International Development Committee

Oral evidence: Recovery and Development in Sierra Leone & Liberia, HC 247

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- Department for International Development

Watch the meeting: Tuesday 1 July 2014

Members present: Rt Hon Sir Malcolm Bruce (Chair); Hugh Bayley; Fiona Bruce; Sir Tony Cunningham; Fabian Hamilton; Jeremy Lefroy; Sir Peter Luff; Fiona O'Donnell

Questions 70-150

Witnesses: **Lynne Featherstone MP**, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for International Development, and **Paul Wafer**, Acting Head, DFID Sierra Leone and Liberia, gave evidence

Chair: Good morning. I am not going to ask you to introduce yourselves; we know you both well: Lynne Featherstone, Parliamentary Under-Secretary, and Paul Wafer—nice to see you again—Head of DFID in Sierra Leone and Liberia.

Lynne Featherstone: Nice to see you, Chair.

Q70 Chair: As you know, members of the Committee visited those two countries—Paul certainly knows; he had his work cut out—and came back a couple of weeks ago. I will ask you, Minister, how you would describe the situation in Sierra Leone. The way it was presented to us was that it was potentially a success story, that there has been progress—which we saw—but at the same time it is very thin and fragile and there is a long way to go. Is that your take on it? How do you see it?

Lynne Featherstone: I visited Sierra Leone recently-ish. Did you come across the water when you arrived?

Chair: We did, on the boat, yes.

Lynne Featherstone: There is this amazing arrival into Freetown and it is very beautiful. Then if you go down by the water, you see the mess that is Freetown. Those two contrasts are kind of it. It has done fantastically to come out of the situation it was in and it is now entering a new phase of growth, but it has got some very serious challenges. It was relatively successful post-reconstruction. The Agenda for Prosperity is really going to be the guiding light there, which was the subject of the signing of the mutual accountability framework with the donors. It has got the potential—it has got the growth; it has got mineral wealth—but it lacks capacity, it is a very poor country and it does not do things in the way one might expect to spread that wealth. It is only going to be successful if it now gets down to really tackling some of the significant challenges that it has across all sectors.

Q71 Chair: There was big talk. For example, they were saying that they would be on the same level or they would have made the same sort of progress as Rwanda in 10 years' time. Indeed, they were talking about middle-income-country status by 2030.

Lynne Featherstone: It is great to have ambition, but that is very optimistic; although there are some signs. You went to Bo, did you not, as a Committee? I went to Makeni. You could see there what a mayor who got it could do with this place in terms of cleaning it up, ensuring there was waste disposal and so on.

Chair: Bo was a similar story.

Lynne Featherstone: Okay. A lot of it is capacity and who is doing it. It can be done, but they are very weak through many of the strata that they work over. That pushing down to district level, which is key, is still variable.

Q72 Chair: That was the point. Nevertheless, what both DFID and, indeed, Government themselves said to us—and to some extent it was demonstrated in the visits we had—was that they were very short of human capacity in terms of experienced and competent administrators and professionals. How do you address this? Indeed, what is DFID's role? I just preface this by saying over the years—certainly in my time as Chair—I have often heard pleas from African government leaders for more support for tertiary training and education, and the donors' response is, "Our priority is to get kids into primary school." If you do not have trained professional people, who the heck is going to run the country after you have phased down development?

Lynne Featherstone: It really is an issue. It is like: how do you eat an elephant? One bit at a time. You have to move in the direction. You talk about tertiary education; you do need skilled nurses and skilled doctors and all of those things, but if you cannot get children through primary and secondary school, then you have not got the basic feeders for those. They are areas that we are looking for.

More generally on capacity, all of our programmes have technical assistance built in to build capacity. We have specific programmes. One of our main focuses, which this Committee knows only too well, is our public financial management support. We are supporting the Ministry of Finance and Economic Development in capacity building, and the National Revenue Authority. We have got an access-to-justice process where we are helping the Ministers of Justice and Local Government and the judiciary to improve budgeting and planning. As this Committee knows better than anyone else, there just aren't often systems in place, let alone the people to operate the systems, so what we do is all of that, but you can only move at a certain pace with the capacity that is there to absorb what you are trying to transfer. It is necessary to get rid of ghost individuals on payrolls, but you have to have a payroll to start with. It is all of those things.

We are providing £12.8 million over four years to support the Government of Sierra Leone to implement its own national water and sanitation policy. It is: how can we support the Sierra Leone Government to implement its own policies, which it does not have the capability and capacity to do? The support on that, for example, focuses on legal reform, financial management, communications, monitoring and evaluation, and utility management. There is a significant part dedicated to capacity building and training the Ministry of Water Resources, the Ministry of Health and Sanitation and at district level.

Q73 Chair: So the objective there is not to do it but to help them to have the capacity to do it.

Lynne Featherstone: It is to enable them to do it. But it is not short term. That horizon of 10 years that you just referred to I would say is optimistic. There is nothing wrong with having ambition, but they lack capacity. I do not know if you want to add anything, Paul. We also do a lot of work on the Anti-Corruption Commission. I had the same round-table you had with those organisations and bodies.

Paul Wafer: We have been involved in so many different sectors and ministries providing technical support and capacity building over the time that DFID has been active since the end of the war. There will always be more to do, and we have to make choices. We also need to recognise that we may set up a programme that runs for five years or so but we need to be realistic; at the end of that programme, it is not going to be ready to run entirely without support and there often needs to be a follow-on phase. The Government of Sierra Leone is aiming to be at the same level as Ghana by 2035. I think that is a realistic timeframe, based on such a low base that they are starting from.

Lynne Featherstone: It can do it. It is really in its own hands—if the leadership is there.

Chair: And, of course, they have got elections and all those kinds of things to get through.

Lynne Featherstone: Don't we all?

Chair: Well, we have our problems; they have a different set of problems.

Q74 Sir Tony Cunningham: Whilst we were on the visit to Sierra Leone and Liberia, we were told that the overall budget for Africa was reducing. Can you explain, Minister, the overall budget cut to Africa? Is it sensible to reduce our help to the poorest countries in the world in Africa when we are assisting quite often middle-income countries?

Lynne Featherstone: As you know, we are ceasing funding as aid and moving to partnerships in places like South Africa and India.

Sir Tony Cunningham: Well, the Philippines, for example.

Lynne Featherstone: Well, yes, indeed. I am not saying we do not do any; it is variable. However, in terms of Africa and budgets decreasing, there is a great wind of change blowing through the way we do business. I would say it is a combination of changes to how we do things and pressures on budgets from other places. If I may, I would like to explain that.

The actual 2014-15 budget, which is directly managed by DFID through our bilateral programmes, has decreased by £14.5 million relative to 2013-14 spending, but that is really in the context of a reducing budget right across our portfolio, and there are a number of things happening. One is that we have reached 0.7%, which is fantastic, but I have discovered the downside to reaching 0.7% is you are now in a zero-sum game where, if you pay Peter, you are going to have to rob Paul. There are those kinds of things happening.

What are the reasons for that change? There is a shift in focus at DFID to prioritise things like economic development and "golden thread" in those countries that are right at the heart of our portfolio, and we have had a significant organisational restructure to enable that. That agenda is going to be pursued by our bilateral countries, but we also now have a big cross-cutting operation, which is a directorate in Whitehall. Although the budgets owned and managed directly by country offices are slightly smaller, what we are spending is either level or increasing, but it is coming from a different part of the organisation.

Chair: I am going to pursue that a bit further in a minute.

Lynne Featherstone: Okay. We are also facing increased pressure from the Treasury to use different sorts of instruments. They want us to generally move towards more returnable capital investments, so that we are looking at returnable loans or equity as opposed to traditional grants. That is a step change for the organisation as well, because we do not have the appropriate level of skills to manage the risk and performance effectively. In the short term that is going to be managed centrally and not directly by country offices, but the money is still going to be spent across the Africa division.

Then we have also got the pressure of unprecedented humanitarian assistance. The demands on humanitarian assistance at the moment are going up—over £600 million in Syria alone. The commitment to IDA is the biggest we have ever made. We have scaled up our commitment to the global funds. We have found, particularly on health, the global funds are an extremely good way to spend money because of their ability to drive down the cost of drugs. In fact, the cost of vaccines for children has gone down by 37%. We could not do that on a country-by-country basis. There are a number of reasons. In terms of the overall funding plans for centrally managed programmes, they have increased from about £1.4 billion to £2.4 billion in Africa.

Q75 Sir Tony Cunningham: Let me see if I can get my head round this.

Lynne Featherstone: I know. It is big.

Sir Tony Cunningham: You agree that Sierra Leone still has a long way to go.

Lynne Featherstone: Yes.

Sir Tony Cunningham: But you are reducing spending directly, and at the same time as reducing spending in Sierra Leone you also seem to be having problems recruiting and retaining staff. Can you explain all of this to me in simple terms?

Lynne Featherstone: I tried to give you a picture of spending. Do not forget we work much broader than Sierra Leone. We work bilaterally in 28 countries and we cannot facilitate everything that needs doing in every country; we have to make choices. There will be, as I said, a £14.5 million reduction in bilateral spending; some of the multilateral spending will go up. We are not having trouble recruiting staff. There was one post—I think it was the Deputy Head—that was unfilled for 18 months. There was a changeover issue with the heads.

Sir Tony Cunningham: And retaining staff?

Lynne Featherstone: My understanding was that retention was fine.

Paul Wafer: We do not have a retention problem. The biggest challenge in Sierra Leone has been historically that it has been an informed-choice posting. That is because the quality of health and education facilities is not very good. That has often meant we have had difficulty attracting international staff with families, but that is now starting to change as well and we are getting more and more members of the team.

Q76 Sir Tony Cunningham: So you have had difficulties in the past.
Paul Wafer: Not in terms of retention, no.

Lynne Featherstone: But the nature of those who will apply for the post is now changing. We could not get people with young families; now they are beginning to apply. It is because of the health facilities in-country. If you have got a baby, you want to be sure you can have health facilities.

Sir Tony Cunningham: You find yourself in the same position, Paul, I know.

Q77 Hugh Bayley: The International Development Act requires us to spend our aid primarily on poor people in poor countries, so why is the Government now spending more money on loans to middle-income countries and less money on grants to the poorest countries?

Lynne Featherstone: Is that the case? 30% of our budget is targeted on fragile and conflict-affected states. I am not aware that our whole portfolio has shifted. We do spend money in other countries, as has been pointed out. India is not the best example, but it is one that springs to mind, where you have the Bihar state with 90 million people living below the poverty line. It is not an absolute. Only 30% of our budget is focused on fragile and conflict-affected states, but within countries our funding is always targeted on those most in need, or should be mostly targeted on those most in need. In Nigeria, for example, we will work in the north, where everyone is so focused on the girls being abducted, but it is DFID that does the day-to-day work on education in one of the most challenging areas of the globe. We work in different ways in different countries according to need. Can I ask my official to comment?

