

International Development Committee

Oral evidence: DFID's programme in Nigeria, HC

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Tuesday 7 June 2016

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Members present: Mr Stephen Twigg (Chair); Fiona Bruce; Stephen Doughty; Mr Nigel Evans; Pauline Latham; Albert Owen; Mr Virendra Sharma

Questions 88-158

Witnesses: **Professor Abdul Raufu Mustapha**, Associate Professor of African Politics, University of Oxford, **Dr Caroline Varin**, Lecturer in Security and International Organisations, Regent's University London, and **Professor Abiodun Alao**, Professor of African Studies, King's College London, gave evidence.

Q88 : Chair: Good morning, everyone, and welcome to this session, part of our inquiry into DFID's programme in Nigeria. I welcome our three panellists for the first panel. Our practice is that we have questions, and when you have your first opportunity to answer a question please do feel free to introduce yourselves. We are rather tight on time, for which I apologise. We have 45 minutes for this first panel, and we are trying to cover eight areas in those 45 minutes, so the more concise the answers the more popular you will be as witnesses before us here today. Thank you for joining us.

I am going to start with a question that I would be delighted to have short answers to from all three of you. That is relating to Boko Haram. As we all know, they have decimated entire communities in the north-east of Nigeria. Estimates suggest that they are responsible for almost 30,000 deaths and perhaps 2 million people becoming internally displaced. Could you perhaps briefly say what you think the main factors are that have contributed to the growth of Boko Haram in the north-east of Nigeria?

Dr Varin: My name is Caroline Varin. I am a lecturer at Regent's University and I am just coming out with a book called *Boko Haram and the War on Terror*. I specifically take a look at this question, and, briefly, my answers would be socioeconomic inequalities and political isolation, lack of education infrastructures, and the opportunities for charismatic preachers. This is compounded by Government failures, creating a perfect storm.

Chair: A great answer, thank you very much indeed.

Professor Alao: Thank you very much. I am Abiodun Alao. I am at King's College London. Since brevity would be as much appreciated as quality, I do not want to repeat what Dr Varin has said. There are a number of things that should be taken into consideration. The first is the fact that there are still some people who believe, rightly or wrongly, in the justification of that cause. They still believe that. They have a point to prove, or perhaps to disprove, so we have to take that into consideration. There is also the fact that there are some Boko Haram members who believe that they have a measure of external support. I am not talking of support in terms of financial assistance here, but that there are other people in other parts of the world, maybe ISIS and others, who have principles that can also sustain their own causes. The mere fact that they have replicates in a number of other countries may also be a factor sustaining the cause. There is the fear of being considered to be sell-outs. They do not want to be seen to be sell-outs, so they want to take it to the final end. The last one that I want to say is that they are not sure of what lies outside, should they even decide to drop out of the Boko Haram.

Professor Mustapha: My name is Raufu Mustapha. I am from the University of Oxford. I agree very broadly with what my two colleagues have said. What I would like to emphasise is that it is not just poverty, but the ways in which inequality intersects with poverty. The north-east of Nigeria, relative to other parts of Nigeria, is the poorest and most disadvantaged area, and within that society itself the communities there have one of the highest levels of inequality within them. It is the intensity of the poverty and the inequality, both regional and within the society itself that needs to be addressed.

There is then the issue of religious doctrines, not just extremism, but the lack of regulatory mechanisms, either within the religious communities or in the state, to draw boundaries. People find themselves in a situation where they are constantly outbidding each other in terms of who can take the most extreme position.

All of these then tie up with the issue of the geography of the place. Lake Chad has been drying up since the late 1960s. Populations have been pushed down. The bulk of the population around Lake Chad, around 30 million, live on the Nigerian side, and they have been pushed deeper into Maiduguri and some of those cities. That is one dimension of the geography. The other dimension is, of course, that it is close to Chad and the Central African Republic. Those are places where violence has been endemic for decades. It is all of this combined.

Q89 Chair: Could I ask each of you just to prioritise one factor as the key factor in the growth of Boko Haram? If you think that is an unfair question, say, but your succinctness in your first answers has set a great example. Would you say there is one main factor, or is that not the right way to look at this?

Dr Varin: I think it would be limiting what we can do about it if we did just give one thing. If anything, I would say Government failures.

Professor Alao: If you ask me to name one thing, I would say that they are not sure what lies ahead if they agree to leave the Boko Haram group.

Professor Mustapha: Governance would be key, because then you could address most of the other problems in a systematic, long-term way.

Q90 Chair: Let me move briefly on to two other areas of conflict, and then I will bring in colleagues focusing more on DFID's work. We understand from evidence that there has been a significant increase in deaths attributed to Fulani herdsman. What do you think has caused the recent increase in violence, perpetrated by the pastoralists?

Dr Varin: I would probably disagree that this is a recent phenomenon. It has been cyclical. It has been going on for a long time; it is just now that we are paying attention to it under this umbrella of Boko Haram. We see these kinds of violent interactions in other parts of Africa. It is not just unique there. There were 10,000 deaths and 258,000 refugees in three years in the early 2000s, and that was 16 years ago. I would argue that it is cyclical, related to climate change and desertification, again compounded by political rhetoric and manipulation of religions.

Professor Alao: I completely agree with my colleague that it is not something that is new and that it is not something that is peculiar to Nigeria. What is also important to point out is that Nigeria has never had it on this scale before. I agree that the issue of climate change is something that is very important, perhaps extremely important. Also, the desire to protect their enterprise in the zero-sum nature of Nigerian politics is something that is very important. We should also take into consideration the socio-political climate in Nigeria. We cannot completely rule out the possibility of a Boko Haram insurgency.

Professor Mustapha: Cattle-rustling has been going on now on an industrial scale for the past 10 years or so, so the whole breakdown of governance and security in the countryside has generated a climate in which at the beginning it was those who suffered from climate change and loss of herds who engaged in it. Now, even for those who have, it has become a way of life for a number of them. Increasingly, they push southwards. We hear when it is the herders against some settler communities, but there is a lot of violence going on within the herding community as well. That does not get reported often.

Q91 Fiona Bruce: Dr Varin, you referred to the manipulation of religion, with regard to the Fulani herdsman. Could you elaborate on that, and on the impact on different faiths?

Dr Varin: Specifically for the Muslim and Christian communities, you have a majority of Christian farmers, and the herdsman are Fulani Muslims. When you have the encroachment on each other's territories, they are holding on to their identity and to political power; mostly in the middle belt the power is maintained by the Christian communities, and there is a fear of Muslim penetration from the north, especially since the implementation of sharia law. All of that is used by different political leaders to protect their power, as well as using violence to do so.

Q92 Fiona Bruce: There is a fear. Is there a reality? Is it happening? Do you see one faith being, if you like, reduced because of this conflict?

Dr Varin: I do not think it is a religious conflict. It is a conflict over resources and power, and that is being emphasised through a rhetoric of religion, and trying to implement that fear, which is proving to be correct because there is violence. However, if you take away the manipulation of the politicians, it is possible you could focus on

alternative methods such as mediation, discourse, and finding solutions, because I do not think the problem there is a religious problem, though it can become one.

Q93 Fiona Bruce: The fundamental problem is the land.

Dr Varin: Resources, yes.

Q94 Chair: We are rushing through all the different conflicts of the country in a short period of time, but if we can move onto the Niger Delta, what would you say are the main drivers of conflict in the Niger Delta, and in particular why does there appear to have been a recent surge in attacks? Shall we go in the opposite order just for a change? Professor Mustapha, would you like to go first this time?

Professor Mustapha: The Niger Delta problem has been going on for quite a long time. The environment, the marginalisation of the host communities by the better-educated neighbour majority groups, as they call them in the Nigerian parlance, that has been going on but some element of criminality has crept in as well. Young men have been taking up arms as a way of getting access to resources, kidnapping and the like. Between the tenure of Presidents Yar'Adua and Jonathan, there was an attempt to address it, not so much by tackling the key problems, but by buying off some people, through the amnesty programme and then the contracts for guarding the pipes and pipelines. I suspect what we are seeing is an unravelling of some of those temporary measures, in the context of the shift in power as well. That may explain the new resurgence.

Professor Alao: It is important to point out that, when we are looking at Nigeria and the ways of addressing the security challenges, one thing that comes into play is the complete weakness or the selective efficiency of structures of governance. That is at the very centre. When you look at the issue of the Niger Delta, that comes out very distinctly. Just like she pointed out, the issue in the Niger Delta is centred on that of land. In Nigeria, people do not fight over oil; they do not fight over gold or anything. They fight about the land accommodating these resources. This is very central, and any attempt to look at anything in Nigeria must take that into consideration.

Making it more specific, the resurgence of clashes in the Niger Delta cannot be completely divorced from the loss of power in courts; with the exit of Goodluck Jonathan and the coming in of Buhari, there is this perception of loss. That has accounted quite significantly for quite a number of other things. Also, it is important to take into consideration the ineffectiveness of some of the structures put in place by the late Yar'Adua. The Ministry of Niger Delta Affairs and quite a number of structures were institutions that were only used to loot money; they did not actually give anything to the region. It is the realisation that the opportunity for cheap money has gone, and people have to look for ways of getting something back.

Dr Varin: I agree with all of this. There is the north-south competition: when you have a northern president you have problems in the south; when you have southern presidents you have problems in the north. This was quite predictable even before the elections and was part of the discourse then. Everyone wants a piece of the pie, and they want a piece of the pie before it goes to anyone else. To a certain extent, if you create the problem now and it has to be addressed quickly, it becomes a priority, especially in that region, and then you lose less even if the objectives are not necessarily stated in that way.

I would say it is worsened by the falling price oil and the fear of a militaristic response. Also what alternatives are there for the young people in the region, other than working in oil? Seeing the degradation of their land limits them, and sometimes picking up weapons is the easiest way to have a livelihood.

Chair: Can I thank the three of you for so succinctly covering a massive amount of ground in 15 minutes? We now have five questions that relate more to DFID's work, and I am going to bring in my colleagues to ask them, starting with Virendra.

Q95 Mr Sharma: DFID's programmes aim to foster better resource management, service delivery and improved governance in the security and justice sector. Do programmes focused on these areas help to prevent conflict and mitigate the consequences of conflict?

Dr Varin: Security and justice are absolutely key in conflict prevention and conflict management. One of the problems we have seen is that if there is no trust in the judicial sector, why would the security sector go through the judicial sector? It is much easier to do parallel justice. It undermines the entire system. However, I do not know how much DFID can do without the complete co-operation of the Government in reforming the judicial system, which requires also safeguards for the lawyers and the judges; if the ruling goes wrong, their lives could also be threatened. There is an incentive and disincentive system there, in addition to allegations of corruption that one may hear. It is a very difficult job to be done in the first place, let alone without Government co-operation.

