HOUSE OF COMMONS

International Development Committee

Oral evidence: Sexual exploitation and abuse in the aid sector: next steps, HC 605

Thursday 16 July 2020

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Watch the meeting

Members present: Sarah Champion (Chair); Mr Richard Bacon; Brendan Clarke-Smith; Chris Law; Mr Ian Liddell-Grainger; Mr Virendra Sharma.

Questions 1 - 52

Witnesses

I: Professor Rosa Freedman, Professor of Law, Conflict and Global Development, University of Reading School of Law; Dr Miranda Brown, Independent Consultant on International Human Rights, Safeguarding, Integrity and Accountability; Alina Potts, Research Scientist, The Global Women's Institute, George Washington University.

II: Frances Longley, Co-Chair, NGO Safeguarding Working Group on Leadership and Culture; Sally Proudlove, Co-Chair, NGO Safeguarding Working Group on Leadership and Culture; Sarah Maguire, Director, Representative, Safeguarding Leads Network; Jill Healey, Co-Chair, NGO Safeguarding Working Group on Accountability to Beneficiaries and Survivors; Steve Reeves, Co-Chair, NGO Safeguarding Working Group on The Employment Cycle.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Professor Rosa Freedman, Dr Miranda Brown and Alina Potts.

Q1 **Chair:** I would like to start this Committee session of the International Development Select Committee. It is our first session on sexual exploitation and abuse in the aid sector. We are very fortunate to be joined by three witnesses on this first panel. I wonder if you could each introduce yourself and give us a little bit of your background as to what brought you to this path.

Dr Brown: I am Miranda Brown. I am a whistleblower at the UN human rights office. I disclosed child sexual abuse in the Central African Republic by peacekeepers in 2015, and since then I have been advocating for greater accountability in relation to sexual exploitation and abuse in the aid sector.

Alina Potts: My name is Alina Potts. I am a research scientist with the Global Women's Institute at the George Washington University, where I conduct participatory action research on sexual exploitation and abuse in Uganda and Lebanon, two of the largest refugee-hosting countries in the world. My background is as an aid worker. I worked for over 10 years in a number of responses in Africa, the Middle East, Asia and Europe, with NGOs and the UN.

Professor Freedman: My name is Rosa Freedman. I am a professor of law at the University of Reading. My background is on the United Nations and human rights, with a specific focus on preventing sexual exploitation and abuse by peacekeepers and humanitarians. I sit on the UN Secretary General's Civil Society Advisory Board for prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse.

Chair: Thank you. I feel very fortunate to have such an experienced panel.

Q2 **Mr Liddell-Grainger:** Ms Potts, could you set out quite simply what we mean by sexual exploitation and the abuse of aid recipients? What sorts of behaviours are you personally aware of?

Alina Potts: I would love to do that. I will do that first by sharing the voices of two adolescent girls. One is from Syria. She lives as a refugee in northern Lebanon and she told us, in speaking about accessing cash assistance, that she might go to the centre, to the organisation, to receive the assistance and the employee there might ask her to do something in order to grant her the assistance. Although she is registered and has the right to take it, he asks for something in return. He might ask her to go out with him, for example. She is obliged to.

Three thousand miles away a South Sudanese girl living as a refugee in northern Uganda shared with us about food distributions: "At times, you find that we girls or women we find difficulties with the distributors. They come and tell that, 'If you fall in love with me, I will add you more food,

or for the cooking oil you will get a big share'. You end up after they have realised the food is about to come they move around cornering girls or women that, 'If you really fall in love with me I will add you food'". Those are big challenges.

These align with experiences that I have seen as an aid worker working to set up gender-based violence services in a number of emergencies. Another example would be in 2017 in the Kutupalong refugee camp in Bangladesh with Rohingya refugees. We were setting up services and a woman came to our centre and shared that she had been abused by a man who threatened to take away her access to rations if she did not have a sexual relationship with him. She did not know who he was. She did not know what agency he worked for. We all look the same. Our logos and our branding are indistinguishable and interchangeable. She did not want to file a formal complaint. She was scared. She wanted confidential support and to know that her food supply would not be reduced.