Chair: Yes. I was going to say, we will want to explore this when we are talking to the Department about its annual report, because these are fundamental strategy and policy issues.

Lynne Featherstone: Indeed. As I said, there is a shift.

Chair: You can see the Committee has learnt something from its visit that is exercising us, but I do not want us to get too distracted by it in this particular evidence session. We will come back to it.

Paul Wafer: I just wanted to add and clarify that the shift the Minister was talking about, in terms of doing more of the economic development work centrally and looking more to using loans, is not necessarily about moving into middle-income countries. It is more about the right sorts of instruments for us to be able to work with the private sector, even in a country like Sierra Leone, and a decision—I think a sensible decision—that we concentrate the expertise on using those new instruments, particularly returnable capital instruments, at the centre, at the beginning at least, until we build more understanding of how they work as an organisation. It is not about shifting to middle-income countries; it is about shifting who we work with using those types of instruments.

Q78 Jeremy Lefroy: I think you will find that in our reports we were the ones pushing for more use of returnable capital in low-income countries, so I welcome that news. Turning to Liberia, how do we ensure that the Liberia programme is not just treated as some sort of afterthought and that it does get sufficient staff attention being managed from Sierra Leone?

Lynne Featherstone: With a programme of just under £10 million, it does not warrant having its own office. Also, a lot of the programmes that we implement there are by implementing partners such as—is it UNICEF?

Paul Wafer: UNICEF, the World Bank and the African Development Bank.

Lynne Featherstone: So, having a small staff who can oversee the implementers is adequate in terms of reporting back. We would not have a standalone office, and that enables us not to have day-to-day supervision. We believe that adequate oversight is provided through a small in-country staff and supported by advisory capacity from Sierra Leone. It does require someone from Sierra Leone to go down there very often to have a proper reporting facility. Now the Secretary of State has decided that the programme is going to go on beyond 2015, the role of the country co-ordinator is going to change to provide DFID input to and participation in the overall donor/Government development dialogue. I cannot remember the percentage of our spend that goes through multilaterals, but it is quite—

Paul Wafer: About two thirds.

Lynne Featherstone: Yes. It is big, so how that multilateral money is spent in Liberia is something we need to have more of a hold on.

Q79 Jeremy Lefroy: Thank you, Minister. I think we were impressed—certainly I personally was impressed—with the quality of the operation in Liberia, albeit extremely small, with one full-time person there, and the impact that it was making. That is why we are still mystified as to why we could not have the same model in Burundi, where exactly the opposite arguments were used. I just wanted to ask: what is DFID's policy on this? We seem to have one policy in Burundi, which is an equally fragile post-conflict state, and another in Liberia.

Lynne Featherstone: I have to say every time I meet the Chair of this Committee he says "Burundi" under his breath to me. We have never been forgiven for the result of the BAR in terms of the decisions. You are saying it was not consistent because we made one decision for Burundi and another one here. I do not have the information on why that decision was taken.

Chair: Nor do we. That was part of the trouble. It was redacted.

Lynne Featherstone: It was before—

Chair: No, it was before your time.

Lynne Featherstone: It was before my time, so I do not know why. I do know from my work in DFID that there are—"rogue" is not perhaps the right word—decisions made but it is not totally obvious why. I have now been a Minister at DFID for two years, and points happen where decisions are made that are not totally and absolutely written in law. I suspect—I have not found out—that there must have been something at that point in time whereby a decision was taken to carry on. For what reason, I do not know. That is why you have this oddness around having a satellite in one country and a decision to leave the other.

Q80 Jeremy Lefroy: I would just make this point. I speak for myself, but I think several other members of the Committee have the same view. If it is possible in Liberia—and clearly one of the reasons for going to Liberia was we wanted to see whether this model makes it possible, particularly in a country where we invest so much multilaterally, to have some very modest ability to influence—can this not be a standard DFID model that is then allowed to operate in countries with equal need, such as Burundi?

Lynne Featherstone: Liberia is the only example of that, is it not?

Paul Wafer: It is the only example in Africa that follows the same sort of model of a satellite, yes.

Lynne Featherstone: What I would say about that is it may or may not work; it may be left there as a residue from some other decision that was made.

Jeremy Lefroy: The Secretary of State is continuing it, so she obviously feels—

Lynne Featherstone: Yes, but it is very small relative to DFID's work in other countries. I am not sure. I take what you say. What I would say, though, is we are trying very hard to make sense across our portfolio of all that we do. If we were to say, for example, "That is a great model. We should implement it in all states. If Burundi, why not others?" that would be a whole expenditure stream that we have not got at the moment. I am not saying yes or no; I am simply saying that everyone wants us to do everything and that this may be a tail end of something that has just been left there. We can look at that, but the decisions about where we spend our money were made very rigorously through the

BAR and the MAR and I would not personally be in favour of simply saying, “This worked here and therefore we should implement it in other such states.”

Chair: The Committee supported the BAR and most of the outcomes. It is that particular issue that still exercises us, because this looks like exactly the kind of model.

Lynne Featherstone: Yes, I realise that it is exercising the Committee.

Chair: But, again, our point is made. We might continue to make it.

Q81 Jeremy Lefroy: Just a final point: one of the reasons for the Liberian programme—quite rightly—is as a reinforcement of the very substantial investment that we have made in Sierra Leone. That was brought home to us very clearly and given as one of the reasons. That is precisely the reason why we would indicate that having that presence on the ground in somewhere like Burundi would reinforce the huge investment in Rwanda and Congo that the Department is making. All the reasons for having the Liberian programme, which I personally felt were very strong, would apply.

Lynne Featherstone: I hear what the Committee says; I hear what Jeremy says. Your point is noted and it is a valid push at us. I am sure that will be in your recommendations for us to look at.

Q82 Chair: Thank you. Just pursuing those, the centrally managed programmes only emerged to us as we entered the inquiry and, indeed, in some cases not until we were actually in the country. There are two interesting things. In Liberia, because our programme was small, there was a conscious effort to add in all the multilateral impacts that were there, so to say, “We have a bilateral programme of £8 million but when you add everything together there is over £25 million.” We have not done the same thing in Sierra Leone. We have just had Sir Tony Cunningham saying that bilaterally you have cut. You have given us answers. You have also given us a supplementary list of 50 programmes centrally managed. The question there is, first of all: how much are we actually spending in Sierra Leone? Are you able to attribute it? When you look at the figures attached to these programmes, they are very large indeed. It is not clear what is being spent in Sierra Leone and what is being spent elsewhere. How do you integrate the local staff? Clearly the local staff are administering a bilateral programme but they are also engaging day to day with the Government of Sierra Leone. They surely need to be fully informed of what is happening.

Sir Tony Cunningham: We were impressed with the local staff.

Chair: Yes, we were. We felt the local staff were competent. We understand, and they explained to us, why some of these programmes are centrally managed, but it was not always clear to us that the local staff were fully engaged or informed or able to help shape it, even if it was being done centrally.

Lynne Featherstone: I have had this discussion. It is not just Sierra Leone; in all countries in which we work, there is a need to know what is going on in your own country. If you are in one of our bilateral offices, then you want to know what centrally managed programmes are being applied in the country in which you are the bilateral office. From my interrogation of this, it is variable. Countries are informed and told, and take-up or interest is variable in the receiving office. Everyone is so involved in what they are doing that information coming in is not always being disseminated.

On the other hand, I have come across instances where a bilateral office is not aware of every programme that is running in its country. This is an area in which there is more work to be done, and we are already putting some of that work in place. Our centrally managed funds—centrally managed by us—are easier. We know which countries they work in and we are putting in place something called geocoding, which is a facility in our database.

Q83 Chair: Are you able to give us the Sierra Leonean equivalent of the Liberian figure?

Lynne Featherstone: No.

Q84 Chair: If not, will you be able to do so before we conclude our report?

Lynne Featherstone: It is not going to be that quick, is it? You have rightly identified that the amounts that will be spent in each country are not determined at the outset of a programme, necessarily, because they can be subject to decisions made by governing boards of global funds or of the Girls' Education Challenge, and others are thematic grants that might be applied through third parties. Those ones are very difficult for us to pin down. Our centrally managed funds are something that we should and could work on.

Can I just go through how our support is made up? The bilateral budget is £58.2 million for Sierra Leone and £5 million for Liberia. That is 2014-15. We estimate that in 2012, the imputed multilateral spend through the likes of the EU—that is the EDF—the World Bank, the African Development Bank and global funds such as GAVI and GFATM was £18.2 million for Sierra Leone and £14.9 million for Liberia, but that date is retrospective.

We have sent the list to the Committee of centrally managed programmes, which come from us, including those from the Africa region, the Private Sector Department and the Policy Division, and funding programmes to NGOs such as the GPAF and research, and that is where we can apply this new geocoding. I do not know when it will be applied; I will let Paul answer that in a minute. The other area in which we spend is the CDC investments. That we do know for Sierra Leone: Sierra Fishing Company; Splash Mobile Money; Dragon Transport; and Ice Ice Baby. We could get from CDC the sums.

Paul, would you like to add to the timing and when and how we are going to be more able to inform country offices—the when, how and what? We do generally. With our centrally managed funds, we work in consultation with our own offices—on education with the education adviser and so on and so forth—but could you comment more generally in terms of the spend in each country?

Paul Wafer: Right now the Department is agreeing a new protocol for how centrally managed programmes will work with country offices. In a way, this is trying to pick up the good practice where it already exists. Look at the example that you saw in Sierra Leone of the Girls' Education Challenge, where my education adviser in-country in

Freetown works very closely with the team in London who run that programme; he liaises with them closely. He has also organised the in-country meetings so that both the Girls' Education Challenge partners and the DFID Sierra Leone partners come together and are co-ordinated well. That is an example of good practice that, through this new protocol, we are going to try to spread to every single centrally managed programme so there is a process whereby the country office teams will be able to have a say in the decisions about which countries will benefit from centrally managed programmes at the beginning, rather than retrospectively. That will make quite a big difference.

Q85 Chair: I understand the point that has been made and why you cannot be precise, but I hope it will be possible at least to get a fairly firm estimate, because it seems strange that we want to tell the Liberians the maximum amount of money but we are not so clear about Sierra Leone. If we could only say, "We have a bilateral programme plus a range of programmes that are between X and Y," it would at least give us some idea of what the impact is. It seems to me it would also help Paul and, indeed, our High Commissioner in their relations with the Government if they had that.

On the Girls' Education Challenge, it did raise a question, because we were told by one NGO that all they were required to do was to send a report to London once a year and that was the only monitoring that they had. That was to PwC, as the administrators. Sorry; it was a different one. There is a separate one with PwC. The point is that all they said they had to do was just to send an annual report; they said, "We did not feel we were thoroughly audited." How do you react to that?

Lynne Featherstone: I am really sorry to hear that. We always have logframes and monitoring and evaluation. I do not know what the particular scheme in Sierra Leone has in terms of milestones of reporting and monitoring and evaluation, but I cannot believe it is just once a year.