Professor Alao: There are limitations as to what DFID can do, and the first thing to take into consideration is the fact that there is a need to clearly understand what the picture is on the ground in Nigeria. The truth is that not many people do. I am not very sure of the extent to which even the Government know this. We must know what took place on the ground, what the gaps are that need to be filled, and until a proper analysis of these are done we will be starting off on the wrong footing. This is the first thing to do. What does the situation need? What is a true picture of the situation and how can its analysis come in to mitigate anything that has been done?

Professor Mustapha: Part of the problem in Nigeria is the objective issues of a struggle over resources, but there is also a lot of fear, misunderstanding and misapprehension, and in many cases some people even make pre-emptive attacks. There is a climate of a lot of distrust and rumour between communities, so making information available—objective, fair and reliable information—is important. The DFID project I am most aware of in Abuja actually does a lot of work along the lines of making such information available. Whether they actually choose the right people is a different matter, but at least they are making analysis and presenting some of that, in a way should lessen the tension across the country.

Q96 Mr Evans: All three of you have painted a grotesque picture of Nigeria today, and it is very difficult for us to get our heads around how DFID are able to operate under such conditions. Could you perhaps paint a picture as to some of the challenges that are unique to Nigeria that DFID have to operate within?

Professor Mustapha: It is a very large country, and a very diverse country as well. Unlike the majority of African countries, it has enough resources of its own to be able to

resist external pressure. So its vulnerability to pressure from outside is also quite limited. There is a whole thinking around what can and cannot be done in Nigeria in terms of isolating the bits that work and locking in and engaging with them, so some states, some institutions, some individuals are making it possible for such units to operate fairly. It is one of the ways in which DFID could contribute, and that then helps DFID to overcome some of the complexities and diversities of the place. If you zero in on particular aspects, like Lagos, like Kano, where you have governors who really want to make a difference, that may be one way out.

Q97 Mr Evans: There must be parts of it—as you say, it is diverse—where, as we talked about the corruption earlier on, at state level and indeed perhaps even higher, the corruption provides even further challenges for DFID to operate within the country?

Professor Mustapha: I am sorry if we gave the impression that it is all gloom. That was because we were advised to be very succinct. However, that would not be a correct view. There are many hardworking, serious politicians and administrators who want to make a difference. It is just that the structure of governance and accountability weakens the capacity of many of them. There are things and institutions that can be worked with; it is just that they are not in the ascendance, by and large.

Professor Alao: I just want to refer to what Professor Mustapha said: the intention is not to paint a grotesque picture; far from that. I only say that Nigeria is a country where the best may be impossible but the worst may not happen. I am a realist.

As for precisely what DFID can do, I think any form of assistance that can be rendered in building institutions would be very important. It is not going to happen to all the institutions across the board, but identify key institutions and assist in building those institutions.

Dr Varin: This might be a bit controversial. The challenges that are unique to Nigeria I think are unique to every different part of Nigeria. The diversity is enormous, with different problems in different places. You cannot address one issue by learning from another, which we seem to be trying to do too often. Listen, work locally, but especially pool from the educated youth, because they have such energy, so many ideas, and so many experiences. They think outside the box. It is not just working through existing institutions, but also thinking outside of those institutions. Let us get away from the old ideas, and pool from the great energy and entrepreneurship that you see coming out of Nigeria in a way that you do not see coming out of Europe.

Q98 Albert Owen: Good morning. Written evidence to us from DFID explained that its approach in Nigeria is primarily about influencing how Nigeria uses its own resources. Accordingly, DFID in Nigeria has invested a considerable amount of time in pushing the Nigerian Government to build its own capacity to tackle severe humanitarian conditions in places where DFID and the other international donors cannot reach. How can DFID best support the Government of Nigeria to build its capacity to meet the increasing humanitarian needs, particularly in the north-east? You had consensus on the panel there that governance was a problem, so what more can DFID do?

Dr Varin: I am sure there are a lot of things they can do, but the one thing that seems to me to be able to bring a real advantage would be looking into NEMA, the

National Emergency Management Agency, which is, in my experience, particularly bad and can do a lot of good. You spoke about 2 million or 2.5 million refugees. Just going to the website, that whole thing can be completely revamped. It is impossible to get access to anybody with any power or ideas. I would say that institution can do a lot, we have seen it do a lot in other places, and that is an area where DFID can have a real impact with humanitarian aid, if that answers the question.

Professor Alao: The first thing to do is understand what is being done by the Nigerian Government, and identify the gaps in there. Otherwise we will just be working at cross-purposes; DFID would be doing one thing, the Nigerian Government would not be doing what is in line with what DFID are doing. Understand what the Government is doing, identify the gaps in that, and try as much as possible to work along with the Government in addressing some of these issues.

More specifically there are things we have to take into consideration. What can DFID do for the displaced people? What can DFID do for the host communities? What can DFID do with the Government? These are things that we have to unpack and lay out. For the people, very little can be done beyond all this cosmetic effort, until effort is made so that there is a measure of security for them to go back to. Until that is done, assistance has to be rendered to make sure there is a crude semblance of comfort in whatever it is that is being done. For the host communities, informal assistance can be given. Maybe I could go into it, if I had the time. As for the Government, try to understand what the Government is doing and identify gaps there, and DFID can identify places where it thinks it can be of assistance.

Professor Mustapha: One of the major problems of the previous Government, the Jonathan administration, is the way in which it quite neglected the welfare of the IDPs across the country. The current Government seems to be doing something about it, but my fear is that they are more interested in feeding people, which is of course important. A little thinking, particularly from the office of the Vice President, has gone into education—provision of education and health. However, by and large, if you look at what the Nigerian Government is doing, it is building physical infrastructure: roads, schools, etc. However, these are communities that have been traumatised—thousands of orphans and women brutalised. I do not think they are putting enough effort into rebuilding people's minds and rebuilding social cohesion, at the community level.

Q99 Albert Owen: Just to develop your argument a bit further, rather than building schools, it should really be helping teachers to educate young people, and have specific programmes, because the gaps identified by your colleagues are huge and DFID can do something practical?

Professor Mustapha: Maybe if I give an example of an interview I had with someone. The state Government in Borno State is thinking of rebuilding communities by building houses for them. What they normally do, which is coming from the tradition of the big dams in the 1960s, is go to the edge of the settlement and build these identikit buildings, and hand them out. The community were asking us for even half of that money to repair where they were, "Because our neighbours are there, our families are there, and we will lose all our networks of support if we moved." It is that lack of engagement with the social cohesion of people.

Q100 Albert Owen: And you think DFID can take a lead on this.

Professor Mustapha: There are one or two individuals who are helping with the children, etc, but they really need a lot of support. The intangible things are not things that politicians in Nigeria want to put a lot of money into, because then they have nothing to show. If they build bridges and schools, they can say, “I built this”. However, “I helped this community” cannot be a platform. In Sierra Leone, for instance, they built informal institutions where people just tell the story of what happened to them, in a fairly safe environment, so that it is not fuelling a crisis, but helping. I do not think they are putting an awful lot of attention into that social cohesion aspect.

Q101 Albert Owen: We have the Minister coming up in the next session. If we were to say to him that the focus is wrong, and they should have a rethink about it, would we be echoing what you are saying?

Professor Mustapha: No, I am not suggesting that building the schools is not good. It is not enough. Otherwise you leave people with all the problems and trauma, and 15 years down the line—

Q102 Albert Owen: Sorry, I realise building schools is a good thing, but what I am saying is leaving the Governments to do it themselves is possibly not the right way.

Professor Mustapha: The UN has developed a unit to deal with the Chibok girls when they were taken, but then there are so many Chibok girls around who need their attention right now. It is partly the communities, the Nigerian Government, the state Government, and DFID; they could be making common cause and making that provision available, much more so than what has been done now by one or two individuals.

Q103 Albert Owen: If some of those girls who had been taken were foreign girls, do you think DFID would be doing more to get them released?

Professor Mustapha: Foreign?

Chair: British or American, rather than Nigerian.

Professor Mustapha: There was the attack on Bama about two years ago and thousands were killed. There were then the terrorist attacks in Paris, about Charlie Hebdo; there was a corresponding attack then. You hardly heard about Bama. We were discussing just before we came in: we do not want to give the Nigerian Government anything to pretend that they are doing it to us. There are a lot of things we are doing to ourselves, that we need to face, then we can face the inequalities in the global system thereafter.

Chair: We are going to come to Pauline in a moment, who is going to develop some of the points you were making about internal displacement, but I think Virendra wanted to come in first.

Q104 Mr Sharma: Would you agree that there is a lack of partnership, when they have the long-term planning—a lack of partnership between the Government or other decision-makers and the general public, particularly the youth?

Chair: I will just get one of you to answer that, just in terms of time. I do not know who particularly fancies taking that one.

Professor Alao: Yes, there is a lack of partnership. One thing that has to be taken into consideration is that you are dealing with youth in Nigeria who see themselves as the neglected majority in an unjust set up. This is very central. If anything can be done to engage the youth, that would be very helpful, because youth in Nigeria can transform things. From nothing they created Nollywood, and they built it to be the second largest in the world. There are many things they can do, provided, of course, they get the support and assistance of the Government.

Q105 Pauline Latham: I think youth all over the world is feeling disaffected. It is happening here; it is happening in Spain; it is happening in lots of places. You are not on your own, but we have not got the problems that you have. If I could move onto my question about conflict across Nigeria, which has led to the internal displacement of over 2 million people, we actually visited an IDP camp where they were very well organised, but it was pretty shocking conditions with no schooling, or local schooling that was not really as good as it could be, because they are not necessarily trained people. According to the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, DFID have responded by allocating £4 million to provide life-saving emergency supplies and to improve the delivery of humanitarian relief to internally displaced persons in their host communities over the north-east of Nigeria. DFID have also helped to set up a Nigerian Safe School initiative, helping to protect children at school and provide schooling to children affected by the crisis. What else can donors like DFID do to ensure a generation of IDPs are not left behind? These children are not in there for one year; they are in there for a very long time, and it seems to me that they have no future unless somebody gets to grips with it.

Could you all tell us what your assessment is of the role DFID can play in supporting the communities hosting internally displaced people to provide basic services in the north? Tearfund gave us some written evidence encouraging DFID to work with the Government of Nigeria and the UN to ensure that all returns of internally displaced people take place safely, voluntarily and in dignity. How can DFID facilitate that process? Sorry, that is a very long question with lots of bits to it, but it is important to think about these people who continue to have children—and you cannot put your life on hold when you are in that situation—but it is going to cause enormous problems for the long term if they are not sorted out.

