Children has been involved in that. We did some qualitative research speaking to young girls about their lives, and the really interesting thing was how much sexual relationships are about economic survival—how they manage to stay in education and how they manage to protect their futures—and having multiple partners around providing different needs, and that continues. Legal polygamy is quite high in Sierra Leone, at least as documented in the DHS surveys, and we certainly see that in young girls as well, because they are surviving in that way. We have to get to the root of that. The earlier evidence session talked about the bulge of youth unemployment, and girls are particularly suffering from that.

Q60 Pauline Latham: In terms of family planning, we hear that Marie Stopes in particular has reported that there is an improvement in the rate, but it is still pretty low, in that it has gone from 7% to 16%—not huge—of women who are using contraception. That would clearly help the situation. What more can you do, and how can that increase, small though it is—it has more than doubled, but it is still a very small percentage—be improved? Is it that women do not have access to it, or do they choose not to take it up?

Catherine Slater: I agree that 16% is low, but a doubling in that period of time, if you look at many countries, is quite impressive. The bottom line is that women want to have family planning. I was with a lady who is accessing our services in rural Sierra Leone. She had had 12 live births, six of whom had died, and she was probably way younger than me. She came and we provided her with a permanent method. She took it straight away. It was very powerful. When one in 23 women dies in childbirth, it is very necessary. The numbers increased exponentially in terms of accessing family planning over the last few years.

Certainly, from Marie Stopes' perspective, that has been to do with two key aspects: providing access; and knowing what they want and understanding what the barriers are. We have introduced implants, so women have more choice, providing them with every different type of method. We have confident and competent providers. It is also to do with making sure that the commodities are available. Often, within the Ministry of Health, you do not have the commodities or the skilled personnel, which are critical components of any access system. There is also the demand side: doing a lot of work with community radio, working with imams and working with the men. It is not a girls' issue; it is very much a family issue, so it is about coming from those two perspectives. Now, Marie Stopes has provided 50% of all family planning in Sierra Leone and has seen an increase like this in terms of how many people are accessing services. Girls and women do want it; a lot of it is around access, and myths and misconceptions. Addressing those two things concurrently means that it is possible to change.

Simon Wright: Can I add just one point, which goes back to economic dependence? If you look at the big DHS health surveys that are carried out every few years, the number of women who report being able to go and visit a health facility without the permission of a male relative is very low, and that is undoubtedly driving whether women can go and demand contraception, so you have to address that as well.

Q61 Mr McCann: It is probably best to direct this, in the first instance, to Tanya. DFID is going to spend £23.4 million up until 2016 in the education sector. Given the concerns that were expressed earlier about the turnover of staff, was DFID right to enter that sector in 2011? Does it have sufficient resources and skills to be able to do this job effectively?

Tanya Barron: I think it is a real pity that DFID waited until 2011 to go into the sector. I remember having a discussion with the head of DFID in 2005 or 2006, and he said to me, "We do not do education. We do not do health. We do not—" and the list was long, because they were doing security very well. That was what they had strategised to do and they did a very good job. I do think that we are still seeing the knock-on effect of there not being enough input into education, and literacy is still hovering at around 60%—slightly higher for boys than girls, but not much. I am really thrilled, then, that DFID is concentrating on education. It is a very young population. I do not see how we are going to shift youth unemployment unless we really get on with the education part of it. The good news is that there have been some quite quick wins in education. DFID has focused very well and we did a lot of work with it on primary, and it is now moving into lower secondary. It is strategically right, and I do think it is getting a lot of it right. Seeing a 10% rise in recruitment to school and in retention in school and literacy is very good, in really a very short space of time.

Q62 Mr McCann: If I just throw into the mix the consortium approach that is applied in Sierra Leone, how does that differ from the approach that is adopted in Liberia? In terms of progress comparing Liberia with Sierra Leone, who would you say is doing better?

Tanya Barron: I think we were all quite nervous about the consortium approach at first, to be honest. I think it has been overwhelmingly good and beneficial. Certainly, from our work, it has enabled us to work in partnership with disability organisations and to have truly inclusive education. We have managed to get, just in the last year or two, 20,000

more girls into school. The consortiums, I think, have been really successful. I think they have worked peacefully and very efficiently, providing really inclusive education, so that we can all do what we are best at. I would say, then, that our evidence is that the results would be better in Sierra Leone than in Liberia, but it is slightly complicated as to why that is. I do not think it is just the consortium approach, but we would now seek out consortiums, especially in education.

Simon Wright: We participate in the education consortium in Sierra Leone, and I know we see that as a very useful model and would like to see one for health in Sierra Leone. I think, for all the reasons we have talked about, in a country that has so many NGOs involved, including so many international NGOs, and which has so much aid money coming in through different routes, anything that ensures good co-ordination across a sector, and makes sure that we are planning together and dividing up responsibilities and different areas that we are looking after, is something you see with a stronger Government. A stronger Government are better able to insist on where NGOs operate and how they support the national plan, but the consortium approach is absolutely right, and we would like to see more of that for health, particularly in Sierra Leone.

Q63 Mr McCann: You mentioned youth unemployment, Tanya, which is often seen as a main risk for a return to conflict in both Sierra Leone and Liberia. Are either of your two organisations—Save the Children or Plan—working on any programmes towards skills and employment for young people in both countries?

Tanya Barron: We have not started yet. Our next phase is going to be youth savings. I have some information from some interesting, big youth employment programmes, if I could mention them.