Paul Wafer: PwC is the management agent for the Girls' Education Challenge globally. They would set the reporting requirements that the recipient NGOs would get in Sierra Leone and in the other countries. On top of that—which I was referring to—our educational adviser brings all of the partners from the Girls' Education Challenge together with the partners that we have and that we fund in-country. Although it might not be a formal requirement, there is that lesson-learning and sharing and joint monitoring that goes on.

Q86 Chair: If that is being managed by the likes of PwC, you would feed that information to them as the managing agents.

Paul Wafer: Yes. If any concerns came to light from our awareness of what was going on in-country, we would clearly feed that to PwC. They have an adviser who is not resident, I think, but is frequently in Freetown, and my educational adviser meets with them on a regular basis.

Q87 Chair: Okay. Again, if I can ask the Minister: we appreciate that you do use a variety of outside agencies to manage programmes, but in particular why would you pick on PwC to do that as opposed to your own capacity? Is it because of the constraints you have on either administration costs or staffing levels?

Lynne Featherstone: It is not really that. Something like the Girls' Education Challenge is a different kind of challenge, if you like, and one that would take extra resource in-country, because it is about getting the most marginalised and the poorest girls into school and there is a whole range of things that go with that. They have to work closely with any programme we have bilaterally in-country. However, what we have found is that, because this is something we want to apply in a number of countries, the skills and expertise and experience need to be built up on how you get marginalised and poor girls into school, and then they need to work with the educational adviser in-country so that there is no overlap and it is complementary. We have found that something like that can add to it. If we asked each country to be responsible for our Girls' Education Challenge, it would take away from our mainstreaming.

Q88 Chair: I am sorry, Minister; I do understand that. The point I was trying to make was: why do you commission an outside organisation rather than managing it centrally? What is the basis on which you say, "We will manage this programme in-house but we will put that one out to PwC or ASI," or whatever?

Lynne Featherstone: Originally when we were conceiving of the idea—and I will hand over to Paul—it was about what organisation, including ourselves, would have the capacity to work across country to put in the scale of programme to take on this level of delivery. It then went out to tender in the normal way and would have been properly procured. The decision to go externally would have been because we did not think we had the capacity internally to run it as well or efficiently.

Q89 Chair: So it is about capacity, not administrative cost.

Lynne Featherstone: I am going to hand over to Paul, because I do not know where the decision was made for that.

Paul Wafer: When the Girls' Education Challenge was set up, the purpose was to find a mechanism that would enable DFID to do more on girls' education than we would do through our standard model of having education advisers in-country and having bilateral programmes. It was all about being over and above the capacity that we had in-house to do work on girls' education. That was the reason for that modality of bringing in an outside contractor to provide that support.

The other thing is that the challenge element of the Girls' Education Challenge is about receiving proposals for funding in different places and being flexible enough to respond to those. I guess the PwC model means that they can move those resources around to supervise maybe a group of countries rather than just the ones where DFID has advisers.

Q90 Jeremy Lefroy: I have just a more general supplementary on that. It seems to me, given the range of programmes for which DFID seems to contract outside consultants in, it would make a great deal of sense for DFID itself to set up an arm's-length wholly owned or partially owned consultancy that can either challenge these other providers and help to drive down costs or at the same time provide a greater pool of expertise. I would not necessarily regard PwC as being world experts on this particular kind of programme. I wonder whether DFID would consider that. We have one example of it already in CDC, which is an independent, arm's-length but wholly owned part of DFID and hence the UK Government. It would also retain a lot of this expertise that we are constantly seeing moving out into the external—private—sector, if not within DFID itself, within the ambit of DFID, just as we are seeing with CDC.

Lynne Featherstone: That is a very interesting idea.

Paul Wafer: Just on the point about losing resources, it works the other way too. You met when you were in Sierra Leone our governance adviser, Cynthia Rowe. She is a very good example of someone who came from that consultancy business, focused on working with DFID and realised that she would rather be inside the organisation. We are also recruiting in from those sources.

Lynne Featherstone: You touch on a really interesting point. It is one of the things that I have pursued anyway: how much can these accountancy firms or other big consultancies deliver this sort of thing? Their global expertise is in how to contract it well and how to manage it well, and that really is specialised in those environments. My fear about your suggestion is we would find our own staff leaving to populate such an agency, even if it was ours. Our special and comparative advantage for me is our in-country offices and our expertise on the ground. I would be slightly nervous about those staff who are so valuable in place being attracted by something else.

Q91 Chair: A lot of that happens anyway, does it not? People all the time have been in and out of DFID and in and out of various other organisations.

Lynne Featherstone: I know, but I am not sure that we want to offer them the door.

Jeremy Lefroy: I just think it is something we would like you to look at.

Sir Tony Cunningham: Could you take it away and look at it?

Lynne Featherstone: It is an interesting idea, and I have never got a closed mind to good ideas, but the reason we ended up with a big consultancy was because of their ability to manage it across the globe in many forms and in many different circumstances.

Jeremy Lefroy: I personally feel that it would introduce a better element of value for money if we did.

Q92 Fiona Bruce: Good morning. I am just going to ask you again about multilaterals and the large infrastructure projects that you do a lot of work on in both countries, but especially in Liberia. The Committee is interested to know how you influence these infrastructure projects and whether you are satisfied that we have sufficient influence as a country over these projects—for example, ones run by the World Bank.

Lynne Featherstone: We work in a number of ways. Are you specifically talking about roads and that sort of infrastructure?

Fiona Bruce: Yes; we are interested in knowing how you have managed to help oversee transportation, or ensure that the World Bank properly oversees it, because they do not always have an expert on the ground.

Lynne Featherstone: I am going to ask Paul to step in on that one.

Paul Wafer: There is a very good example in Liberia, where we are supporting the Liberia Reconstruction Trust Fund, which is a World Bank multi-donor trust fund. There are a number of other donors who are contributing to that as well, including Sweden and a few others. We have a senior infrastructure adviser based in Freetown as part of our team, who also works in Liberia. He sits as a member of that project board and goes to the regular meetings that take place in Monrovia. He is one of the most influential and vocal people on that project board, because he has that level of expertise.

Sir Tony Cunningham: Is this Martin?

Paul Wafer: This is Martin Walshe, yes. He is able to go along. It is one of the reasons why, in fact, the other donors and partners in Liberia are very keen for DFID to remain, because they know that we can bring that sort of expertise to those discussions. On the example of roads, there was a change in legislation around axle weight for trucks. Martin is the sort of person who can engage in that discussion and ensure that the Government is making the changes that it needs to make. We have quite a good story to tell about that.

Q93 Fiona Bruce: That is very interesting. Can you give us any other examples of where you have successfully influenced programmes—infrastructure programmes or large projects? Do you feel that DFID satisfactorily monitors the effectiveness of these programmes?

Lynne Featherstone: Just more generally, the EU spends an awful lot on development. They come in five-year programming, so now is the moment when the new EDF is going to be programmed. Our country offices are consulted as the EU develops its programmes for each five-year thing. That is approved through EU member states. Individual projects are referred to the EDF committee, and DFID's EU department attends those committee meetings. That is the workings, if you like. That is how we get our say in, plus a bit of lobbying here and there.

Q94 Fiona Bruce: And then monitoring after work has been undertaken—or during and after.

Lynne Featherstone: Do we do an analysis of the multilaterals in terms of how our influence has impacted them?

Paul Wafer: How it works in practice is that in both countries—Sierra Leone and Liberia—there are not that many EU member states. The EU delegation is obliged to consult with and engage with member states. In each case, they are very keen to hear our views, because we are a significant player and partner, so we do have an opportunity to feed in, to stay closely involved, to talk to them about what is going on and to follow up. There is an open door for us to be able to influence that at operational level on the ground.

Lynne Featherstone: The other thing that Fiona is asking about is the monitoring and evaluation of our impact.

Fiona Bruce: Absolutely, yes; of our investment, yes, Minister.

Lynne Featherstone: Of our investment. In terms of the EU, what we have managed to do over the last four years is to get a results framework in place so that we will be able to do exactly what you are asking. Previously, we have not been able to do what you are asking. Now a results framework is in place. It will be used. We will be able to see and measure in a way that we have not been able to do until now. It has been lobbying from us, and particularly from the Secretary of State, on putting that results framework in place. It has taken a while to get it going.

Q95 Fiona Bruce: So, watch this space, in other words.

Paul Wafer: The EDF was subject to the Multilateral Aid Review—the MAR—which we had a follow-up with, and so the EU is very clear about the things that DFID is expecting from it in terms of performance.

Lynne Featherstone: And it came out well, but that is not the specific deep dive you are asking about, which hopefully now, with the results framework, we will be able to do.

Fiona Bruce: Thank you. We might come back to that at some future date.

Lynne Featherstone: Yes.

Q96 Jeremy Lefroy: Turning to health, the under-five mortality rate in Liberia has gone down from 248 in 1990 to 75 in 2012, which is a very welcome and substantial decrease. In Sierra Leone, it has gone down from 257—roughly the same level—to only 182, so a much weaker performance. The newborn mortality rate similarly in Liberia has gone from 51 to 27 and in Sierra Leone from 59 to 50. In some evidence we were told that perhaps Britain has the best model for how you can develop and aspire to run a health system, yet Britain has been the lead donor in Sierra Leone and the US has been the lead donor in Liberia. Just from these statistics, it would seem to be exactly the opposite: that the US has a better approach. I am just putting that question over to you. Perhaps you can tell me if I am completely wrong.

Lynne Featherstone: You are not wrong in terms of the statistics, but there are a number of explanations for why there is a differential other than the USAID model, which is a completely different model and very difficult to compare, but I will go on to that. In terms of health, we do two things. It is about strengthening health systems, which I am particularly keen on myself, and also the support of provision of direct services. In terms of the differentials, there are multiple factors. If I can, I would just like to run through the way we analyse that difference that you have so rightly pointed out.

Firstly, there is the health status of the population. Sierra Leone started from a very low base when compared with Liberia. In 2000, the maternal mortality rate in Sierra Leone was almost double that of Liberia, at 2,300 per 100,000 live births compared to 1,200. It was almost double, so they had a bigger mountain to climb. In terms of health financing, immediately post-war there was a large, sustained injection of funding for the health sector in Liberia, to the extent that in 2011 the total health expenditure as a percentage of GDP was similar in the two countries, at about 15%, from a base in 2000 of 5.9% for Liberia compared with 18.4% for Sierra Leone.

Then we go on to Government capacity and leadership of the health sector. Presidents Koroma and Johnson Sirleaf are committed politically to the health sector—that is not an issue—but the leadership of the sector has been consistently much stronger in Liberia than it has in Sierra Leone. An example would be having one health minister since 2008 in Liberia, while we have gone through four different health ministers in Sierra Leone.