Dr Varin: One of the camps I visited—outside Abuja, so one of the nicer ones—was an ad hoc camp, not a Government camp at all, and, as you said, they were really well organised. One of the problems that they faced was actually access to clean water, and they would get what they needed to get the clean waters, but then they would not find a well that would bring out this water. All this money goes into there; you have to dig and get new technology, so I think actually having water engineers would go a long way to helping those communities. It is not just Government camps; it is also all of the other ad hoc camps.

Another problem they face is being integrated into the new communities. There is a lot of fear that they have been infiltrated by Boko Haram, so that can create a lot of tensions in that community, so it is perhaps about working on mediation or helping them integrate into this new environment. Sometimes it works incredibly well, but more often than not they have to move from place to place, until they find a welcoming environment.

Working locally with volunteers, not just with the Government, is important, because the ad hoc camps are helped by other, quite wealthy Nigerians who also give their time and their finances to make this work. In fact, I think they probably work a lot better. However, we cannot just focus on returns, and I think that is one of the mistakes the Government is making: “Let us send them back. It is safe.” No, it is not just safe, it is also that everything has been destroyed. What do they go back to? Things have changed. These communities have been established. They have been there for sometimes a year or more. They have had children. The children are going to meet the other locals, and they are here to stay. A change of mentality is also necessary.

Professor Alao: Dr Varin has said most of the important things. The key thing is for DFID to formulate policies in conjunction with the community. Imposing policies and suggestions will definitely not work. Going into specifics, sanitation is something that is very important—any form of assistance along that line—and also medical assistance, for taking care of the people, and also assisting in settling in, for these people in their new environment. Let us face it: they are not going back that easily. It is going to take quite some time. So the reality is they need to say, “They are going to be here for quite some time”. Whatever it is that can assist them in just getting accommodated in that community would be very helpful.

Professor Mustapha: I am afraid I disagree a bit with my colleagues. I do not see a future for people staying in those camps. I doubt that everybody will go back. The majority of them are now living in the community, not in the camps anyway. However, considering the way things are in Nigeria, I think it is most likely and better that they actually return to their communities where they have access to land and can farm, and build up their businesses and the like. When the Nigerian Government tried to get as many of them to go as possible to show the world that it has dealt with the problem, which is not so, it is to be deplored. However, as a long-term basis, to think of making those camps permanent will disadvantage those people. They are sitting on the edges of cities, where they have very little. I do not see how that could be a sustainable approach on a long-term basis for them.

Q106 Fiona Bruce: Professor Mustapha has actually very ably anticipated my question, so you may not want to repeat what you have said already. How can DFID ensure that its humanitarian support contributes to longer-term stability and development? Also, what is the right balance for DFID between tackling the causes of conflict and dealing with the consequences of it?

Chair: If each of you can answer it in one minute, you will definitely be my favourite panel of witnesses we have ever had.

Professor Mustapha: Like I said earlier, a part of the drivers of conflict in Nigeria is misunderstanding, fear and misapprehension. DFID can do a lot of work in terms of creating platforms for the exchange of ideas among different Nigerian groups. That would lessen the drivers of conflict a bit.

Professor Alao: In a very brief way, just assist the country in building these institutions. Conflict definitely will come—there is nothing we can do about that—but the ability of the structures to withstand contradictions is very central. Any assistance that can be provided in building these structures would be helpful.

Dr Varin: We have been speaking a lot about working with the Government, but we also said that a lot of the problems are because of the Government and from governance. Perhaps branching outside of the Government and looking at alternative modes for conflict prevention and resolution would lead actually to more long-term development. Perhaps if you take some of the politics out, you could find some sustainable solutions.

Chair: Can I just give you massive thanks on all of our behalves? We have covered an enormous territory in under 45 minutes, because we started slightly late, and you have given us some really superb answers and great evidence that is going to assist us with our inquiry. Thank you for sparing the time to be with us today. We are going to take evidence now from the Minister and from DFID Nigeria, so feel free to stay to watch in the gallery if you have the time, but thank you very much for being with us.

Examination of Witnesses

Witnesses: **Nick Hurd MP**, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for International Development, and **Ben Mellor**, Head of Office and Country Representative, DFID Nigeria, gave evidence.

Chair: Mr Hurd, this is your first time giving evidence before us formally, though we have obviously met informally since your appointment. I would like to put on record publically our appreciation for the great support we had from Ben and his team when we visited Nigeria as a Committee, earlier in the year. We have a lot of ground to cover. We have an hour and a half. We have 16 questions that we want to try to address in that time, and I am going to go straight to Nigel to ask the first of them.

Q107 Mr Evans: Ownership of DFID programmes in Nigeria by Nigerians is seen as important, and yet just giving money directly to Governments—state Governments, federal Governments or indeed some institutions—may be seen as a no-goer, simply because of the fear that this money will be side-tracked somewhere else. How are you able, therefore, to ensure that DFID programmes are seen to be at least led by Nigerians on the ground?

Mr Hurd: Chairman, thank you very much for inviting us here. It is a pleasure to come before you formally for the first time. May I say just how much I welcome your interest in Nigeria at this time? It is particularly important. It is, as you know, a country of major importance to the British national interest. There are few countries that have, I think at the last count, a dozen Government Departments or agencies operating in the country, and I think that is testimony to the complexity of the relationship and the texture that underpins it, and therefore what DFID does needs to be seen in a broader context of HMG effort. Our commitment to the country as DFID has grown substantially over the last 10 to 15 years, and therefore it is exactly the right moment to scrutinise how effective we are being, and how effectively what we are doing is embedded in the broader HMG effort.

Before answering Nigel's question, if I could just register one point about why I think this inquiry is particularly timely, I do not know what main conclusion you drew coming

back from Nigeria, but from my visit, which I think post-dated yours, I came back with a very strong feeling that the next three years are absolutely critical, in terms of answering the question of whether Nigeria will have a serious chance of harnessing the potential we have talked about for years. It really feels like this is a moment in time, and DFID definitely wants to be a player in making the answer to that positive. It is a very useful opportunity for us to be under your scrutiny, just to really test that. Ben may take a different view about this, but I certainly think so.

To Nigel's point, I will say two points at the top, and encourage Ben to come in with some specific examples of where we are encouraging the Nigerians. The main point here, Nigel, is that Nigeria is unlike many other countries where we operate in Africa, where in financial terms what we do is absolutely tiny. To our constituents, £250 million is a lot of money, but in the context of Nigerian GDP and the Nigerian Government, it is small. For us, it is not about the money; it is about the influence and what we can do to help reforming Nigerian politicians to mobilise more domestic resource and use that more effectively, particularly on the behalf of the poorest members of their country, which has been a political failing in the past. An increasing part of what we do is not substituting Government resources or taking the place of Government. It is to try to work alongside Government as best we can, to strengthen systems and empower it to use them to do the job.

Would that be easier if we were able to work through Government systems? Probably, but we cannot, and I cannot see the circumstances under which that is going to change in the very short term. We have to be smart in terms of how we work outside but alongside Government systems, whilst trying to bring the best possible advice to bear on those politicians who we believe are reformers and who we trust to be acting in the interests of the country and the interests of the agenda we are trying to support and encourage there. Ben can come in with some specifics in relation to this.

Ben Mellor: A couple of points I would make, if I may: in terms of making sure there is Nigerian ownership, first, we support the federal level and the state level. Although we do not support them with resources, it is important to remember that state-level piece. There we work with reforming governance, reforming individuals who we believe can make a difference, and make sure we are supporting them in their efforts, because that is where the sustainability comes from, and that is where the route out of aid comes from for Nigeria.

The other point is working outside Government completely, working with civil society. One of the exercises we have done in preparing our new business plan is consulting with Nigerian youth. There is a huge number; it is a very young demographic. We are consulting with Nigerian youth about what they want to see as the priorities for DFID going forward, what they see as the future of their country, and how we can contribute to it. We are not going behind the back of the Government; we are being clear to the Government that this is what we are doing and that we are talking to all sides. We can both talk to them and put them at the heart of what we are trying to do.

Q108 Mr Evans: Do you ever get a sense that there is a feeling that what DFID is doing in Nigeria is ever perceived, at whatever level, just as being in the interests of the UK as opposed to in the interests of Nigeria?

Mr Hurd: Based on the experience of one visit, absolutely not. What I came across in Nigeria was an understanding of the contribution we were making at the highest level, and gratitude for it, but a very strong sense that the future was Nigerian. The solutions had to be Nigerian-driven, and they were extremely grateful for the support that we were giving, but they did not express it in terms of, “Thank you for the money”. What seemed to be more valuable was the advice. That is the impression I got from my visit.

Q109 Mr Evans: You say you work with federal and state Governments. Is there a suspicion as to what you are doing there?

Ben Mellor: May I take that, Minister?

Mr Hurd: Of course, yes.

Ben Mellor: Absolutely not. The relationship between Nigeria and the UK goes very deep, and there is an understanding of what the role is of our support for development—as the Minister said, not undermining what should be rightly a Nigerian process, but they would expect the UK to be supporting them, as they expect the UK to support across the whole range of HMG interests in-country. The fact that we are there, helping them, and helping them at state level and federal level, is completely understood and appreciated.

Mr Hurd: I detected real pride in the relationship from the Nigerian side—a genuine appreciation of our support. This was reflected in the conversation I had up in the north, in Kano, with the Vice-Governor, where he really knew the detail of what we were doing there. He was extremely grateful. It was massively important for them, but it was never a transactional conversation; there was never any sense of the line of your inquiries: this was being primarily driven by the British interests. If I can be candid, we are a lot less transactional than some other countries that are operating in Africa.

Q110 Chair: Was that even the case, Minister, in light of the new aid strategy placing a great emphasis on the UK national interest? Was there no sense of a perception in Nigeria that that might place the UK interest above what is best for poverty reduction and development in Nigeria itself?

Mr Hurd: No. Again, if I can be candid to the Committee, Britain has historically been very shy in expressing the British national interest. There is a framework of mutual expectation underlying our development. I think we have given development aid for the purest of purposes, driven by the anti-poverty strategy. This evolution is not jarring in any way in terms of our business. It is what they expect. In a way, I think we have been quite naïve in the past. We are just getting a bit sharper. I do not think they see anything abnormal in that. That is what they expect, and compared to the conversations they are having with other countries, this is still comfortable.

Q111 Pauline Latham: Good morning. Nigeria is Africa’s largest democracy and economy. It has very complex development challenges. Why did DFID select Nigeria as the testing ground for thinking and acting politically in its approach to development? What exactly is DFID doing to adapt the tools it would normally use, to enable it to think and act politically?

Mr Hurd: Can I just probe a little bit what you mean by “acting politically”?

Pauline Latham: That is what you said you were going to do. You were going to think and act politically in the area, so that you can help the development of the area. How is DFID’s normal approach being adapted in order for you to be able to do that?