Over and over again when bringing these instances to the relevant fora, we were told, "There is not enough evidence. It is a large-scale emergency. We are feeding hundreds of thousands of people. These things may happen, but overall everything is okay". In other instances we find that the focal points for dealing with it have moved on or that the agencies implicated focus on whether the alleged perpetrator was a contractor or staff and debate who is responsible. In the meantime, the complaint is withdrawn. These experiences are not unlike those I had in Darfur over 15 years ago or in northern Syria almost eight years ago. Unfortunately, while global progress is being made on the ground, we keep seeing these instances again and again.

Q3 **Mr Liddell-Grainger:** You have answered this partly but, following on from that, first, who are the worst perpetrators? Secondly, why is this, after 15 years, still a problem that we are still talking about? Thirdly, can you come up with a list of specific situations and locations with numbers? Can I just add one personal point? I find it slightly bizarre that they cannot work out which aid agency people are from. If they cannot, surely we should change things, so it is very clear on the back or front of people's jackets who they work for.

Alina Potts: I will do my best to remember those questions. Please prompt me if I forget any of them. One of the reasons we still see this is that we are not addressing the underlying cause, which is a root imbalance in power. These situations are heightened settings in which refugees and particularly women and girls have very little access to decision-making power about how aid is delivered and who delivers it. They get very little say, and so really, if we are failing to make aid settings more equitable in how decisions are made, we are failing to address those underlying power imbalances.

As for the perpetrators, I do not know how much time you have spent in large-scale refugee settings, but they are very complex settings. There are a lot of actors coming in and out and not all of them are regulated. A

lot of people are illiterate and that transfers to a lot of our logos and a lot of the branding that we use. It all just looks like a design with a T-shirt and, frankly, anybody can get access to those T-shirts.

It is a very confusing situation and what I really focus on in this research, after being frustrated myself with the response, sharing your frustration, is prevention. How can we prevent these things from happening in the first place? One of the ways we can do that is by focusing on what is called contextual safeguarding. It is not just about removing a few bad apples. It is really a system that does not seek to share power in how aid is delivered with those most affected and fails to look at contexts conducive to abuse and address those risky contexts and risky situations before waiting for a report to come forward.

We know that for so many instances that happen maybe we will hear one report. By the time you have heard a report, probably much more has occurred, so we really need to be proactive. We need to be working with community-based organisations, especially women's organisations, which have been on the frontlines of this for a long time. If we talk to them and ask them, they know; they see where the Land Cruisers are parked at night, who is going where and who is doing what. They know all of these things. They might fear to make specific reports, because retaliation is real. We have people on this panel who have experienced that first-hand and done that very bravely, but not everybody is in a position to risk their livelihoods to do that.

We really need to be proactive and address the contexts conducive to abuse and see that as our responsibility as aid actors, in terms of the entire ecosystem—not just our own staff, but contractors, volunteers, people who we hire and even people who transport people to and from. It is all part of the aid infrastructure and if we do not really take care of the whole environment, then we are failing in our accountability.

Q4 **Mr Liddell-Grainger:** I am just going to add one little bit to this. If that is the case, has there been improvement, say, since 2018? Secondly, what measures need to be implemented with urgency to help people to be able to understand logos or whatever? How do we stop what is going on within the aid agencies?

Alina Potts: There has definitely been improvement. The sustained attention of the British Government has been very helpful. We cannot waver in that. It is not over. As I said, some of this comes down to very practical things. Especially as donors, there is a lot of power to hold people to account in terms of how they design their programming, how they monitor it, how the feedback mechanisms are set up and whether they are actively engaging women and girls in affected populations in doing so. Are these things coming top down and being told to communities? Information is confusing. We have heard many reports of women who report SEA and then find out later that they were being offered aid that they were already entitled to. Information is power, and making sure that things are shared transparently in gender-sensitive

ways and ways that are sensitive to different types of literacy is very important. We can even see that in the global pandemic, in terms of how challenging it can be to share thoroughly transparent information in a quick way where people know how to access support.

The other thing I cannot stress enough, which has been a leadership position of DFID for a long time, is the importance of leading and keeping going gender-based violence response in humanitarian settings. Access to those services, whether it is healthcare, psychosocial support or case management, must be made widely available to survivors while ensuring it is not contingent on them reporting specific instances of abuse, because many will find that a deterrent. They will not come forward, but I can tell you that, time and time again, if you set up safe confidential services, survivors will come forward and, once they have more faith in the help that they can get, they will share more of what is happening, so we really need to lead with that.