In terms of the strategic approach, it has been very different in both countries. In Liberia, there has been a parallel NGO-led health service delivery model as opposed to delivering service through a decentralised public health system, which is operating in Sierra Leone. The Liberia model contributed to accelerated improvements in health outcomes but at the expense of the development of decentralised public health service delivery. You want that in the end; you do not always want to have a parallel NGO delivery service. Free healthcare services for all were introduced earlier in Liberia than they were in Sierra Leone—in 2008 versus 2010. In Sierra Leone, only 30% of the population is eligible for that free healthcare.

Then there are wider determinants: things like the status of women. A key indicator for improved family health is higher in Liberia, with 67% of females with some schooling compared with 57% in Sierra Leone. Access to improved drinking water in Liberia, at 75%, is higher than in Sierra Leone, at 57%.

I would just put a caveat on that whole thing. Health outcomes are expected to improve quite substantially in Sierra Leone within the next five years, consolidating the gains made in improving service delivery under the free healthcare initiative. So, you are right, but there are a lot of reasons as to why it has happened in the way it has happened. I cannot determine the number of health ministers Sierra Leone has.

Q97 Jeremy Lefroy: No, of course not. Thank you for that. During the visit we were told that there were likely to be some statistics coming out fairly shortly in Sierra Leone that could well indicate quite a substantial improvement. Is that the case? When would those be available?

Paul Wafer: I cannot tell you exactly when they will be available. The demographic and health survey that has been undertaken was delayed because of a number of problems with the statistics, but we are working with the Ministry of Health to get those out as soon as possible. We can come back to you with the date of when we expect that.

Jeremy Lefroy: You don't think they might be in time for our report.

Paul Wafer: I don't think they will be in time for your report, but we can confirm that.

Q98 Jeremy Lefroy: You mentioned the maternal mortality statistics. Understandably, Sierra Leone was coming from a much more difficult base, but the child mortality statistics were very similar for both Liberia and Sierra Leone according to the figures we have been given. What lessons do you think we can learn from, clearly, some successful interventions in Liberia for health programmes elsewhere—particularly in Sierra

Leone but, indeed, more generally? There has been, particularly on under-five mortality, a very dramatic reduction.

Lynne Featherstone: I would have to ask Paul for the specifics on under-fives, but I would say in general it is about consistent leadership, a priority in terms of delivering a health service and the resources to do so, and persistent, continued interest from the centre in what is happening in all parts of a country. Just in general terms, that is what makes something work. I do not know if you can add to that rocket science.

Paul Wafer: Only that the future of the American role in Liberia is quite important. Regarding the way that USAID tends to work, their model is very much about setting up NGOs and international NGOs to deliver services and to achieve those results rather than necessarily more of a health system-strengthening approach. That may also have helped to contribute to these quite significant changes, but there is a question about sustainability and maybe even affordability as well, because a model in which you get US NGOs to be the deliverers of services in the long run might not be as sustainable as the one that we have been supporting in Sierra Leone—about building district capacity.

Q99 Sir Tony Cunningham: When we were in Liberia, we were told that Liberian health sector support funds from the EU, which were supposed to be going to the Ministry of Health, were not being passed on, because they were done through the Finance Ministry. I just wonder if DFID has any input into that problem.

Lynne Featherstone: It is not something I am particularly aware of, but I will follow that up. Are you aware of that?

Paul Wafer: This is partly to do with the way that the EU money was allocated. The EU provides sector budget support, I understand, to health in Liberia. That means that the money goes into the central Liberian Treasury and is then destined for the Ministry of Health. I do not know the exact reasons why it did not get received by the Ministry of Health, but there is a donor group in Liberia in the health sector; these are the types of issues that can be raised amongst that group.

Q100 Sir Tony Cunningham: Given that the UK is a member of the EU, it has a role to play.

Paul Wafer: That is right, alongside the EU itself, which would have been asking the Ministry of Finance in Liberia why the resources had not been allocated.

Q101 Sir Tony Cunningham: It seems to be a general problem that some governments do not see health spending as a priority and use the funds for other projects as they believe donors will step up to fill the gap. What can we do to deal with that problem?

Lynne Featherstone: That is one of the reasons we focus on revenue management and helping in particular, say, the Government of Liberia to mobilise greater domestic resources. Until you get that domestic resource mobilisation and a tax base, in terms of a Government providing public services, it is not going to happen. Our support is really about encouraging governments to increase their support to national priorities, including health, but we have to work to a Government's national plan. We think in Liberia that domestic budget allocations to health will increase and offset donor contributions to the health sector, and in that way become sustainable. We are not able, just as we as a country would not really accept someone telling the Treasury what to support—although one might feel tempted to tell the Treasury at many times what to support—to tell countries how to allocate their funding. We are just coming out of the health pooled fund.

Q102 Sir Tony Cunningham: It was sector specific. It was for health.

Lynne Featherstone: Right. As I say, I will look into that. I have not been made aware of the fact that the Liberian Treasury has reallocated funds in a way that was unexpected.

Paul Wafer: One of the things that we can legitimately do in these situations is support home-grown civil society to look at the way the budget is being allocated and to challenge the Government themselves. Certainly, the programme that we have in Sierra Leone on strengthening civil society is exactly about that. It is about enabling local grassroots and community organisations to look at and understand Government budget reports and then to challenge Government on why it is doing this and not doing that.

Q103 Sir Tony Cunningham: We heard real concerns about the need for the UK to continue to be involved in the health sector in Liberia—we heard it from both the Deputy Minister of Health and the President—to consolidate the progress that has been made. It is a clear question: will DFID continue to provide some health sector funding beyond 2015?

Lynne Featherstone: Yes. Inasmuch as—

Sir Tony Cunningham: Thank you. You can stop now.

Lynne Featherstone: The Secretary of State has said that DFID will continue to work in Liberia beyond 2015, but—

Sir Tony Cunningham: In the health sector.

Lynne Featherstone: Well, the focus is going to move away from health per se, as I said, towards supporting the Government of Liberia in revenue management. We are planning a phased withdrawal from the direct support for the health pooled fund. As I said, we need to ensure that the Government's revenue management and domestic resource mobilisation happens. We will remain engaged with the Ministry of Health and continue to try to align donor support to the priorities of the Ministry of Health. USAID, as rightly you have said, is the biggest donor. We work with them to facilitate closer alignment with the health pooled fund. It is trying to begin that structuring whereby what the largest donor is doing is in line with what the country needs to be done for it to ultimately transfer and be sustainable.

We are also going to provide other support to the Liberian health sector. Between 2013 and 2015 we are spending about £8.27 million on health systems through our core contributions to the World Bank—that is an instance in which we know what we are doing, as you said, for Liberia—and applying health system-strengthening programmes in Liberia.

Sir Tony Cunningham: It was beyond 2015.

Lynne Featherstone: Oh, it was beyond 2015.

Sir Tony Cunningham: As I say, both the Health Ministry and the President were desperately keen that the UK continue its involvement.

Lynne Featherstone: As I said, the Secretary of State has decided we will continue to support Liberia but not in every sector and not necessarily in the same way. We cannot do everything for everyone in perpetuity. That is a decision that has been made. With USAID being the biggest donor on health, we will remain engaged to try to make that work in the right direction, but we are not doing direct health funding after 2015.

Q104 Jeremy Lefroy: If I may, I have a slight follow-up on that. This comes back to the question of being in accordance with the priorities of a Government. If the President—the Head of State—of a country says, "This is what we would really like you to do" and yet we do not, and the Head of State is prepared to say, "Look, I understand that additional money is available, but we would rather you did this than invest, say, in WASH," which was the alternative, is it not incumbent on us to heed that, given that it is the Head of State who is saying that, for all good reasons?

Lynne Featherstone: Yes, and we would listen to all of that. I do not know the details of where we are with our WASH programmes. It is going from £9 million to £5 million in terms of total spend bilaterally, is it not?

Paul Wafer: We will not continue to do WASH work in Liberia.

Jeremy Lefroy: That is what we were told.

Lynne Featherstone: No, that is not true. The only work we are continuing with—and it is also a demand of the Head of State—is exactly what you started on: capacity. We are putting in the technical assistance to their revenue management.

Q105 Sir Tony Cunningham: Can you pass on our concerns, which have been expressed to us on our visit to Liberia by both the President and the Minister, to our Secretary of State, please?

Lynne Featherstone: I can do that, and that is specifically on health, is it?

Jeremy Lefroy: If I remember rightly, it was on the health pooled fund. They both felt that Britain, and DFID in particular, made a very valuable contribution to that and were really keen to see that continue.

Lynne Featherstone: I understand that, but the decision was made in 2010 that it would terminate in—

Chair: I think the problem too is that the US will not make direct payments into funds like that, so they will not take up—

Lynne Featherstone: No, they do not. They have a different operating model and they cannot contribute to the pooled fund.

Chair: Yes. They will not take that up, and the question is: who else will? At the moment, the burden falls heavily on Irish aid, but they are not able to step up.

Lynne Featherstone: I hear what has been said.

Q106 Chair: We were very impressed with what they had done, the message they had and how sincerely they believe that what they have achieved will fall away unless somebody can step up to the plate. They are looking at their own revenue options, but there is a genuine worry that was expressed to us that they will not be able to maintain the progress post-2015 if something is not done to cover that.

Lynne Featherstone: Okay. I am not aware that it has been expressed to us, in the form of me. When you have a visiting IDC group, it is an opportunity to put forward a need and translate it.

Chair: And they took it.

Paul Wafer: If I can just add to that—this is important—we certainly heard those messages very clearly when you were visiting. Interestingly, in the letter the Secretary of State received from the President, she did not make that same point in her response.

Jeremy Lefroy: That was an earlier letter.

Paul Wafer: When the Secretary of State communicated the decision to continue to work in Liberia—

Lynne Featherstone: But not in the health sector.

Paul Wafer: —but not in the health sector, we had a response from the President to the Secretary of State, and she did not make the same plea on remaining in health that she did when you were visiting.

Sir Tony Cunningham: She certainly did with us.

Jeremy Lefroy: Yes.

Lynne Featherstone: It would have been helpful if she had been consistent.

Jeremy Lefroy: Maybe it was a matter of additional information.

Lynne Featherstone: As I say, when the IDC comes to town it is an opportunity. I hear what you say, however, and we are concerned about health in Liberia. We do not want it to lose the development gains that have been made there.

Chair: We also understand DFID's reasoning and the problem.

Lynne Featherstone: It leaves a gap.

Chair: Indeed. They have basically said, "We are worried there is a gap going to open up, which could see things going backwards."

Lynne Featherstone: I understand there is a gap. We will certainly take it away and look at it.

Q107 Jeremy Lefroy: I want to come back at some point to the comment that Paul made about strengthening civil society to challenge in respect of the EU. The first priority is surely Parliament. It is Parliament that should monitor expenditure. Civil society has an important role to play, but Parliament has the primary role. We are coming on to those questions later, so I will not pursue it at this point.