Mr Hurd: I will ask Ben to come in again and give some examples of where we are thinking more politically. At the highest level, in terms of our HMG works—and I hope you got a flavour of this on your trip—the HMG system is thinking much more politically about how we work together much more effectively to co-ordinate our messages and project the country and our interests and expectations. We have got a lot smarter about that. In terms of some of the preparations done for our programming—and Ben can talk to this—there is probably now more analysis on the political economy done upfront than there was before. The other thing I would say is when I go and talk to Nigerian Ministers or Ministers in any other country now, I am equipped to deliver all HMG business. James Duddridge and I could be interchangeable. The messages they get from DFID is the messages they get from everyone. We are more political in that respect. We do not go in and just talk about what we do.

Q112 Pauline Latham: Presumably, from what you say, you and the FCO are working much more closely together to deliver a joined-up approach to Nigeria?

Mr Hurd: Yes. One granular example: Ben and I have just come off a conference call to discuss the business plan for the next five years on Nigeria. Paul Arkwright was on that video call. In Nigeria recently, James Duddridge and I did what we billed, ambitiously, as a deep-dive into Nigeria, bringing the Foreign Office and DFID together to discuss Nigeria—the opportunities and the risks. We are trying to mesh the thinking and the doing in a way that I do not think has happened before.

Ben Mellor: A couple of quick examples: if we take an example of our support for democratisation, where the traditional division of duties was for DFID to do the technical support, building up systems and the capacity of the independent election commission, and the Foreign Office would traditionally have done the political lobbying and messaging and so on. What we saw up to and during the 2015 elections was we brought the technical and the political together. We were being political in where we put our technical support, so it was agile and responsive as required, and we were getting messages from the political side. We were then making sure the political side was giving the messages or were informed by the realities we saw on the technical piece, so those two things are not seen as being separate or competing; they are combined together. That is easy for an election, perhaps, because it is an event. What we have then done is taken that approach into a broader piece, exactly because it is a very complex environment. As the Minister said, if we are not aware of the politics when we get into these things, it will undermine what we are trying to do. It is about a better understanding, but also using what we are doing to inform a better political understanding in turn, so creating a virtuous circle.

Q113 Pauline Latham: The Minister said the next three years are critical. How will you assess whether what DFID and the Foreign Office have done has been successful? Do you feel, since we were there, that the relatively new Government are actually progressing along the right path to deliver some of those things that need to happen for Nigeria?

Mr Hurd: Let me start on that. The significance of this moment is huge. We have had a peaceful transition of power for the first time. We have had a president come in with a very strong mandate, to tackle some very difficult things, which we all understand are fundamental to progress: corruption, security and economic diversification. My candid view, again, is that progress has been slow, but progress has been real. We are finalising a strategy that binds us closely in to nudging and supporting progress.

On the DFID side, as you know, we have a manifesto commitment to make, particularly on the human development side, so our progress on that is transparent and measurable. In terms of where we would like to see Nigeria by 2020, we would like to see fair elections in 2019. We would like people to feel that there was less corruption. We would like people to feel that access to justice had improved. We would like people to feel they have more information about what Government was doing and where public money was going. I am sure we will get around to talking about the economy, but the economy is in a very precarious state at the moment. That worries us enormously, because, as you know, Nigeria has a fast-growing population and has 2 million young people coming into the job market every year. This economy needs to find another gear. We want to see peace and stability in the north-east and we want to see big progress on the human development indicators.

Listening to myself, it is a massively ambitious agenda, but much of that is within reach. That is what we are aiming towards at the macro level, and at the micro level we have our targets and plans, which are transparent, as is our business plan.

Q114 Pauline Latham: You are able to measure those.

Mr Hurd: Yes.

Q115 Albert Owen: In evidence we have had to this inquiry, there have been concerns about the low level of staffing, relative to the size of DFID's Nigeria programme. Staff numbers, for instance, have not kept up at the same rate as the budget. How are DFID's human resources being strengthened in order to manage an increased budget? I realise it is not just about people to how much is being spent, but on the ground are you satisfied, Minister, that you are getting good value for money? A difficult one for Ben, sitting next to the Minister, but is he satisfied that there are enough resources there to carry out your ambitious programme, which I share?

Mr Hurd: That is a question I will ask every country manager, and Ben is a very experienced country manager: "We have got ambitious plans. Do you have the capacity to deliver?" Everyone knows it is always about implementation and delivery. What I think the pattern in Nigeria has been, and we were discussing it this morning, is that, as I said in my opening remarks, there has been a big growth not just in money but in terms of staffing commitments to Nigeria over the last 10 years or so. That has stabilised, and we are under a lot of pressure to control costs. The challenge for Ben and other country managers is to maximise efficiency, as well as being very honest with us and saying either, "I can deliver at this level," or, "I cannot". Ultimately, he is accountable for delivery. He has got to make the case.

Q116 Albert Owen: I understand that, and you have to answer to people as well. In the evidence from Dr Oliver Owen—a great surname—the research fellow at Oxford for international development, he talks about complaints of a lack of strategic engagement with Nigerian Government partners by DFID staff on their behalf. Although he goes on to say, in fairness, that is uncertain whether this is the result of inadequate staffing, they may act as a barrier to DFID’s politically smart approach about which you have spoken. There was also concern from Alex Duncan from The Policy Practice, talking about too much having been handed over to big implementers. The question I am asking you, as a DFID Minister, is whether we have the balance right between the DFID expertise and the implementers?

Mr Hurd: Never pick a fight with an Owen, and I will not, but I think that is a very good challenge for us. I will ask Ben to give you his perspective because he is managing this balance. The balance is between driving the most cost-effective and efficient delivery—getting the outcomes we want at the best possible price—and DFID’s ability to manage relationships, influence and our visibility, frankly, because we are a very important part of HMG’s soft power toolbox. This is something I feel very strongly about. This morning, my position would be I am comfortable that we have got the balance right based on what I have observed and heard from my visit to Nigeria in terms of the response I have got from our main interlocutors in Nigeria, such as the Vice President. They are very satisfied with the outcome they have got from DFID. Ben, you should talk to the balance between contractors and DFID staff.

Mr Mellor: Certainly. In terms of overall staffing, we have increased by 35% since 2010, in terms of the number of staff in DFID Nigeria. We have up-scaled, but you are right: the size of the programme has gone up faster than the number of staff. As the Minister said, we are making sure that we are ensuring value for money and that we keep that balance.

On the point you have raised, though, the key issue there is exactly what I have to look at when I am trying to make sure that I am making the case on staffing. I want to make sure that I have enough staff to fulfil our fiduciary responsibilities—the accountability to the UK taxpayer for the programmes—and to make sure that the programmes are run effectively. That is my number one priority. However, I also need to make sure I have the staff to do exactly that strategic engagement, otherwise all the political smartness that we were talking about would not happen. I need to be able to make sure that I have enough resources for both, and part of that is about making sure that we prioritise within different sectors or we prioritise within different regions of the country to make sure that we are not stretched thinly geographically or thematically. We need to make sure that we really make an impact where we do.

The other thing is getting feedback. I will take that as a piece of feedback and we will look at it and make sure that we are getting it right.

Q117 Albert Owen: We also had evidence from the first panel just before you, and they talked about gaps in certain areas, and we talked about the north-east in particular. DFID could do more in education, for example, rather than just allowing the Governments of that area to say, “We are building more schools”. Physically, they may be building them, but the education and the reduction in poverty measures might not be there. Is that a resource issue? Are you working on that and trying to be more politically smart and working with each different region because of the complexity?

Mr Mellor: I am actually chair of the donor group on education, so I hope I am being influential with the Government on education. Also, we take a leading role on education and emergencies, which looks specifically at the issue of education in the north-east. I have an excellent education team, and we do it. One area that is an example of how we have changed is two and a half years ago when I arrived in Nigeria, we had no humanitarian programme. The humanitarian needs have increased exponentially over the last three years, and we have found the resources to make sure we have a humanitarian team, both a human humanitarian team and the programme coming in behind them to make sure it is done. However, again, we are always making sure we have got that balance. I do not want the money if I have not got the human beings to deliver it.

On the question about using contractors, that has to be a multiplier and should not be contradictory. So I will use contractors where they can multiply the effectiveness of my staff, not where they end up setting up as an alternative. Who speaks for DFID? Who speaks for HMG? That is very clear. That is my staff and that is the high commission. They are the ones to speak for the UK.

Mr Hurd: Could I add one point to that? There will always be gaps, just by the nature of the scale of Nigeria and the scale of the challenges, the complexity of the challenges, the limits of our budget and the fact that actually we do not want to be doing everything. We should not be doing everything. We will not have popular support for doing everything. That means there will always be gaps. Our challenge is how to focus our resources in the most intelligent way, and to then think about how we can influence others to come in alongside us as support and to build scale and coherence to what we do. However, there will always be gaps. You will always find people saying, “I wish DFID would do X, Y, and Z”. It will always be a factor in Nigeria.

Q118 Chair: Just to follow that line of questioning, I think you said there had been a 35% growth in staff numbers since 2010. In that same period, the total spend more than doubled. Is it possible that you could look to recruit additional staff if you felt that was the best way to most effectively spend the resource that you have got? Is that a possible outcome of the processes that you are going through at the moment?

Ben Mellor: Yes, and not just because my Minister is sitting next to me. It has always been understood that when you go into the country, you obviously make the case for exactly those two reasons that I have talked about. I have never had a problem having that heard at the centre.

Q119 Chair: On contractors, you will be aware that, in the 2013 ICAI report, they identified a weakness in terms of DFID Nigeria staff learning lessons from contractors in the implementation of programmes. Can you tell us a bit about what is being done to ensure that lessons, information and networks are being shared by implementing partners with DFID Nigeria staff to improve the effectiveness of programmes on the ground? I do not know which of you would like to lead on that.

Ben Mellor: We have done a lot. Because of the operating model that we have in Nigeria, where such a high proportion of our programme is delivered by these contractors, it is obviously important that we make sure that we are not creating problems for ourselves. It was alluded to in the previous question. The kind of things that we have done over the last

couple of years are to set up a local version of the key suppliers process. We sit down with all the key suppliers and the key contractors who are working in Nigeria to make sure not only that we are learning from them, but that they are learning from each other. The key issues that we have been putting out are the importance of collaboration between programmes and the importance of better co-ordination and so on. That drives better value for money, but it also drives better lesson learning. We have then looked at specific sectors and, when we get into specific sectors, we have brought all the partners who were working in that sector together. An example of this is health, where one of the key issues is around supply chain. It does not matter which sector you are working in, if you can work on improving the supply chain, we can bring people together on that. So, overall, twice a year, we bring everybody together and then ad hoc the sectoral specific piece.