Dr Brown: I agree with what Alina has just said. One point that I would like to emphasise is that even when you look in Europe, for example, only 30%—roughly, depending on the study—of victims and survivors will actually report abuses. This is for a variety of reasons, but one of the key reasons is that they just simply do not want people to know about it. There is shame. There are all sorts of reasons why. There are studies in Latin America that have confirmed that only 10% of people will actually report sexual abuse, so we have to be realistic as to what these complaints mechanisms will actually do.

In that context, I wanted to go back to what Alina said. In most cases, in my experience, the staff of the aid organisations and the aid workers themselves know what is going on. They see it. They come across it, but they are not empowered to report it. It is just too dangerous. They will lose their jobs. They will suffer retaliation. This is not being addressed. This is something that can be addressed quite quickly and relatively easily, in my view. We need to protect aid workers so that they can disclose abuses, and there are very simple ways of doing that.

Since the Committee's last inquiry, DFID was supposed to do, for example, an audit of whistleblower protections in organisations. This has not been done. There has been zero progress on that front. To give you an idea, I am in contact with many aid workers across the system, both in the UN and working for NGOs, and they are very scared of disclosing abuses. They will lose their jobs. They will suffer retaliation. My case serves as a deterrent. I have been blacklisted by the UN now for five years. That is one area that I would like to suggest that the Committee could focus on.

Q5 **Chair:** Miranda, can I just follow up on two parts of that? You said that people will lose their jobs. Who is it that would make that decision to lose a job, and why? Why is it that safeguarding processes are not being followed, in your opinion? Also, in 2018 DFID reported a lot of

safeguarding improvements and movement that has happened. Have you not seen big improvements in the complaints process since 2018?

Dr Brown: In answer to the first part of the question, to give you an idea, you are a junior aid worker, like Alina was saying. You might be national staff. You are working in a refugee camp somewhere and you are on a short-term or fixed-term contract. Perhaps you work for an NGO, an INGO or the UN. Your contract is already limited. You are junior. You see that a superior is engaging in misconduct and sexual exploitation or abuse. What do you do? In most cases, these organisations have codes of conduct and you are supposed, under your code of conduct, to report it, but you know that if you do, the easiest thing is for your contract to not be renewed.

We have cases of aid workers who have been pushed out their organisations and forced to sign non-disclosure agreements. We know that survivors and victims have also been compelled to sign non-disclosure agreements. In situations like that, there is a real disincentive to disclosing abuse. There is no contractual protection. Aid workers who fall under UK law have some measure of protection, but the vast majority do not. That is the first thing.

In answer to your question about complaints mechanisms, there have been improvements in complaints mechanisms. My comment was simply that a lot of victims and survivors just will not use them. For example, they do not use them in Europe, so we cannot assume that they are going to use them in a refugee camp. My point is that we have to find other ways of monitoring what is going on and making sure that these abuses do not occur.

To give you an example of what I experienced when I was working for the UN in Somalia and South Sudan, in many cases the survivors and victims rely on food provided by the aid workers. If they disclose the abuse, the food will stop being supplied to them. The child sexual abuse that I disclosed in the Central African Republican was eight-year-old and nine-year-old boys who were being forced to engage in sex acts with soldiers in exchange for food. Many of them were orphans in an IDP camp. It is not realistic to expect that they will use a formal complaints mechanism. I am not saying they are not really important, but we have to be realistic about whether they are going to be used.

Q6 **Chair:** Rosa, from what Miranda and Alina have said, this sounds widespread. Is that your finding?

Professor Freedman: We have to accept that this is widespread and that, as my colleagues have both emphasised, reporting rates are low in any country. We know that reporting does not happen of most sexual abuse, even where it is a crime, let alone sexual exploitation. It is interesting, from the United Nations reports, that up until 2015 the UN reported how many reports of allegations had been made. In 2015 they reported 99 worldwide. They stopped reporting on those numbers after

2015, because the numbers were so low and they were being so heavily criticised.