Lynne Featherstone: In a sense, that is part of what I was talking about with the results framework, so you can see what the result is for the money put in and whether the proposal works.

Q108 Jeremy Lefroy: Just a final question on health. We gather things have got quite a lot worse even since we came back 10 days ago. I just wondered how the country's health systems are coping with Ebola.

Lynne Featherstone: Initially they coped very well when it was up in Guinea, but my own view is that it has not been tough enough fast enough. It has spread now to four districts; it is the worst outbreak in history. There is now substantive movement—and I will let Paul talk about the detail—to close it down, but stopping people moving around is much more difficult because, as you will know—

Sir Tony Cunningham: The borders are not—

Lynne Featherstone: The borders are not borders in the sense that we might know them. Also, there was a rumour that there was an attempt to exterminate a particular tribe. These rumours spread like wildfire, so everyone ran away into different areas and therefore spread the disease. The World Health Organization and the Government of Sierra Leone are now advised of the seriousness of this and are moving fast, but I will let you talk more.

Paul Wafer: In the last 10 days there has been a significant ramping up of focus and effort, both by the Government of Sierra Leone and by the international partners. The UN resident co-ordinator is now organising daily meetings. There is a very clear commitment to have a much higher set of resources going in. There will be a new appeal for more money, because it is now clear that what was asked for originally is no longer adequate. DFID is also looking to see what more we can do to help. We are also having discussions at the moment with Public Health England, and this week one of our humanitarian advisers will fly out to Freetown to join our team in order to support us in this response. There has been quite a significant step change since you visited.

Q109 Jeremy Lefroy: Thank you. What are the latest figures that we have for Sierra Leone and Liberia? Do we have any?

Lynne Featherstone: I do not have them on me; I am sorry. I can go and find out.

Paul Wafer: I saw a figure over the weekend of over 600 cases in total in the region now.

Q110 Jeremy Lefroy: One concern that we had—and it was also raised by a parliamentary colleague who happened to be travelling in Sierra Leone at the same time and travels there frequently—was that the FCO travel advice on that area is always behind the curve; in fact, sometimes they update the advice because he phones them up and says, "It is actually worse." I wondered what DFID can do, because you are involved really extensively in the health sector and have all this knowledge, to inform the FCO's travel advice to British citizens seeking to travel in that area, because that seems to me to be quite an important service.

Lynne Featherstone: I believe that I have met the same Member who travels frequently to Sierra Leone. In fact, you were standing there when he was telling me how much more serious he thought the situation was than had been evident in the reactions of the international community and, indeed, the Government. I did go straight from that to ring the office and say, "I think there are issues here," because he knows. All I can say is, we will go away from this meeting and inform the FCO of what has been said here.

Q111 Jeremy Lefroy: Thank you. It is a more general point that the FCO's travel advice is something that is relied on hugely by British citizens. I wondered whether, as a systematic approach, given that DFID has in many ways just as much experience or more experience of what is going on on the ground because either your numbers locally are greater or you are working directly in the health service, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office asked DFID for proactive advice on the health situation in countries around the world. If so, does DFID check that the FCO is actually putting on the website what you are telling them?

Paul Wafer: I cannot speak for the cases around the world, but I can tell you what has been happening in Sierra Leone in the last three to four weeks. The first thing is that the FCO travel advice comes from the WHO, so if there is any lag in the data, it is not when the FCO changes the advice; it is if there is a lag between what the Ministry of Health is saying and what the WHO is saying. In the last couple of weeks, there have been a couple of cases where that has happened and what the Ministry of Health was telling people in their daily update briefings was different from the figures that the WHO were still publishing. There was that lag, which is now being addressed, and there has been a commitment this week.

Q112 Jeremy Lefroy: That is being addressed. It seems to me that nobody at the BBC says, "It is WHO travel advice." It is Foreign Office travel advice; therefore, the British people who are travelling there are going on the reliance of the British Government. If the British Government is relying on data from the WHO, which is itself behind the curve, that is quite serious.

Paul Wafer: But at the same time, that would be what we would be doing as well. What has been happening is that we have been working very closely with the High Commission in Freetown. We have been having almost daily discussions about the situation, with the health adviser in my team regularly updating the High Commissioner and the deputy.

Lynne Featherstone: And the FCO?

Paul Wafer: Yes, absolutely. They have been meeting. Over the last week, while I have been here in the UK, they have been having daily meetings. We are very joined up on it.

Q113 Jeremy Lefroy: Is that reflected in the published website advice of the FCO on Sierra Leone as of this moment, or not?

Paul Wafer: I think it is, yes. It is the High Commission in-country that decides when to change the travel advice and, as I said, that is being informed by daily discussions with us.

Chair: I will just point out that we are somewhat less than halfway through the topics we want to cover, so we may need to move along a little briskly.

Q114 Sir Peter Luff: Both these countries have recently emerged from lengthy civil wars, and Britain played a major part in ending the Sierra Leone conflict, so security is an important question for this Committee in particular. Why do you think there is a UN security mission in Liberia when Sierra Leone's has come to an end?

Lynne Featherstone: Just timing, in the sense that UNMIL is due to come to an end, but after the elections.

Paul Wafer: In 2017; that is right.

Lynne Featherstone: In 2017. I do not think there is a hugely differentiated situation, other than I believe the Government of Liberia has asked them not to go until after that point.

Q115 Sir Peter Luff: The Committee has heard that as well. Do you think the mission is still necessary in Liberia?

Lynne Featherstone: I have not been to Liberia and I do not have any information. You have been there more recently than I have. Nothing has come in suggesting there is a very volatile or dangerous situation.

Q116 Sir Peter Luff: The reason I ask is, these missions are quite costly and do not appear, to the Committee at least, to offer the greatest possible value for money. What else could be done in future conflicts that would be more effective than these security missions? Is there a better mechanism we could think of?

Lynne Featherstone: When the mission closed in Sierra Leone, it was at a point where we were doing a number of security and justice programmes that began to establish a safe and secure environment. We work, for example, in terms of police reform as being the most important—

Q117 Sir Peter Luff: I want to come on to that. So you think UN security missions are okay and good value for money, and the scores of 4x4s parked in these car parks are the best possible use of the taxpayers of the world's money.

Lynne Featherstone: I think at certain points they are.

Q118 Sir Peter Luff: Right. It seems to us that army reform has gone quite well in both countries, but the same cannot be said of the police. Do you think in future we should focus on the police rather earlier in our security approach to countries emerging from conflict?

Lynne Featherstone: Ideally you would be doing both, but resource is an issue. It is a very interesting question that you ask. For example, I recently had two submissions—this is slightly off piste, but forgive me, Chair—on the continuation of programmes on policing and working with the police and police systems in South Sudan and DRC. In South Sudan it is impossible to continue; the circumstances do not allow it. In DRC, they are very difficult and it is a high-risk programme. I am deciding to continue it, because I believe police reform is crucial to taking the country forward. The point at which it can start is a judgment for security forces in the first instance, but it is necessary to have police who behave like police and who keep the rule of law. Some of our work, like Police de Proximité—the community policing—and that relationship with people is incredibly important in changing the nature of police who used to simply be there to take a bribe or to damage you into people who will protect you and work with you as a partner. I am very much in favour of starting that work as early as possible.

I only cite those two examples because the *Guardian* newspaper took issue with our work in DRC and said terrible things. We stand proud on those things. They are very difficult decisions in difficult circumstances, they are expensive, and things go wrong. It is not easy training police forces who have been used to using it as a form of income and power and transforming them into police services that work for the people. Sorry; that was a long answer.

Q119 Sir Peter Luff: No, thank you; that is helpful. We have heard evidence that there is a considerable lack of trust in both countries in their police forces. How serious could the consequences of that lack of trust be? Can you see circumstances in which it might lead to a return to conflict itself?

Lynne Featherstone: Ultimately that could be a possibility, but the work we do is focused on that. That is why the community policing relationship, on the ground, in terms of keeping the peace, is paramount and critical to success.

The other piece of work we do is strengthening the systems at the centre. It is like we were talking about before: the lack of systems; strengthening of systems; accountability; and improving that accountability. We are working with the Ministry of Internal Affairs, and we have established in Sierra Leone an independent police complaints board. You have to get to the point where a citizen who is wronged by the police has the ability to go to somebody independent to judge it, and then you have to have a judiciary who will implement it. When you are starting from such a low base, you work in a direction, and all of these things are happening and are hugely important. There are no guarantees of how fast you can get there, but it is one of the most important programmes we have.

Q120 Sir Peter Luff: You mentioned earlier in your answers corruption in the police force. How important do you think that is? Do we have any programmes to tackle low-level corruption in Sierra Leone?

Chair: Pay No Bribe; is that not one?

Lynne Featherstone: Pay No Bribe. Perhaps you would like to describe it, because I will never find the page.

Paul Wafer: Yes. We have just started a programme in Sierra Leone called Pay No Bribe. The origin of this programme was to recognise that, while the UK and DFID had been supporting the Anti-Corruption Commission for a number of years in Sierra Leone, we wanted to do something that was more about low-level petty corruption—what many citizens experience on a day-to-day basis. The Pay No Bribe programme is about raising citizen awareness that they should not have to pay a bribe. It is about working with different line ministries, which could include the police or maybe the health service or education, to put in place systems through which people can report, using mobile phones in particular, any cases of corruption, and then making sure that there is a follow-up mechanism there. It is early days—we have just started this programme—but it is exactly about trying to change the debate around corruption so that it is also about what people experience on a daily basis.

Lynne Featherstone: Yes. That is really important, because it is how lots of these countries exist. It is just what you do instead of tax; it is informal taxation, in a way.

Q121 Sir Peter Luff: When you say you have just started it, did you start it in April this year or May?

Paul Wafer: I do not know the exact dates. The programme was designed last year. We have just agreed the contract, so it is about to go live. It has been soft-launched by the Government in Sierra Leone.

Chair: We saw some evidence, did we not? We saw some posters about it.

Paul Wafer: Yes, that's right.

Lynne Featherstone: You saw the posters. It is a good initiative; it will be very interesting.

Q122 Jeremy Lefroy: I have a very brief supplementary on the UN mission in Liberia. As far as I understand it, there are still three Italians there, two Nigerians and one Ghanaian—something like that. We heard very positive reports about the work that they were doing, which was much appreciated. At the same time, there is effectively an insurgency in the north of Nigeria and yet some of their best forces are based in peacekeeping operations in places like Liberia. I wondered if the UK Government has a position on this. We pay for some 8% of peacekeeping operations, therefore we are supporting those battalions there; at the same time, their home country is suffering from a very serious breakdown of law and order and, indeed, security. Are we saying anything about the priorities in peacekeeping as against basing those experienced troops back in areas in their own country where they might be able to protect citizens?

Lynne Featherstone: I do not think DFID has a policy on that. My guess would be that the MOD or the FCO would say to a country supplying soldiers from their nation to a mission that that is their decision rather than for us. I do not know; I am just hazarding a guess.