The other thing we have done in terms of addressing the ICAI concern is that we do a lot more early market engagement now. When we are putting out new contracts for programmes, by engaging early we are asking the contractors to bring in their expertise and knowledge to help us refine the design. With a new programme such as the FOSTER programme—the oil sector transparency programme—through the early market engagement, we got suggestions and proposals from potential bidders. We got their information and that improved the project design.

Q120 Pauline Latham: The recent Nigeria state budget transparency survey 2015 found that state budget transparency around the country is deplorable. In most of the states surveyed, the public do not have access to the comprehensive and timely information needed to participate meaningfully in the budget process and to hold the government to account. Are programmes such as State Partnership For Accountability Responsiveness and Capability having a sufficient impact to enhance the accountability of state level governance? If they are, do you believe it is true that people need to be educated to know how to hold the Government to account over there? They need to have that education. How is DFID ensuring that people do get access to that to help them to hold the Government to account?

Ben Mellor: The SPARC programme has just come to an end and the new programme that we have launched is the Public Sector Accountability and Governance Programme, which was launched in the last few months. That learns from the approach both of the SPARC programme that you mentioned and also the State Accountability and Voice Initiative—SAVI—which was the other programme that we had working at state Government level. What we found out from the two programmes was exactly what you have just mentioned in your question. The quality of budgets—budget setting, implementation and execution—and also the ability of the public to interrogate those numbers were very poor. We did find that it was better in the states in which we had been working. SPARC worked on improving that in 10 states out of the 36 states, and there was measurable improvement in terms of the quality of budget execution. We found that in the 10 states that we were working in over £1 billion of additional money was properly budgeted and therefore properly executed, and that led to better health and education outcomes. We hoped that showing that would have a replication effect across other states.

Q121 Pauline Latham: Is it doing?

Ben Mellor: There are things like the Nigeria governance forum that are meant to do that replication piece, and we are working with them to say, “Look at these examples of good

practice”. Particularly in the current economic situation where states have much less money, you need to make sure that the money you have is going to the places where you want it to go. It is not a fast process. One of the reasons is because of the point about how you build up public and, indeed, even state level legislators’ ability to interrogate what is going on. That is what our SAVI programme did: working with civil society, but also working with the state house of assembly. The Minister met the state house of assembly in Kano when he visited to try to get them to do their job properly. That is something we will carry on into the new programme. We will try to build that accountability mechanism throughout.

Mr Hurd: If I could just complement that, Chairman, this agenda is so important because it touches so much in terms of our desire to get resources applied where they are meant to be applied in terms of delivering basic services. It is also important in terms of squeezing and shutting down the space for corruption. I know from my experience of the Cabinet Office in the last Government the power of transparency, open government and open data. Once you start down this journey, as you know, Pauline, it is irreversible. Because once you start giving the public information and they get used to that, you cannot take it back. This is a really fundamental change that we are trying to encourage. Ben has talked about the work we do at Government level. There is another side to this, which is small and embryonic but potentially powerful, which is the support and encouragement that we can give to civil society organisations that want to follow the light and want to shine a spotlight on the issues. Ben introduced me to BudgIT. There is an incubator in Lagos for small tech-based start-ups. One of them is a group of young Nigerians who are absolutely dedicated to helping their fellow Nigerians follow the money and educating them on what to look for. You need both sides of it, but the stakes are very, very high because this is a change that cannot be unwound once the genie is out of the bottle.

Q122 Pauline Latham: You have got to do it with a new Government rather than one that has been there forever.

Mr Hurd: Yes.

Q123 Chair: Pauline asked specifically about education and training efforts to complement anti-corruption work. Can you just say a little bit about that?

Ben Mellor: I was taking education in its broadest sense of educating—

Chair: We will come to education in the broadest sense later. What about specifically around equipping citizens so the work on anti-corruption is effective.

Ben Mellor: One of the things that we think is very important in terms of tackling corruption is to do systems, to do sanctions and to do society. Society is where the education piece fits. You need to have better systems, as the Minister said, to make it harder to be corrupt, and sanctions so that the people who are corrupt get punished. However, you do need society to be educated; absolutely, you need to achieve that. We need to have a better understanding of what different perceptions there are about corruption and the corruption that is tolerated and not tolerated. We need to try to make sure, through education in the broadest sense, that we are tackling that. That will be part of our anti-corruption approach moving forward.

Q124 Pauline Latham: I hope we are not accepting corruption. When you say that there is some that is accepted and some that is not, I hope that we—

Ben Mellor: We need to understand why the Nigerians accept some and then work on that to make sure we change that.

Mr Hurd: Our position is zero tolerance, but we have to understand the texture of the Nigerian debate about this and understand what social attitudes are and what is considered acceptable and not acceptable at the moment.

Chair: We are going to move now to some more detailed questioning on corruption, which Fiona is going to lead on.

Q125 Fiona Bruce: Minister, you said earlier of DFID's work, "We'd like people to feel access to justice has improved". That echoes evidence from some of our previous witnesses today who said it is absolutely key for conflict prevention and conflict management, as well as for addressing corruption, that the judicial systems are addressed. The independence of the judiciary needs to be addressed if—another witness was saying this to us—the corrupt are to be effectively brought to account without manipulation of the judicial system. In what way is DFID working with the Nigerian Government to strengthen judicial institutions, so that it is not just about access to justice, but about having a robust judicial system that can then deliver justice and act as a deterrent?

Mr Hurd: A hugely important issue, but I am going to defer to Ben to talk about the Justice for All programme and other specific programmes.

Ben Mellor: This fits squarely into the sanctions bit of the "triple-S". With our Justice for All programme, we have been providing support specifically to the parts of Government that are in charge of both investigating and prosecuting corruption, so through the Economic and Financial Crimes Committee—the EFCC—but also through working on the judicial process. As you said, the challenge with tackling corruption in Nigeria is not so much about charging; it is about getting that all the way successfully through to conviction. That is the area we need to work on. I should say that it is not just DFID that works in this space. For HMG, this is an area where the whole of Government is involved. We work very closely with the National Crime Agency and other parts of the UK system to make sure we provide that support.

Q126 Fiona Bruce: Can you give me more detail? Do we have lawyers working there with the Nigerian judicial system? Are they working with the Bar Association? What is actually being done to strengthen the systems?

Ben Mellor: I can really only speak to the DFID-supported part of the overall approach. There is support that is going on with lawyers who are working on supporting prosecutions, but that is supported by other parts of the UK Government as complementary to what we are doing as DFID. The bit we have been doing as DFID on the specific support we have been giving to the court system has been mainly around lower-level courts as opposed to those who are directly themselves engaged in the anti-corruption piece, because that is the area where the court engages with the judiciary. However, the actual support that I think you are talking about is provided by other parts of the UK Government.

Q127 Fiona Bruce: I wonder if we could ask for some further information because it is such a key issue, and of course it is now the new goal 16 in the SDGs to provide access to justice for all and effective accountability on institutions at all levels. It is something that we need to have more information on, please. Could I just mention also ICAI's 2011 inquiry into corruption, which was partly based in Nigeria? That was quite critical of DFID's understanding of how to address corruption. What lessons do you feel, Mr Mellor, you have learned in terms of how to address anti-corruption following that report?

Ben Mellor: We agreed absolutely with ICAI's assessment that tackling corruption has got to be at the heart of what we are trying to do in Nigeria. As the Minister said, we have a zero tolerance to corruption when it relates to our own programmes and we also believe that corruption is one of the key constraints to growth and to development of the country. Therefore, we need to do everything that we can to try to help the Government to tackle it. Specifically in response to the ICAI report—but also there was a desire on the part of ourselves to be more ambitious and on the part of the Government, particularly under President Buhari, to really address corruption—was putting together the comprehensive strategy to tackle corruption, which is looking, again, at the three Ss. It is also bringing together all those different parts of the UK Government machine that can support that effort. The fact that President Buhari came to the anti-corruption summit and was able to speak about the levels of commitment that Nigeria will now take going forward to tackle corruption means that we are well placed, as the UK, to support the Nigerian Government as they get serious about changing that picture.

Q128 Fiona Bruce: All of that sounds very fine and having a strategy is good, but what I really ask you is, bearing in mind it is now five years on from 2011, could you also write to the Committee and say how the lessons that you have learned from the ICAI report have made a difference in Nigeria in terms of tackling corruption? You may also want to clarify what the challenges are that remain, but, nonetheless, very specifically, please can we have that because this is such a critical question, I feel there is not time for us to address it here in the meeting.

Ben Mellor: What I would say, Chairman, very briefly is that two very big things have changed. We cannot underestimate the importance of a President coming to power whose primary mandate is to tackle corruption in a country where corruption is endemic. This is a very big change and it puts a lot of onus on us to get our act together to produce support in the most effective way because we are, arguably, not going to get a better chance in Nigeria. When I was in Nigeria, I asked for a meeting with all the Government agencies that are working together on anti-corruption to articulate the strategy. I was impressed by the “triple S” strategy—sanctions, systems, society—but part of the change is that there is, of course, HMG effort here which is much more co-ordinated than it was in the past and much more connected to the work that needs to be done in London as well to support this.

Mr Hurd: Fiona, we will write to you to give a little bit more substance to it.

Fiona Bruce: Thank you, Minister, for referring to the fact that there are now other Departments working on this issue, because this is something that our Committee is now very

mindful of. We would appreciate it if when you write to us, you could also elaborate on what those other Departments as well as DFID are doing.

Q129 Pauline Latham: Recently, in written evidence, we heard that employment schemes such as DFID's Mafita programme simply pump more entrants into a saturated informal economy. Research suggests that this can create social tensions between the different groups and frustrations with the failure of education to provide a decent livelihood. How is DFID ensuring that its training programmes are well matched with employment opportunities? Does DFID take into account the risk of increased social tensions associated with increasingly saturated labour markets? How is DFID Nigeria working to help businesses scale up to create jobs, rather than fostering an increase in the number of unsustainable microenterprises?

Mr Hurd: I am going to give Ben a little bit of time to prepare a specific Nigeria response to that. This issue is so important, Chair. Increasingly, as we look at Africa, we think that a common growing challenge, which is inextricably linked with our British national interest, is this question of demographics and growing populations. Demographic projections are reasonably reliable and, by 2040, Africa is going to be the biggest labour market in the world. The World Bank predicted that something like 18 million jobs will need to be found a year. By 2050, one in four of the world's population will be African. I put it to you very simply: if we do not find a good enough answer to the question of what are all these young people are going to do, then some of the things we worry about today, quite reasonably—the ghastly images of the boats and the concerns about security and vulnerability to extremism—are as nothing compared to what is coming down the track, if we do not get this right. This is arguably the biggest strategic issue facing Africa and those concerned with Africa, and it is a very major issue for Europe as well. I do not think there has been enough focus attached to it. As you will hear from Ben, we are, both in the context of Nigeria but I assure you also in the context of DFID, thinking increasingly ambitiously and deeply about how we can contribute to a good answer to that fundamental question.