Q64 Mr McCann: Sure. My supplementary was going to be: if you are not doing anything, do you know of anybody else who is doing something?

Tanya Barron: Yes, and some very different experiences. As you might expect, one of the biggest youth employment programmes is the World Bank's cash-for-work programme. I would say that some of it has worked, but I think one has to be quite critical of it. It is a big programme: \$20 million, with an aim to get 30,000 youths into employment. There are two problems. One is that it has been primarily road-building, which is fairly typical. Sierra Leone does need more and better roads, but the problem with that is mainly that it is taking on young men—there are very few young women involved in the road-building programme. Secondly, it is a really stop-start programme. Cash for work is okay, but it is not really bedding in any sustainable work. Once the road is built, the road is built.

Mr McCann: Or skills necessarily.

Tanya Barron: Or skills. It is mostly manual labour. Having a job and turning up for work is a skill, so there are some benefits. I think the UNDP programme is more interesting: Youth Empowerment and Employment Programme. You can tell from the title that it is a much more holistic approach. It is much smaller—about \$3 million and 850 young people—but there is training for employment, employment preparedness and working with employers. It is a much more interesting programme to look at. Both of those are ongoing, so you could have a look at both.

The German GIZ is targeting and training urban and rural youth in three districts using public-private partnerships. That might be worth looking at. In particular, they are working in the cocoa and coffee industries. There are various other smaller initiatives, but I would certainly say the UNDP and the World Bank would be worth looking at for a contrasting approach.

Simon Wright: In both Liberia and Sierra Leone, there are a number of programmes that are working on youth employment.

Mr McCann: For Save the Children?

Simon Wright: For Save the Children, yes. In Liberia, it is particularly about working with ex-combatants. It has an ultimate aim of stability, peace and state building by working with young people around employment. In Sierra Leone, it is called EYE: Education for Youth Empowerment. Interestingly, Sierra Leone and Liberia have connected with Save the Children China, because there is so much Chinese investment going into Sierra Leone, to work with some big Chinese companies around how we can develop youth opportunities for young people in Sierra Leone.

Q65 Mr McCann: Do you feel any conflict there with China?

Simon Wright: There is always going to be a conflict, but we always try to work out what it is, and try to avoid it and steer through. Clearly there is a lot of investment coming from China into countries like Sierra Leone. In Sierra Leone, it is going to make a big difference. It changes the landscape substantially, of course. All the discussions we have had have been very much around traditional donor money coming from the UK, whereas Chinese investment does change a lot of that dynamic in terms of understanding who is benefiting from that. Are all the skilled jobs done by Chinese staff coming in to run those while using a few low-paid local workers, or can it be done in a way that becomes more sustainable and helps to build skills and the economy? It needs to be managed very carefully.

Mr McCann: We have witnessed that in other countries, but we will not open that particular can of worms.

Q66 Chair: A few years ago, during this Parliament, Claire Curtis-Thomas, a former Member of Parliament, gave evidence to us of a proposal supported by the UK construction industry to set up a library trading facility for construction industry workers, which I do not think went ahead—or I do not know whether it went ahead. Are you aware of that?

Simon Wright: No, I was not.

Chair: The whole idea was to try to upgrade the skills of Sierra Leonean workers to enable them to perform on international contracts and meet international standards.

Simon Wright: It is not something I am aware of, but I would be happy to look into it to see if we can find an update on it.

Q67 Chair: We might explore that when we get there. In terms of these wealth creation programmes, I think there was a point that Peter Luff was making earlier on: you set targets, but how real are they and how effective are they? What is your evaluation of them?

Simon Wright: I do not really have that kind of overview, so it is hard for me to answer that. I think we know what we want to try to get from them. I am sure that we have some reasonable outcomes from that work but, if you would be interested, I would be happy to provide some more information in writing.

Q68 Chair: The problem, presumably, is the lack of a dynamic economy that needs workers, so you are creating jobs in order to create jobs, but not necessarily to create an economic dynamic.

Simon Wright: The point that we heard in the earlier session was about extractive industry being the source of most Government revenues, but not employing that many people. The wealth does not get shared, but goes out of the country quite quickly, because it is not going into salaries, and people are, therefore, not paying money into the economy, which is not letting it grow in the inclusive way that we would all want to see.

Tanya Barron: I think there has been some good progress in Sierra Leone. I think there is a lot to be encouraged about. When you look at the rejuvenation, for example, of their ginger market, or the development of really quite interesting and quite functional co-operatives of agriculturalists coming back together to go a little bit more to scale, there are some good examples of a re-energised co-operative agricultural development, which is now going to market with products that they have not been marketing for probably 20 years.

Q69 Chair: It was suggested that, after the conflict, a lot of the young men in particular who had been released were not particularly willing to go back to the land, so they were all hanging around in Freetown with not enough to do. Presumably, however, we are moving into another half-generation, where the young people can stay on the land, if there is enough for them to do and if there is enough added value for them.

Tanya Barron: Yes, I think that is right, and that is why I think, with things like the newly regenerated ginger stuff, of which Sierra Leone used to be a huge exporter, of course, and the better management of coffee and cocoa, we are starting to feel, especially in the rural northern areas, that is now providing a viable alternative to young people.

Chair: Thank you very much indeed. I think it has been a useful first session from our point of view, and I hope, if there is anything you reflect on, you might feed it back into us as the thing continues.