Paul Wafer: Peacekeeping is definitely a Foreign Office lead, but we know from the discussions we were having around UNMIL that the UK's position in the Security Council has been to push for a more rapid draw-down so that the mission in Liberia does not stay at the same scale. We have been one of a number of member states that have been pushing for that reduction. As we saw when you were there, it is reducing quite dramatically, but there was this counter-plea by the Liberian Government not to complete the mission before the presidential election.

Lynne Featherstone: But the question was really: should Nigerian troops be helping in Liberia when they are needed at home?

Chair: Presumably the Nigerian Government could insist on taking them back.

Lynne Featherstone: That is what I am saying: I do not think it is something that DFID would be commenting on; that is for the country's Government.

Chair: It is an interesting point, though.

Paul Wafer: There was a Nigerian contingent in Mali at the time of the insurgency there and the Nigerian Government did pull them back.

Q123 Chair: We saw the legal support and also the family reconciliation, which was very practical and very good, but the worry was we were funding it and it was not at all clear how it could function without funding. It was providing so many good basic things; where we found that people were being arrested and not being charged and just being kept, the intervention was pretty effective. Whenever they found anybody had been arrested, they could invoke the law and get them charged or released, and they had more or less 100% effectiveness. But it did depend on donor funding, and they were very short of people with trained legal experience. What are the chances of that funding being continued or alternative funding being found? They deliberately said, "Well, we hope local government will take it over," but local government presumably has other responsibilities as well.

Lynne Featherstone: The work we do is to enable and to build the capacity in-country for it to be sustainable by that country. We do not want to withdraw and leave programmes without that sustainability. In terms of access to security and justice, DFID has been working at a number of levels. In districts, we have been supporting community mediation and provision of paralegal services, through support both to civil society organisations and to chiefs, and we have been helping to strengthen the structures that make that sustainable. I suppose the theory there is that when and as it starts they are sustainable because the training has been done.

It is not going to be self-financing in the short term and we have recognised that, so we are planning to continue our support of access to justice. Our focus will be on women and girls beyond the current project, which ends in 2015, so we will be continuing with that in terms of access to justice. We are discussing with other donors who have supported this sector in the past, such as the Open Society Foundation, joint funding arrangements to move forward together. We are also supporting strengthening of central Government's institutions. That has resulted in a marked increase of central Government allocation to the justice sector in the 2014 Budget. We will continue this process in 2014 and 2015 to help reduce the dependency of the justice system on DFID and other donors. I cannot project forward further than that at the moment, but until the end of 2015 we are programmed to continue our support to the access to justice programmes.

Paul Wafer: If I can add to what the Minister has said, there are two things that are important to say that complement what you saw in the field in terms of those justice programmes. One is exactly the work that the Minister was just saying on ensuring that the justice sector has more money from the central Treasury as part of the annual budgeting process. That creates the potential supply of resources that can be allocated to different things in the sector. The second thing that we have been working on is around the legal framework for what is in effect legal aid. The programmes that you saw were a form of paralegal legal aid, but you need to have some sort of legislative framework in place that will define what the Government will and will not do, and we have been supporting them on that.

Chair: I think we were told that the working committee had only met once.

Paul Wafer: It is early days.

Q124 Fiona O'Donnell: Good morning. I want to take you back, Minister, to some of your opening remarks about the shift in terms of DFID's emphasis now on the golden thread and economic growth, and to ask about youth unemployment in both Liberia and Sierra Leone. Clearly, if young people are not getting access to education and do not have the skills, that economic growth will be hampered. In particular I want to ask about how inclusive education is. You have mentioned girls' education, but at every level, what is DFID doing to ensure that girls have access to education? Also, what is DFID doing to make sure that people with disabilities are not left behind in economic growth as it hopefully is sustained in both countries?

I realise I am lumping this all together, but it might be easier to answer it as a whole. Looking at the work opportunities like the World Bank's Cash for Work programme, those kinds of infrastructure projects—things like building roads—are not going to provide jobs for women or for people with disabilities. How is DFID ensuring that first of all it addresses youth unemployment but also makes sure it addresses it for everyone?

Lynne Featherstone: The first question was around skills and training.

Fiona O'Donnell: Education at every level. What are we doing to invest and to make sure that that is inclusive? And then, employment opportunities.

Lynne Featherstone: Let me go through it, because it is quite a broad question. We are investing £23.4 million in Sierra Leone up to November 2016 in the education sector. We want to remove the barriers to access and participation for the most marginalised at primary and junior secondary school, which is the inclusive part of what you were saying. We have targeted programmes that get children to enrol in grade 1 at the correct age. We target out-of-school children in rural areas and urban communities, and we provide stipends to cover the costs of the junior secondary school, and 66% of those stipends are reserved for girls. That is one of the things.

We work on improving student learning outcomes via our work on improving the quality of teaching and learning and school management. We have put in place and administered a national learning assessment so we can measure the improvement. We are working on enabling Government to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the education system. There is a range of technical assistance to support capacity development and, as you mentioned, a strategic fund managed by the World Bank. That will provide the resources to transform service delivery, so it is a different scheme from the successful implementation of the education sector plan. Did you ask about tertiary skills?

Fiona O'Donnell: I was just about to say: what about tertiary as well?

Lynne Featherstone: Yes. Our general budget support to the Government of Sierra Leone can be used; that is up to the Government of Sierra Leone, in terms of if they want to do it. We do not do it. We have not directly supported skills training programmes, because we concentrate allocated funding on delivering against the 2015 operational plans, and they are geared towards the MDGs for the education outcomes at primary and junior secondary school, so we are locked into that at this moment in time.

I am very keen on economic development—I always say "inclusive economic development"—but basic education is economic development. Getting a cohort through who are capable of work and better work and go on, ultimately, to tertiary skills is the benign place we want to get to—particularly, as was mentioned earlier, the training of nurses, midwives, doctors and educationalists—but we are not there. We have been scoping the possibility to support skills training programmes in Sierra Leone since 2013, not just with the aim of increasing the number of young people with qualifications but also to increase the number in meaningful employment. However, one of the challenges we have is many of the direct donors who are already involved in tertiary education are having a huge struggle with it. The GIZ—that is German development—and the African Development Bank have really struggled to scale up their programmes, and the sector needs a clearer steer from the Government of Sierra Leone. There is no clarity about what is happening where.

Chair: The President talked of nothing else.

Lynne Featherstone: Did you raise the issue or did they raise the issue?

Q125 Sir Tony Cunningham: I was primed to raise the issue of vocational education and the President shot my fox by saying, in the first statement that he made before answering any questions, how much he supported and promoted vocational education.

Lynne Featherstone: I do too, to be frank. I work in lots of countries in Africa. One clear, obvious thing that is needed is vocational jobs. You cannot go anywhere in Africa without noticing the number of young people—particularly men—sitting on the roadside not doing a lot. That is the thing that strikes you—or struck me. That is a very clear issue. Also, I have just been looking at a jobs and skills programme up in northern Nigeria, because one of the problems with Boko Haram is that they have a better job prospect than you get anywhere else up in northern Nigeria. It is a really important, fundamental thing about a youth demographic plus the need to expand the jobs industry.

One of the other issues we have got is that there are quite a lot of calls from the private sector for DFID to take on the role of teaching and introducing all of this, and the cost of providing skilled Sierra Leoneans, because it is not attractive to the private sector itself, apparently, to do that. I want to use the opportunity of the Committee here to push back that message and say: actually, there is an onus on the private sector itself to get involved and be willing to accept their responsibilities and to foot some of the bill. Our participation has to be carefully targeted to ensure better co-ordination and long-term success, because these are very difficult things. These are almost un-started areas. In the end, as I said, we are up to 0.7%; we are no longer on an expanding budget. You have rightly identified a really critical need, as has the President, but DFID cannot be the answer to everything.

Q126 Sir Tony Cunningham: Jeremy and I both talked to the private sector whilst we were there. They are desperately keen to help and support and provide some finance, but they want someone to work with. It is not going to work without the private sector, and particularly the mining sector. Are you prepared to work with the private sector to try to put something together?

Lynne Featherstone: We are prepared to work with the private sector in all countries. That is one of the things. No doubt that will be a recommendation and we will take that forward in our response.

Q127 Fiona O'Donnell: There was not any mention there of people with disabilities, as the Minister with responsibility for that. Also, is there anyone in-country monitoring what opportunities are being offered to women?

Lynne Featherstone: I am going to let Paul speak while I look up a bit more about women.

Paul Wafer: Just on the point about skills training, as we move forward with our programme into the next spending phase, we are looking at doing more on education and skills, but there is an important issue around getting a very strong message—as the Committee did from the President—that this is a priority, and yet at the same time there are programmes and initiatives, as the Minister said, being supported by other donors, but there is a gap somewhere in between. That is about strategic leadership, perhaps, in the Ministry of Education. I cannot remember whether the Committee heard about one of the programmes supported by the African Development Bank, whereby they provided a tertiary skills college but then the Ministry did not provide any teachers for it and did not pay the teachers. There are issues about making sure that initiatives supported by donors, a top-level message from the President and how the Ministry of Education allocates its budget are all joined up. That is the type of role that we could play.

Q128 Sir Tony Cunningham: Are there successful vocational training facilities, courses or whatever in other countries that could be used as a model for Sierra Leone?

Paul Wafer: There are successful small-scale vocational training facilities in Sierra Leone already, in partnership with some of the mining companies. The issue is about whether we can scale those up and also make sure they are done in a cost-effective way.

Lynne Featherstone: As this Committee knows, DFID is putting girls at the centre of everything we do. Partly it is about rights, but it is also about the only way to address extreme poverty being to enable girls to help with development. We have mainstreamed our programmes in Sierra Leone and we have a number of results. I will just give you an idea of how our work has delivered: 80,000 girls completed education; 700,000 women had improved access to security and justice; 280,000 women and girls had access to contraception; there was the delivery of 168,000 births by skilled health personnel; there were 9,000 new jobs and income-generation opportunities—a lot of that is getting the stuff to market and all of that—and we provided nearly 800,000 women with sustainable access to water and improved sanitation. Women and girls are mainstreamed through all of our work.

In terms of disability—not particularly focused on Sierra Leone—as you know only too well, we are at the beginning of trying to make sure that disability is mainstreamed and included, but in DFID's programmes it has been ad hoc to an extent up to now. Now, as you know, we are trying to stabilise it within a framework.

Fiona O'Donnell: Yes. Especially post-conflict, where there will be problems.

Lynne Featherstone: Yes. Interestingly enough, that has not come up in things that have come to me in terms of disability, whereas in Rwanda post-genocide it has been much more dominant in discussions. That is quite an interesting point to raise.

Fiona O'Donnell: Maybe we need to raise it.