Ben Mellor: As your question implied and as the Minister said, this is front and centre of the challenge. I appreciate I probably said that about corruption, but I am allowed to have two things front and centre of our challenge. I am incredibly conscious that 2 million Nigerians are coming into the job market each year. We need to make sure that we are helping, as you said, the private sector to create the jobs that will help those people. One of the things I would emphasise is it is not just about any job; it is about the quality of jobs, which I think was implicit in your question. It is good quality jobs that are adding value. The other thing that I think is really important is where those jobs are—Nigeria is a country with regional inequality—and also who is getting those jobs. There is gender inequality about where the jobs are being found.

You mentioned the Mafita programme. It is early days to be making judgments on whether Mafita will succeed or not, but one of the intentions behind it as a programme is very much to try to answer some of the questions about who is getting the jobs. It is targeted specifically at youth in the north—the Almajiri, who are the marginalised youth of northern Nigeria. It is targeted at them and it is also specifically aimed, to your initial question, at identifying opportunities within the private sector and, therefore, making sure that the skills that it provides are matching where we believe the private sector could go to

avoid that problem we have seen in previous similar programmes which simply, as you said, pump more skills that are not needed into a job market. However, it is a big challenge and that is why we are starting a relatively small programme to test it. We know more about what does not work than we do about what does in terms of that piece. We need to get it right.

You also asked about how we can help businesses scale up, and that is really important. The Nigerian economy is characterised by very entrepreneurial people. There are many, many, many small, micro-sized enterprises. The challenge in Nigeria is for those enterprises to grow. The two main constraints, as we see it, are the business environment in terms of the legal frameworks and the shockingly low position that Nigeria has in the ease of doing business index, and the second issue is about access to finance. It is very hard for small businesses to be able to access the finance they need in order to grow. I have been working on both those areas. It is slow but really, really important work.

Q130 Stephen Doughty: DFID has had a record over a number of years for working on financial inclusion and access to finance projects. Obviously, we have got the EFInA programme in Nigeria, which has as one of its focuses women and particularly people in the north. The survey has shown that women have not had access to finance and access to financial resources as quickly as men and that actually the number of people financially excluded in the north in particular has gone up in last two surveys; I think it was 2012 and 2014. Can you just tell us a little bit about why the programme is struggling to reach those two target groups and what is being done to address that? Is it just the conflict or are there some other factors going on there?

Ben Mellor: The situation of access to finance is particularly bad for women, and it is particularly bad for women in the north. That is why, through the EFInA programme that you mentioned, we identified that there was an area we needed to look at explicitly. I think this speaks to the challenge. I would say that it has not failed as a programme, but it has not done enough given the size of the challenge that we face. Women's exclusion from the financial sector has decreased from 85% to 58% since the programme began. That is success in terms of getting women access to finance, but if you break that down, exactly as you are saying, what we see is we need to do more on access in the north. Does that say there is a limit to what you can do purely on access to finance and that you need to look at societal attitudes and, as you alluded to in the question, the conflict issues and so on? I think that is right. I think it is why one programme on its own will never be able to transform. However, coming back to where we started the discussion, that is where this political savvy approach of saying, "Address this comprehensively" will start to make a difference. I think EFInA has been successful; it just has not been successful enough given the scale of the challenge that it was intended to address.

Q131 Stephen Doughty: What is the relationship like with commercial banks and the traditional banking sector? How is that working in terms of increasing access?

Ben Mellor: It is critical. This is how it will work. Getting the commercial banking sector to be better able to serve, particularly the rural poor, will be key. I think it is a work in progress. They are commercially driven, by definition, and this is not at the profit-making end of their activities. At the moment, when they are suffering from an

economic downturn—the banking sector is under a lot of pressure in Nigeria—our job as DFID, through the relationships we have built up with them, is to keep them in that sector and to keep them providing the services that the rural poor, particularly the rural poor women in the north, need.

Q132 Stephen Doughty: What is your sense of the priority that the national Government—the federal Government—are placing on this issue? What are they doing on the need to address this particular gap in the north?

Ben Mellor: This is another issue where there is an opportunity with this President and particularly with the Vice President, who is very keen on this agenda. In the budget for 2016, there was a big emphasis on social protection and things like conditional cash transfers, which is one way they can get the programme out to the poor. At federal level, there is a lot of political enthusiasm behind it. Translating that political enthusiasm into reality on the ground is, of course, a challenge.

Q133 Albert Owen: Concerns have been raised about the negative impact of the energy sector privatisation on the poor. We heard written evidence to suggest that Nigerians have difficulty accessing electricity in the first place, but when it comes on under the reforms then they just cannot afford the price increase. How does this align with DFID's poverty reduction mandate, which looks after the poor?

Mr Hurd: Can I just start with the macro comments on here, and then I will ask Ben to talk to the specific programmes. In terms of poverty reduction there is a hugely important piece around delivery of basic services, but there is also an enormously important piece around how you stimulate the private sector to create economic opportunity.

I had dinner in Lagos with quite a good cross-representation of SMEs in Lagos. I asked them, "What is the biggest barrier to you growing?" I expected them to say corruption. They did not. Universally it was access to power. Therefore, there are trade-offs and complexities in getting this right, as you well know, but the overriding policy objective in Nigeria is to get the energy system working and provision of reliable electricity.

We have been trying to advocate to the Government—Ben will tell you how we are working to push and encourage the Government further down the path they want to go to make that happen, because at the moment this is a system that really only works for the relatively well off. It has to work for everyone. The first thing is provision and reliability. That is the priority No.1. We are advocating for some subsidy and some tariffs to benefit the poorest in the community.

I am very clear in my mind that the priority is that the system failed, absolutely. There is now a process of reform, which has a decent chance of producing an energy system that is capable of sustaining itself. That has required some quite tough political decisions on tariffs, which we have supported. We could not see another way to getting an energy system on a commercially sustainable basis, which ultimately is what will underpin reliability and the kind of provision that we want to see. That would be my macro point. Ben can fill in some of the detail of what we are doing on the ground.

Ben Mellor: That is right. You have a country of 180 million people with the same amount of power being generated as Luton. There is a mismatch between the power needs and the on-grid power provided. Some 34 million people last year were benefiting from improved power supply as a result of the reforms to the power sector, which is good. Just under 960,000 of those were poor people. You can see, therefore, the grid power, even with the reforms, is only addressing the needs of less than 1 million when we estimate that there are 100 million poor people in Nigeria.

The benefit to the poor in Nigeria will be served by the reform of the overall sector and as that starts to improve. We are seeing with the support we provided to the power sector that there is commitment on the part of the private investors coming in to increase support for power sector generation. Some \$2.5 billion of new investment has been pledged as part of the privatisation process.

At the beginning of this year we were seeing the highest levels of generation since history began in Nigeria. That has come off over the last few months, mainly to do with the problems of the Delta and the problems of vandalism of the gas supply. There have been security problems that have brought that number down. We are starting to see some of those successes.

Q134 Albert Owen: That is not the evidence that we are getting from others, with respect. What they are saying is quite clearly that targets have been missed or dropped from the reform programme, and there is the concern that it is hitting the poor and impacting on the poor in the cities but also in the rural areas. We are talking about an oil-rich and energy-rich country; the balance of payments is dependent on it and yet its own citizens are not sharing in the benefits.

Ben Mellor: I have had the debate with the people that have put out that line of argument and gave evidence to you on that. My view is that we need to improve the number of people that are accessing grid electricity from the current levels of 960,000 so that we can make sure that poor people are benefiting from improved electricity supply. We also need to make sure we are providing off-grid solutions because it will take too long for the grid to reach those rural poor that we really care about. To me, that is the key issue. Get the power sector sustainable and get it producing more reliable power because that will create jobs and that will create wealth.

Q135 Albert Owen: How will you influence the price on that off-grid? Off-grid is usually more expensive than on-grid. That is what energy Ministers tell us in this country anyway. Certainly if we are going into new technology in rural areas, for instance, what control could DFID have if it was to invest in that programme on the price of electricity to ordinary citizens.

Ben Mellor: We are investing in off-grid already, in particular off-grid solar and we are making sure that that is reaching out to the poorest, and it can be done in an extremely cost-efficient way. When you are talking about the choice of no power or power, then the pricing is different. Long term, the cheapest would be for the grid to extend, absolutely, but we cannot wait 20 years. If you are a poor rural woman in northern Nigeria, you want to have the power now. Solar is cheaper than diesel, which is the other option that is available to you.

Mr Hurd: Can I just emphasise one point, Chairman? One of the distinctive British contributions to the debate about power in Africa now has been the emphasis we are placing on the off-grid power. The work on increasing generation capacity and improving the grid is absolutely fundamental, particularly for the business sector. If the goal is universal access there is no way that Africa is going to meet global goal 7 by 2030 on current run rates without a very big step up in off-grid.

Ben's point is absolutely right. If our concern here is about those furthest from the market and the poorest—as Ben said at the moment they have nothing. They are spending a lot of money on kerosene, which is toxic. This is one of the things we are pushing, particularly as the Energy Africa campaign is all about accelerating a market for off-grid household solar systems where technology has pushed the price down very, very fast and where the other game changer is the ability to pay as you go, whether through mobile banking in Kenya and others where that is more sophisticated or other mechanisms that allow you to pay as you go. This has made this technology increasingly affordable against kerosene, which is the alternative.

Q136 Albert Owen: Do you have evidence that that is working and having a real impact on the poor because that has not come across in the evidence?

Mr Hurd: On the off-grid piece, yes, we can certainly—

Q137 Albert Owen: Let us be honest about it, Minister: people do not care whether you are on-grid or off-grid. They want electricity and they want it at affordable prices.

Mr Hurd: Our point, Albert, is the IEA's—the International Energy Agency—forecasts all bears this out. Even if everything works in terms of the on-grid work, fundamental as it is, it is likely to only reach 40% or 50% of the population, so we are asking ourselves what we can do for the 60% that is quicker? We think the answer is off-grid and the answer is increasingly off-grid households—

Q138 Albert Owen: Do you have any empirical evidence of this working? This is my point. Are there small towns, are there villages, are there individual properties where this is working?

Mr Hurd: We can give you evidence in Nigeria and there is broader evidence because what is distinctive about this is this is not a subsidy; this is about us asking how we can accelerate a market, whether it be social enterprise or the private sector, to want to deliver this product and service.