Q129 Sir Tony Cunningham: The question on vocational education has been answered, but I want to put on record just how impressed both Jeremy and I were when we visited the Craig Bellamy Foundation in Sierra Leone and the work that has been done in the field of education, which is why I am raising it here. I pay tribute to the work of Johnny McKinstry, who is the Northern Irish guy who is running it. What was so impressive was, not only are they providing education for 30 or 40 young people as well as their football, but they have established leagues for boys and girls throughout Sierra Leone. One of the criteria for playing football is that they must attend school. Someone goes in and checks the register each day, and if they do not go to school, they do not play football. Just by the way, Craig Bellamy, who would not want this publicity, has spent £1.4 million of his own personal money on the foundation and the academy in Sierra Leone. I just wonder whether, in the educational sphere of what they do, there could be any help from DFID.

Lynne Featherstone: Well, help from DFID comes in many forms. Generally you have to apply for it though a fund with proper criteria. The work you are describing sounds phenomenal, but it is difficult unless an application is made through proper channels.

Sir Tony Cunningham: I just raise it.

Paul Wafer: There is help that can be offered, which is not just about funding schemes but also about the fact that we have an educational adviser in-country and that we know all the main players—the other NGOs. It can be really just about linking the Craig Bellamy Foundation up with some of the other NGOs that we do support so that they understand what is going on and can share resources. I think there is scope there.

Lynne Featherstone: Sorry, I thought you were asking for funding.

Sir Tony Cunningham: No, it is any help.

Lynne Featherstone: As a modus operandi, it sounds very effective.

Q130 Jeremy Lefroy: I share in everything that Tony has said. It is a very impressive set-up. Unfortunately, we did not get the chance to play football because it was too wet.

Sir Tony Cunningham: It was too wet.

Jeremy Lefroy: But we were ready and willing, were we not? One of the things we kept on hearing in Sierra Leone was the problem of lack of human capacity to build the economy, which we have referred to already, and yet at the same time there are high levels of graduate unemployment. Is there any way that these two things can be somehow brought together? It is a problem not just confined to Sierra Leone, but are there any initiatives that DFID is involved with, or any thoughts that you have, Minister, about that?

Lynne Featherstone: No, I do not have any preconceived thoughts about that, but I hear the gap that you are putting forward.

Q131 Jeremy Lefroy: It seems to me that you have got a number of eminently able and capable people and the need for them, and yet it is not possible to bring the two together. If I may just extend that and just raise the question of education for business or education for entrepreneurship, 90% of jobs for young people—and, indeed, for anybody—in developing countries are created through the private sector, and most of those are going to be created through the informal sector and, indeed, agriculture, agricultural processing and so on. Is there any element of the education support that DFID is providing that emphasises the teaching and training of these kinds of, shall we say, fairly basic business life skills in Sierra Leone and, indeed, in other countries such as Liberia? It seems that if young people are leaving education and a very high percentage of them are going to go into the informal sector, become self-employed and therefore need those kinds of business, numeracy and literacy skills, that is something we should be focusing on directly in school curricula.

Lynne Featherstone: You are right that there certainly is a lack of appropriate skills in terms of getting jobs in those industries, even amongst graduates. One of the things is that there is quite an old-fashioned approach to what a qualification is and therefore that area is not well attended. You are absolutely right: any real scale-up of jobs is going to come from the private sector. It is yet another thing that needs doing. I cannot provide the answer to everything that needs doing. You are right. That is, in a sense, why, as I said, we have prioritised, and up to 2015 our operational plan demands, that our resources go into basic education: primary and junior secondary schools. I see what you are saying, but it would be a very good thing if the private sector would step up and run entrepreneurial courses.

Q132 Jeremy Lefroy: We saw these impressive Second Chance schools run by Street Child in Bo.

Lynne Featherstone: Second Chance. It is excellent.

Jeremy Lefroy: They provide a second chance to people who have been unable to have education. These are precisely the kind of young men and women who are likely to be earning their livelihoods in the informal sector. As part of the Second Chance curriculum, there is an emphasis on these kinds of business life skills that are going to be incredibly important for them, given that the Street Child programme also included support for informal business that we saw ourselves.

Lynne Featherstone: Yes, I visited it too and I thought it was a tremendously impressive programme and really captured something about gathering those who had not had the opportunity, for whatever reason, of an education. There is further work to be done in refining what that programme is. We need to accelerate the pace of learning. We were going to look at the next three years and, assuming that three years' delivery showed demonstrable evidence of the success of the programme, we were then going to make a decision in 2016 as to whether to continue it or not, but you raise a really good point and I will look at it.

Jeremy Lefroy: Thank you, Minister.

Chair: Corruption is a problem in many countries, and certainly here there are a number of issues.

Q133 Sir Tony Cunningham: A very simple question: how do you ensure DFID money is not subject to leakage and corruption?

Lynne Featherstone: We carry out due diligence on all partners before allowing them to get their hands on our money.

Q134 Sir Tony Cunningham: Do you think there is the political will in Sierra Leone to deal with the subject?

Lynne Featherstone: That is the point of technical assistance on all of these areas. We use a mix of service providers, we carry out due diligence and our money does not go astray. Therefore, one would hope that would be something the Government would be interested in. We tackle corruption through a number of programmes, both at Government level and citizen level. We put in technical assistance; we have comprehensive public financial management programmes and give support to Audit Service Sierra Leone and the Anti-Corruption Commission. We have routine reporting and audits. This is the work that we do day in, day out to try to work with governments on the importance of systems, the importance of accountability, the importance of transparency—all of those issues. It is a hard job. In terms of our own taxpayer money, we follow the money very closely. In terms of making governments that careful about all the money, so you do not have these ghost employees and it does not disappear anywhere untoward, that is the work we are doing and will be doing for a very long time. It is the only answer.

Q135 Sir Tony Cunningham: You support some sectors and not others. How do you decide which ministries are suitable for sector support? Is sector support working?

Lynne Featherstone: In terms of the choice of sectors, it is partly to do with what the country regards as its own priorities and trying to support the country priorities, and of course our own in terms of the MDGs. It is a happy mixture of those two things. I think the sectors do work. When I was there—I do not know if you had the same opportunity—I had breakfast with the mining industry, which is an important sector there.

Sir Tony Cunningham: Iron ore.

Lynne Featherstone: Iron ore. I went up to London Mining up-river somewhere. I did not realise iron ore was so beautiful, in its own way. Setting up the National

Minerals Agency, working on transparency, working to ensure that the mining companies bring some value added to the local areas in which they work—it is slow. Most of the advantage still goes to the companies that work there, but it is work in progress in terms of getting the Government to ensure that nothing goes astray, as you were saying, because letting those contracts is super important, and I assume that backhanders for contracts is one of the ways in which money can change hands, so to speak. Funnily enough, this afternoon I am doing the Statutory Instrument on the African Legal Support Facility, which really is a way of ensuring that expertise on contract negotiation is available to countries in Africa to ensure they do not get stitched up.

Chair: That is your question, Jeremy, so you will want to pursue it.

Lynne Featherstone: Sorry, have I leapt ahead there?

Chair: No, it is fine.

Lynne Featherstone: We do have an effect, but all of these things are slow.

Sir Tony Cunningham: They all take time—correct.

Q136 Jeremy Lefroy: Indeed, my question was going to be about support for negotiation of contracts. One thing that we were told was that often the companies come in with very high-powered lawyers—not just companies, but governments from other parts of the world—and they are able to negotiate what are sometimes very advantageous contracts. I have to declare an interest here, in that I help to run Project Umubano for the Conservative Party, which has been helping with legal support on a pro bono basis. I wondered what DFID is doing specifically to work with lawyers who are offering pro bono work in Sierra Leone, of whom there seem to be quite a lot, and whether we have seen any effect on the negotiation—indeed, renegotiation—of some of these mineral contracts.

Lynne Featherstone: I am going to let Paul talk about the programme that operates that is relevant to that, but, as I said, the bigger picture thing around the African Legal Support Facility will be invaluable. I have seen my own and other local authorities stitched up in public–private partnerships because, as you say, top lawyers come in with top dollar for the companies—they are babes in the wood right across the world on that.

Paul Wafer: There are a number of things that we have been doing in Sierra Leone and Liberia that are really about trying to build that framework so that the Government has a stronger negotiating position. The work that we have done on setting up the National Minerals Agency was exactly about that; it was about getting the right sorts of legal frameworks in place. We are still supporting a programme in Sierra Leone called the Extractive Industries Technical Assistance Project. That is support, with the World Bank, of £2.4 million; again, it is about putting those types of mechanisms in place. It is not so much the lawyers negotiating the contracts, but getting a legal framework in place on the statute book that gives the Government a better position for negotiating.

The other thing that you saw in Liberia is the work we have been doing on the geological survey, which is another part of the same story, because it is about building government's own knowledge and ownership of what is under the ground and having control and knowledge about what is there in order to be in a better position to negotiate with the mining companies.

Q137 Jeremy Lefroy: The second part of my question was: have we seen any definitive results in terms of much better contract terms that the Government has been able to negotiate or renegotiate? Are there any specific examples?

Lynne Featherstone: Liberia has signed agreements proposed to contribute more than $10 billion of investment into the mining sector over the next few years. I assume that has been with these new advisory frameworks in place.

Q138 Jeremy Lefroy: Minister, is the African Legal Support Facility you referred to earlier to provide support for, for instance, British experts who are prepared to help to go in and work on—

Lynne Featherstone: It is not pro bono.

Jeremy Lefroy: Not pro bono. But it is there to provide British legal expertise.

Lynne Featherstone: Not just British. It is really about also building the capacity within African legal capability, so wherever in the world. A lot of British lawyers, because our expertise is extremely good, will get a lot of the work, but part of it is all about building the legal capacity within the African legal system—African lawyers to work side by side. It is about building that capacity, again, to be able to deal with the contracts. As I say, the big boys have very good lawyers, so you really need quite a substantive input at this point.

Chair: Finally, we have two more topics. With regard to parliamentary strengthening, we had some meetings with parliamentarians and there were some issues that were raised there. Jeremy.

Q139 Jeremy Lefroy: I just refer to the point I made earlier, which was about the first accountability being to Parliament and not civil society, however important civil society is. The message that we got from parliamentarians was often that they had not a clue what NGOs were doing in their own constituencies. That is an issue that occasionally we ourselves as parliamentarians raise, although I have to say organisations such as the Big Lottery Fund are extremely good at telling us what they are doing in our constituencies. Can DFID not insist as part of its contracts with the NGOs with whom it operates that they advise Members of Parliament in whose constituencies in Sierra Leone or, indeed, other countries work is being done that that work is being done and that they are welcome to have a look at it?

Lynne Featherstone: I will go on to the NGOs in a moment, because they do try hard to do that. The fault lies less with the NGOs and more with the MPs, 40% of whom never visit their constituencies.

Q140 Chair: We were told there is a good reason for that, which is whenever they do, people swarm around them like bees round a honey pot saying, “Where is our money?”

They do not have the idea that they are not there to provide the services; they are there to fight for them.