The test there is the growth of the market, and the first place you look in Africa at the moment is East Africa in Kenya and Tanzania, where this is more mature. It is 500,000 people in Kenya now; it is growing. One company alone is growing about 2,000 a week. I have seen for myself just how much demand there.

Q139 Albert Owen: What are the barriers to that in Nigeria, if there are barriers? You are citing East Africa.

Mr Hurd: There are lots of barriers and that is what the Energy Africa campaign is about. It is about the British Government working with partners to work with

Governments, Nigeria and others. We want to work with 14 countries across Africa; that is our target. We need to say, “These are the barriers. What can we do to break them down?”

There is lots that Governments can do because a lot of this is about the cost that they impose on products through VAT and the cost of getting products into the country. A lot of it is about making it easier for the entrepreneurs to access finance, but that is the package that we have put together in encouraging partners to come in or asking how we can accelerate this market and make it work for the poorest because, as you know, prices come down with volume. We do not want to be subsidising a market; we want to be growing one and accelerating it.

Albert Owen: That is the hope. The evidence we are getting now—

Mr Hurd: Just on the off-grid piece.

Q140 Albert Owen: Again, on the on-grid, there are poor people in cities who have no access and they are using, as you said, alternatives that are more expensive and they are being ripped off on it. The project that you are talking about is the expertise to create a market, which I am sure British companies are involved in. Do you have any evidence that that is working and that it is not just creating entrepreneurs and businesses, but is helping the poor?

Mr Hurd: Yes, I have seen for myself. There is evidence. In the interests of time—

Chair: Write to us with the evidence please.

Mr Hurd: I will write to you, Chairman.

Q141 Chair: We are going to move on now to education, where there are a number of different strands that we will be covering. Let me just start off. A number of us went to Istanbul for the World Humanitarian Summit, where there was a big announcement of a new appeal around education in emergencies. Ben, you referred to education in emergencies earlier. Can you say a bit about how you think that would assist in practical terms the situation, particularly of internally displaced people and their education in Nigeria?

Ben Mellor: The challenge particularly in north-east Nigeria is that you have around 2 million internally displaced people. A large number of those are children and are therefore missing out on education. They have now been displaced for coming up for two years. The longer they miss education the more their future life chances are being damaged.

In terms of how we can respond to it, the UK has been involved in the Safe Schools Initiative, which was originally a response to the Chibok abductions over two years ago. As well as looking at literally how you make schools safe, it was also looking at how to provide improved education facilities for the displaced people in the north-east. It looks at models that have been picked up from the outcomes of Istanbul, around things like School in a Bag approaches where you can do very low-cost, temporary education options.

The model of the displacement in Nigeria is very much not into refugee camps or IDP camps. It is into host communities. The schools that exist are then suffering because there is over-crowding, but you can do things like double-shifting in schools to increase their capacity and so on to make sure that you can provide education. None of those things are easy to do and we are learning from the process what is the most effective, but it is a work in progress and we are getting there.

Q142 Chair: Can I bring us now to a subject that we have discussed, particularly those who were on the Lagos leg of the recent Committee visit to Nigeria, which is the balance in terms of DFID's work with the public sector and the private sector in education in Nigeria, although it has broader implications for policy in other parts of the world? Is there a risk that support for and the proliferation of low-fee schools could leave the very poorest behind, Minister?

Mr Hurd: If there is it is one we will manage it very carefully, as you know. "Leave no-one behind" is stitched into, if that is the appropriate phrase, the DNA of the Department. You certainly do not need a lecture from me about the importance of education to that agenda with your experience.

Again, the candid response is that we have to be pragmatic and not ideological. The pragmatic view when considering how you improve the outcomes in Lagos, for example, where 70% of kids are in private schools, is you have to go where the kids are, not necessarily where you might want them to be.

It comes back to what you are trying to achieve. If your objective is trying to improve the school experience, improve the offer to young people and improve ultimately learning outcomes, I do not see why you should exclude working with the private sector or looking to encourage innovation from the private sector or looking at how you could reduce the cost of access to the private sector system if the private sector system is such a fundamental part of the ecosystem of learning, as it is in Lagos or in Mombasa.

We just have to deal with the reality of the ecosystem that we are dealing with, and because, as you know, the challenge is so enormous in terms of education, not just in terms of access where arguably we have focused in the past, but in terms of improving outcomes where frankly we have probably only just started on a journey, again it is in the interests of that agenda to look at a mixed economy where it already exists and ask ourselves what we can learn from that, how we can improve that, or, if it is working, how we can make it easier to access that.

Ben Mellor: Just to reinforce a couple of points there, first, it is important to note that the majority of our support to education in Nigeria is for the public education system.

Q143 Chair: Remind us about that, Ben.

Ben Mellor: It is about 70% to 75% through ESSPIN and the Girls' Education Project. In fact, it is slightly more than that. I will write with that number. We are very keen to make sure, as the Minister said, that we work out where the children are to improve the quality of their education. We are trying to do two things. We are trying to improve access and we are trying to improve the quality of education. Where those children are in private schools, as they are in Lagos, or where they are in Islamic schools,

as we saw in Kano for those who came up to Kano, where they are in informal Islamic schools outside the state system, we will work with both of those to improve the quality of the education. I would also make the point that we are very much looking at the low-cost end because of our focus, rightly, on the poorest.

Q144 Chair: Do you accept that, even at low cost, for the poorest that makes those schools not an option and therefore they are either going to go to a state school that by definition is not getting the extra help because it is going to the private school, or they are not going to go to school at all, which surely goes fundamentally against the commitments to universal primary education?

Ben Mellor: The purpose of the DEEPEN programme, which is the programme that works in Lagos—the private education Nigeria programme—is to improve the ability of the Lagos state—of the state system—to regulate and improve the quality of the private schools. The private schools that exist to meet the needs of those 70% of kids do a shocking quality of education. There are some good ones, and I do not want to slander an entire sector, but we could do a lot, and the state Government needs to do a lot, to improve the quality of that education, because those very poor people are paying because they value education; they put a value on education but they are not getting a quality product in exchange for that. That is what we are trying to do: improve that quality.

Q145 Chair: As you know, when we were there we visited three schools in Lagos, two of them private and one state school. What struck me about the state school was there were just so many pupils there that the issues were about the class sizes, and it felt to me that if we had some resource to put in, would it not make sense to give more to the state schools so they could employ more teachers and have smaller class sizes because the teachers, as I understood it in the state schools, tend to be better qualified and better paid than they typically are in the private schools. That is a different sort of challenge than might exist perhaps in other countries.

Ben Mellor: I would argue that it is a both/and on this one. Yes, there are good teachers in the public sector but there are also a lot of ghost teachers in the public sector, and every time we do a census we find that people are not turning up. We have gone on from the corruption discussion, but the exposure that most Nigerians have to corruption is having to bribe their teachers to get an exam result. It is very much part of that whole need for strengthening, and that is in the public sector as well as the private sector. We need to improve both. We need, as the Minister said, to be pragmatic about this and we work with the decision that people in Lagos have made—that they prefer the private sector—but we also look to improve the public sector provision of education in Lagos. Thirty per cent. of a lot is still a large number of kids, so we are working to improve the public sector provision through our programming in Lagos state and so is the state Government of Lagos.

Q146 Chair: As you know, we visited one of the Bridge academies. In many ways we were impressed with what we saw, but we have had evidence to this inquiry that Bridge had said they do not operate in, I think, the Makoko slum because there is no market there. Does this not raise serious concerns about DFID funding an organisation that is saying that it will not serve the poorest in terms of education?

Ben Mellor: I have not had that conversation with Bridge. Their model is a really interesting and innovative model. We were very keen to encourage them to come into Lagos. We were also very keen to encourage them and others to come and provide innovative ways to improve quality of education across northern Nigeria as well. It is something that we should encourage. I will take that back and check on that one, Chairman.

Q147 Chair: A final question on this: if their model is interesting and innovative, could it be made to work without fees, with a bit more subsidy?

Ben Mellor: There are things that they are doing. The way that they work with digital and enhanced use of that is something that I would love to see rolled out across the public sector. It is a very, very powerful model and it is a very low-cost model.

Mr Hurd: They are challenging the role of the teacher, which is interesting.

Chair: The aspect that I found most challenging was the sense, particularly in primary education, that a fee is being charged that must mean that some families are excluded and therefore the question is: where do those children end up? I still do not feel that I have had an answer to that question.

Mr Evans: The Bridge International fee is very low: 6,500 naira a term, which is about £18 or £20. I agree that the absolute poorest of the poor would find that unaffordable, but most poor will prioritise education for their children and would not find that the key barrier. The main barrier that poor people have is a mixture of poverty, whether there is a school nearby and whether they think they will get quality out of it. Parents are the same the world over. If they do not think they are going to get quality education, they do not send their kids to school.

Chair: We will definitely return to this, not least because we are going to have an inquiry into education and some of these issues do apply in other countries.

Q148 Pauline Latham: Could we move on to SDG 4, on inclusive and equitable quality education? Chris Horn, a former ICAI consultant, questions whether DFID's education interventions have got a realistic chance of helping to achieve SDG 4. We know that education services require a steady funding stream to provide a stable impact, and so far education has experienced uncertain funding across Nigeria. For instance, in Jigawa they only get 3% of the annual state budget that is released. How can DFID influence the state or federal Governments to improve the funding so that education can deliver a quality service for every Nigerian child?

Mr Hurd: The honest truth is that Nigeria's prospects for achieving SDG 4 should be challenging. We know that and the challenges in Nigeria are amplified by conflict and the situation in the north-east. We are proud of the work that we have done over many years in terms of increasing access, and Ben can talk to that. Again, I will be quite honest with you—Ben can complement this—it is not entirely clear to me yet what priority the Government attaches to education at the federal level. Certainly at the state level I have come away, when I visited the north, encouraged by the level of top-level buy-in to the importance of education, particularly for girls. I am not, frankly, yet quite clear enough about the buy-in at the federal level. We know what the priorities are, and they are corruption, security and the economy. It is hard to argue with those.

I come back to my macro point before: if the increasingly primary challenge is young people and jobs, you cannot detach that from your process of preparing young people for life in employment. Therefore, these agendas are inextricably linked. Part of our process is to keep making this case and keep influencing and, critically, making sure that what resources are allocated to education get there. If we can achieve that, then we will have achieved a lot as a starting point, aside from the question of whether the budget is big enough. Ben, did you want complement that at all?

Ben Mellor: That is right. Certainly, in terms of SDG 4, it is unlikely to be achieved by 2030. That is our current assessment. It is not impossible—nothing is impossible—but on current trend it is unlikely.

Pauline Latham: The numbers are looking against it to start with. They have not got the teachers or the buildings.

Ben Mellor: Exactly. That is why, in our approach to education, we will continue to balance those two things of looking to do direct delivery to support service delivery, support improving the quality of the buildings, as you said, improving the quality of the teachers that are available and looking at innovative digital options where those exist. We will also continue to bang away on this political piece. We keep coming back to that issue of how the politics and the technical come together. We need political will and it needs to be political will, as the Minister said, both at the federal level and at the state level. A really good commissioner at a state level can make a huge difference.

Q149 Albert Owen: Just following on from Paul on education, and in particular the Girls' Education Project that UNICEF runs, we have heard criticism from the same sources—Pauline mentioned with Mr Horn—with regards to the quality of the programme. Are you satisfied that it has become more effective and it is getting better, because you have heard the criticism? Does DFID have sufficient influence over the way UNICEF is delivering the GEP?

Ben Mellor: We share the assessment of the ICAI report on GEP. We have spent a lot of time and a lot of effort in terms of turning that programme around. We had the option of stopping the programme, but because of the fact that we were absolutely committed to improving the number of particularly girls in education in the north and this was part of that response, we thought it better to try to invest the time turning the programme around rather than simply stopping it.

The last review that we did of the programme said that it is now much improved. I like “much improved”, but I prefer “excellent”, so we will continue to push it. What we have done with UNICEF is to basically trim down the programme, so it basically just delivers on its core. It was too ambitious in what it originally tried to deliver. It is more streamlined. We did have quite a lot of influence. We took it up at very senior levels within UNICEF to make sure they put the right people on to the programme in-country and that has definitely improved over the last couple of years.

Q150 Albert Owen: It is much improved, you suggest, but again the annual review in 2015 recommended that “this UNICEF managed programme must move on from an advocacy approach to one which that supports the effective operation of supply chains”. Is

that happening? Are you pushing that to happen? I hear what you say: that you have taken steps to improve it. Are you able to change the culture of UNICEF to get the outcomes that you want?

Ben Mellor: We have been trying to do that. We have literally just flagged off the 2016 review and that will be assessing how we are doing and how they are doing, more importantly. It will probably be too late for this Committee report.

Q151 Chair: Is it harder to influence because they are a UN body than if they were a different sort of partner?

Ben Mellor: There are pros and cons. With the UN engagement you get all the additional value-add of having a UN engagement. That is why they are able to work in difficult places. They can ensure the connections between that programme and other things that UNICEF are doing. That was why we liked them as an implementing partner. In terms of the influencing, DFID has fantastic relationships with the UN at a very senior level, so we can always deploy that. I am not sure it is anything intrinsic about UNICEF. There were a number of problems in the country team that I have worked through with them.

Q152 Pauline Latham: Talking about gender equality, they have problems in Nigeria right the way from the top, right through Government, and they need a bit more gender equality. We have heard again in evidence that the three to five-year programme window is not long enough for DFID to deliver changes in social norms. You have already said this morning that it is going to take a long time and it is slow progress. How does DFID assess the impact of its work in this area, and does DFID Nigeria recognise that progress may be very slow in this respect?

Mr Hurd: Yes, but that is no reason not to be doggedly persistent in making it quite clear to our Nigerian counterparts and partners that for us it is an absolutely core pillar of the British approach, offer and expectation, because growing up as a girl in Nigeria, particularly northern Nigeria, is really tough. It is about as tough as it gets. What you are looking for, when there is something that is that culturally difficult, is local champions, and for people at the highest level to get it and support it. When I went to meet the Emir of Kano, I was talking with a champion of this agenda whose personal issue is early child marriage. This is one of the most important religious leaders in the region. Our mission is to be absolutely persistent in saying, "This matters enormously to us, and it should matter to you for these reasons", and then to work with people who get it and to structure our programming in the smartest, most intelligent way, to keep making a difference. I am pretty satisfied that we have got an appropriate level of ambition and we are doing some smart things.

My visit culminated in a reception at the British Embassy and they got to celebrate the women parliamentarians in Nigeria. It is only about 5% or 6% representation. That has gone backwards, and we wanted to send a very strong signal. We launched a programme to encourage more women into politics at local and state level. That was sending a very strong signal about what matters to Britain. It went down extremely well. You hear their stories. I am used to stories of how tough it is for women to get into this place, but wow, particularly at state level when I went to meet all the politicians in Kano, there was not a woman in the room. It is persistence, intelligent programming, working

with people who get it, and recognition that this is very patient work and that the education piece is absolutely fundamental.

Q153 Fiona Bruce: On our visit to Nigeria we heard of the success of the SuNMaP Project and DFID has played important role in tackling malaria in Nigeria. Can you tell us if this project will be supported going forward? It has clearly had very considerable positive impact in the country.

Ben Mellor: We are just at the beginning of the new business planning cycle, and so we are currently in process of finishing off the design for the successor programme to SuNMaP. If that all goes smoothly, it will come on stream in about January. As I discussed with the Committee when you were visiting, the current SuNMaP programme has come to an end. That sounds like there is a gap. I would really want to emphasise that tackling malaria in Nigeria is very much a collective effort. It is not an unexpected gap; there was always known to be a gap in what DFID was doing bilaterally. What we want to do is make sure that our new programme did the right sort of things. The key shift in SuNMaP II, as opposed to SuNMaP I, is that some of that commodity purchasing that we were more heavily involved in under the previous programme will be shifted over to the Global Fund. What we are doing under SuNMaP II is making sure that we are enabling and supporting the Global Fund in their effort. We can talk about the Global Fund challenges. The idea of SuNMaP II is very much to provide that in-country support to make sure that they do their job properly.

Mr Hurd: It is worth stating the context for this is a refreshed commitment by the UK to spending £500 million a year combatting a disease that still kills a child every minute. Nigeria is such a heavily burdened country. It is always going to be an incredibly important part of the mission. We tackle it through a mixture of bilateral and the Global Fund, which we may have time to talk about. The replenishment of the Global Fund will be a very important milestone on that journey.

Fiona Bruce: That is good to hear.

Q154 Chair: Let me finish with quite a broad question about the balance of support moving forward within Nigeria and, in particular, how DFID sees the general and overarching goal of poverty reduction fitting into the proper focus on the need to tackle some of the issues of conflict and instability, particularly in the north-east, the Middle Belt and the Niger Delta. There are two aspects to the question: how will work in the North East affect the balance of the country-wide programming; and how is the Department positioning itself strategically to intervene in the north-east, when the security situation is ready for you to do so?

Mr Hurd: On the last first, you met the Vice President when you were there. When I met him I made it very clear to him that Britain stood ready to support a nationally, Nigerian-led reconstruction or renaissance for the north-east, which is being calibrated and discussed, and committees are being set up to look at it. We have got an offer on the table there to support that specifically.

In terms of the balance going forward, if the starting point here is about how we can be sure we are going to make an impact in this country, focus is going to be very important. That includes geographic focus. Something like 60% of our work takes place

in the north and that is increasing. Obviously the reason for that is that that is where the biggest burden of poverty is. Geographic focus is going to be an important part of the future, but we are dealing in a country whose stability cannot be taken for granted. We always talk about the north-east. Not enough is done to talk about the Delta area. We are very alive to the fact that part of our challenge is about flexibility and ability to respond to events. Geographic focus is going to be important for us. In terms of what we prioritise in terms of activity, they are all connected in terms of the journey that we want to support Nigeria on, which I articulated earlier. Basically, we want better governance, a stronger economy, more resilience to shocks and more progress on human development indicators. They are all connected. We are in the process of finalising the operating plan for Nigeria, and there will be a public-facing part of that that will obviously be available to everyone, which will give a sense of how we are striking that balance. Ben, did you want to complement that?

Ben Mellor: The key for me is focus, as the Minister said. It is also about agility. We have been able, over the last five years or so, to do that shift into the north. We are looking, at the moment, as the Minister says, at how, as the situation allows, we can shift into the north-east. We have demonstrated that we are actually quite good at being flexible with the oil tanker of a development programme that takes 20 or 30 years to deliver some of those long-term results. We would be in a position to do more in the Delta if that is required. At the moment the two things that we are doing in the Delta are around conflict reduction and non-oil employment. Those are the kinds of things that one would see as the kernel of an approach.

The other thing we learnt from our increased emphasis on the north-east was that we go into Delta, if we do more in the Delta, as one Government. It is not just about DFID. It is about making sure we get the political piece right. It is making sure we get the security piece right, and it is making sure that we get the development piece right.

Q155 Albert Owen: As a group, we did meet with the parents of Chibok children who had been kidnapped. The international response has been such that it has been critical of the Government's failure to protect women and children. I know DFID and the Foreign Office have been involved in this. Could you elaborate on what has been done there? It is hugely important that we have not had many statements on this either from the Foreign Office or yourselves in Parliament. Maybe we are not asking the right questions.

Mr Hurd: I can certainly refer you to joint statements that James Duddridge and I have made, not least on the anniversary of the abduction. I would be very happy to share that with the Committee. Britain was very quick to make a substantial offer to the Nigerian Government of support, right from the start. The Prime Minister clearly personally associates himself with the Bring Back Our Girls campaign. On my recent visit I raised it with the Vice President and anyone else, and I met with the campaign group to make it quite clear that Britain stood ready to support but we needed to respond to a Nigerian call for support. This needs to be Nigerian-led. I am delighted that one girl has been released. It is something that we will raise with Nigerians every time.

Q156 Albert Owen: Do you think that the Nigerian Government would have been quicker to respond if foreign students had been kidnapped?

Mr Hurd: Pass.

Q157 Albert Owen: It is a question we were asked to ask, so I am doing my duty.

Mr Hurd: What I would say is—credit where credit is due—the President has come in and has said, “Security is one of my top priorities”, and he has moved, and we have supported him in that movement with, as you know, military personnel to support with the training and also financial assistance. Some progress has been made against Boko Haram. That is undeniable. He has made some public announcements about the girls, which are rooted in a good place. We raise it every time we are there, but we cannot force them to take action. You all understand that the operational conversations about this are quite delicate, because obviously they do not want to do anything to jeopardise the lives of the girls. The intricacies and difficulties at an operational level are probably quite challenging. We should respect that. In terms of the position of the British Government and the statements we make and who we visit and who we see on our visits and what we say, we are persistent on it.

Q158 Chair: We all found it the most powerful and moving part of the visit when we, at Ben’s instigation, joined the vigil, and some of us even had the opportunity to address it. It is really important that Albert has put that on record. We are exploring ways through the House that we can keep this issue alive and have statements made to the House.

Mr Hurd: I made statements to the media when I was there. I said, “The British are here to help. We would like to see progress on this,” so that we keep the pressure on.

Chair: Thank you very much indeed. That is an appropriate note on which to end. Thank you both for your evidence here today. Thanks to my colleagues, particularly to Pauline, Albert and Fiona for lasting the duration.