Lynne Featherstone: They need to go there more and say that more often.

Chair: I am not saying they should not, but that was part of their argument.

Lynne Featherstone: I have heard that argument and I think it is a very weak argument. You have got to change expectations, have you not? If you are trying to get on to the rule of law and democratic accountability and all of those things, one of the ways is for Members of Parliament, who are leaders and are elected—

Sir Tony Cunningham: It is about leadership.

Lynne Featherstone: It is about leadership—to begin to change that around.

Jeremy Lefroy: Surely the two things go together.

Lynne Featherstone: They go together. The NGOs that DFID support that operate at district level do co-ordinate very closely with the local government, and in many districts NGOs and local councils publish and share their respective plans, they co-ordinate closely, and some of them have signed memorandums of understanding to formalise their accountability to the public and to each other. District councils are the key government institution at the local level for development planning, so that is a key issue. Also, national and international NGOs are often called before Parliament to report on their activities, but, as I said, most MPs, once elected, do not even visit their constituencies. What you are saying is really important; it is important to know what NGOs are doing in any district. I am sure we could look at that. They may do it already but I do not know in what form, and you do not want to burden them with work if they are already working with the local area together. They may well publish what they do. We will have a look at that. I do think that MPs are very different there from here—or I would like to think they are very different.

Q141 Chair: That is part of the point, though. First of all, you have specific evidence; you very specifically said 40% do not, so presumably 60% do. Who does, who does not, and why? More to the point, is that not an argument for DFID doing more to engage with parliamentarians more intensively than you do—for example, supporting committees on health and education so that they can more effectively be aware of what is going on, ask the questions and be better informed?

Lynne Featherstone: Sir Malcolm, you want us to do a lot.

Chair: Yes. You are trying to build the capacity of the country.

Lynne Featherstone: We are doing it. I will tell you a couple of things we do with parliamentary scrutiny and committees. We are one of the key donors to a programme that provides increased support to parliamentary oversight committees between 2014 and 2018. It is a pooled fund, with $750,000 budgeted for support to the Public Accounts Committee, the Finance Committee and the Transparency and Accountability Committee. That is a nearly fourfold increase on the budget over the previous four years.

In addition, DFID is exploring options for potential additional support to Parliament through a new democracy programme, and potential areas of support include in particular to women parliamentarians and to research capacity. We are going to be examining where DFID can have most impact, learning lessons from previous support to Parliament in Sierra Leone and other countries, and so on and so forth.

DFID does do some of this work, as do other donors, but capacity is slow to build. We cannot suddenly magic up more resources or more human resources to give oversight of every area. We work with the CPA. They are focusing on training with a focus on strengthening committee clerks. We know how important committee clerks are—smiling at yours. That complements the work that DFID is doing supporting the oversight committees. How much more can I do?

Chair: My understanding first of all is that DFID is talking about putting more into parliamentary strengthening in general, so it was really to see whether or not you were in the process of doing that.

Lynne Featherstone: We are.

Q142 Chair: The suggestion that was made to us, if I put those things together—and it does not only happen in Sierra Leone—was helping to develop an understanding of how Members of Parliament should be interacting with their constituents, both in terms of explaining and feeding back, but also how they can build up the capacity. Supporting specialist committees so that they can be more effective is a way of doing it—if Parliament has to have a role.

Lynne Featherstone: It does have to have a role. You work in a direction. I have met groups of parliamentarians coming from the CPA from various different parts of Africa who come over, and quite often they will ask me for money for their constituency. They work through different means. It is like, "You support me and then I will do good things in my constituency." I have to explain that we do not do it that way round, generally—well, at all.

Q143 Jeremy Lefroy: If I may just put my final question, this is why it seems, certainly to me, that NGOs making clear to parliamentarians what they are doing in their constituencies is a win-win.

Lynne Featherstone: I do not disagree.

Jeremy Lefroy: Parliamentarians will then be able to say to people who come and ask them, "Why do you not set up a school here or a school there?"—

Lynne Featherstone: They can say, "We have".

Jeremy Lefroy: They can say, "This is what we have done through the Government and working in co-operation with NGOs." Then, instead of conflict, you will get partnership, so that the parliamentarians work together with the NGOs, who are going to be, perhaps, more professional in implementing that, and at the same time people can understand the role of parliamentarians, which is a role of representation and support rather than just handing out cash.

Lynne Featherstone: I do not disagree at all.

Q144 Chair: I think that was how the Kenyan MPs justified being the highest-paid parliamentarians in the world; they have to hand out cash. That fits the Pay No Bribe, if you think about it. MPs should not be there to deliver the services; they should be there to articulate. The point is, is there not a role for us to help strengthen that?

Lynne Featherstone: I don't know. We will look at your recommendations on that. When MPs win elections by giving things to people, it is some different basis from which we work. We do work in a direction. We are trying to do these things, and I take on board Jeremy's suggestion; it is very good, but I do not know that we can ask the NGOs to do this. We will look at your recommendation. All I am pointing out is that democracy and MPs and knowing your constituency come from a very different place.

Q145 Fiona O'Donnell: This is the last question, Minister; it has been a long session for you and for Mr Wafer as well. It is not the last question because this Committee does not think it is an important issue. The issue is female genital mutilation, which is a huge issue in Sierra Leone. I wanted to ask what work DFID is doing to eradicate the practice. You spoke about access to justice for women and girls, but it is not illegal in Sierra Leone. It was almost included in a Bill but the clause was taken out. Are you speaking to Government about that? How do you think you change the culture, much of which is embedded in these secret women's societies? What work is being carried out to try to change that culture? Finally, just generally, given the leadership that the Department has given on FGM, why is it not more of a priority for us in Sierra Leone?

Lynne Featherstone: It is a priority. It is a personal priority, not just a departmental priority. We have launched a £35 million programme that will work in 17 countries and a global awareness programme that will work in 10 countries. I think Sierra Leone is one of them, but I am not 100% sure, because we are in the inception phase of that programme.

Q146 Fiona O'Donnell: Would you be able to confirm that? The instance is so high here.

Lynne Featherstone: Yes, but it is so high in many places. It has to have leadership within country and it has to be led from within the community. We can only support the African-led movement; we cannot turn into imperialist finger-wagging Brits. You are right; it has been one of the most intransigent countries on FGM, partly because it is tied up with this secret-society Bondo thing, which somehow gives it a mystique that it really does not deserve; it just means you are going to get a horrible shock. When I was there, the embassy or DFID—I cannot remember—had a reception one evening with Ministers and everyone there, and I was able to stand up and say, "I have come here to talk about female genital mutilation, around other things," and said quite a lot about it. Afterwards, people said to me, "You would not have been able to say that three years ago, or even two years ago." That is moving in a direction.

On a more practical level, we are doing some things in Sierra Leone. We are providing technical support and advice to the formal establishment of the Forum Against Harmful Practices. As a coalition of NGOs and development partners working on the abandonment of FGM, the forum has led national advocacy efforts for the development of a national strategy on FGM reduction and, through its civil society support, helped to draft a submission to the Constitutional Review Committee proposing an amendment regarding the protection of women against harmful practices. As you rightly say, there is no law against it at the moment, so you have to work on all fronts: the legal framework and also in communities. In those other countries where more progress is being made, like Burkina Faso, which is going great guns, they have so much that is different from Sierra Leone. The First Lady is absolutely committed; they teach it in schools. I sat in a classroom with a mixed class of 14-year-olds, with boys talking about clitorises. All of those things will really bring change. You also have the community-level working groups with UNICEF and so on. Sierra Leone has a very long way to go before it even draws anywhere near some of the better countries.

Q147 Fiona O'Donnell: That is part of the challenge: what works in one country will not work in another.

Lynne Featherstone: That is why the research part of the DFID programme is so important. A chunk of the money—I think it is £7 million or £8 million—is going to look at what works in what country and why. Ultimately, the £35 million programme, quite frankly, is almost seed funding. It is massive, in the sense that nothing like it has been done before, but nevertheless we need to understand what works and how to work before we can scale up, or put support in for African countries to scale up.

Q148 Chair: Can I seek clarification? Sierra Leone is not included amongst the 15 countries—

Lynne Featherstone: I think it is part of the global awareness campaign, but I will clarify.

Paul Wafer: In the first phase of the global programme, Sierra Leone was not included. It is exactly the point that the Minister was making. The initiative that we have been taking is about falling in behind African leaders so that it is an African-led movement. The reason Sierra Leone was not included in the first phase is that lack of leadership that we have had so far in Sierra Leone. That is why what we have been doing is working very much behind the scenes to build this forum, which is really the first step in getting a set of local voices working together, campaigning together and starting to raise this issue on the agenda.

Lynne Featherstone: But we will clarify, because I am not 100% sure—sorry to disagree with my official—on the global awareness campaign. I think we were looking at an advanced country on FGM, a middle country on FGM and a "not got started" country on FGM, but I am not 100% sure.

Q149 Chair: Those of us who went to the Aberdeen Women's Centre met a survivor whom you would love to meet, I have to say. She was fantastic. She was telling us that, apart from getting regular death threats, she was phoned by a Minister the day before she came to meet us, who said, "You had better stop talking about this." This is a Minister phoning up to tell her that. She turned around and said, "You are not going to stop me talking about this and I will go anywhere and everywhere to do so."

Lynne Featherstone: Good for her. There are amazingly brave women in countries. I meet them all the time. They are phenomenal, because what you are highlighting is just the way it is for women. It is just too awful.

Chair: She also, however, told us a very funny story.

Lynne Featherstone: Okay. Tell it.

Chair: I will not tell you the story, but the basic upshot was a man who was telling one of the chiefs who was upholding the tradition, "You have not had what I have had. If you had, you would not want it." She brings humour into it as well, which is quite effective. It is a huge way to go.

Lynne Featherstone: Yes. I was—well, I will not just chat.

Chair: Paul, I think, will know who I am talking about, but if you ever get the chance to meet her, we would appreciate that.

Lynne Featherstone: We have the Girl Summit in July, which is on FGM and CEFM. In terms of awareness-raising around the world, that will be amazing, but it will be the day-to-day work in-country for the next Lord knows how long that will be the change factor. Change is coming.

Q150 Chair: Okay. Well, thank you very much indeed. Thanks to members of the Committee for that. I am not sure what the timing of our report will be; presumably it will be September.

Sir Tony Cunningham: Chair, it would be remiss of us not to thank the DFID staff for the excellent way in which they looked after us whilst we were in-country.

Paul Wafer: I will pass that on.

Chair: Indeed. We had a very good programme; it was well spaced and, given the inhibitions of travel and the fact that we could not see some of the health things we would have liked to have seen, we still had a very good programme.

Lynne Featherstone: You have spent much longer there than I have.

Chair: We have. It was a very good visit and we already have thanked Paul and his staff, but you can report it formally that we appreciate it.

Paul Wafer: Thank you, Chair.

Chair: Thank you very much.

Q151