We can criticise the UN, but we can criticise all of the aid sector organisations as well, because the very low numbers show that there are very poor reporting systems and that people do not know where to report or even what they can report. Reporting is usually around sexual exploitation or abuse of minors, because it is internationally and universally accepted that that is a problem, but is not around abuse or exploitation of, say, teenagers or above and particularly exploitation, whether it is around prostituted women and prostituted children or whether it is around sexual activities for services such as food. The aid recipients do not necessarily know what is or is not allowed by these aid agencies. Even if they do know that they could report it in, they do not know where to or how to. There are then all the factors that Alina and Miranda were talking around, which are factors universal, around shame and not wanting to report or not believing that there will be access to justice.

We do not have any idea of the scale of this problem, but we do know it is widespread and we do know that this is about power. In IDP camps, where there are people who are physically contained, who cannot leave because it is unsafe to leave as they are likely lose their lives, who are wholly dependent on the people providing services, sexual exploitation and abuse is perpetrated at a much higher rate than in any other conflict or crisis zone, because there is no escape and there is no ability to provide food or shelter for themselves. They are wholly dependent, which is why the UN Refugee Agency, the UNHCR, proportionately has the highest number of allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse perpetrated against the recipients of its services compared with any other part of the UN system. We have to understand that power dynamic to think about how widespread that problem is and where the problem will be most manifest.

Q7 **Mr Liddell-Grainger:** Have you published the name-and-shames, because, from what you have all said, it is so serious that we need to be able to use our privilege in Parliament and other places to say, "This is what is going on". I am glad you said that the UK Government are aware of this, but we need you, the whistleblowers, dare I say it, Dr Miranda Brown, to pass the information on and we can then use it.

Dr Brown: If I may respond to that, I have been giving that information for five years and I have written several times to UK Ministers. I submitted testimony to the first inquiry. I testified before the US Senate Committee on Foreign Relations on this. It is known. I would be happy to provide you with information and I am sure Alina and Rosa can too, but the problem is that there has not been a concerted response from the UK Government, certainly in relation to the UN and whistleblowers. That is something that the UK Government could address and have so far refused to do so. If we are going to require aid workers in the UN to

disclose child sexual abuse, for example, we are going to have to ensure that they are protected, and that just is not the case.

Chair: That is shocking. Can I give you the assurance that this Committee is looking into this because we are very concerned, and we will keep on pushing about this until we get some sort of resolution?

Mr Bacon: I just wanted to follow up something that Alina Potts said right at the beginning about the power imbalance. These are people at the very bottom in the refugee camps who are dependent on food, and there is an enormous power imbalance, which Alina Potts described. I completely get that and you cannot expect the sorts of behaviours that we might think would be normal, given that they are literally dependent on these folk for food, but what I do not understand, which perhaps Alina Potts could comment on, is we are talking about some of the world's largest NGOs. These are famous household names, big charities in many cases with organisations worldwide, and these organisations have big management structures; they have chief executives; they have middle managers. Why has more not been done by those organisations, from a top-down perspective, to sort this out? We are still talking about it. It came to public attention with the scandals in Haiti a couple of years ago, but from what you have been saying it sounds like it has been going on for much longer. Why is more not being done by the organisations themselves?

Alina Potts: That is a great question. I am sure the other panellists have a lot of insight on that too. One of the unintended consequences of a zero-tolerance approach is that it really drives reporting underground. There is a lot of fear of losing reputation and funding.

CARE released a report on Burundi in 2004 about sex for food. I tracked down the authors of that report when I started my research, Empowered Aid, because I wanted to make sure I was not doing something that had already been done. I said, "What happened when you released this report? It is a really powerful report", and they said, "Nothing really". After a little while it made it to some of their Scandinavian donors, who said, "Wait a second; what is going on here?" and that engendered a bit of action, but, frankly, there is a lot of acceptance for sexual exploitation, abuse and many forms of gender-based violence in our society, and we are only seeing in the last few years a real intolerance for it.

When I spoke at the DFID Safeguarding Summit in 2018 it was right at the heels of Dr Christine Blasey Ford's testimony in front of our Congress, and we can see how that was received. We can see that abuse is normalised. Speaking truth to power is often most harmful to those who are brave enough to do it. In a lot of aid agency, there is a lot of will to do well and there is a lot of fear also. We saw what happened at Oxfam or Mercy Corps; I am not at all excusing it, but at the same time to completely cut their funding and all of their programming also hurts a lot of aid recipients.

There is a fear that this type of abuse, SEA, will be weaponised and will be used to defund aid budgets and to support other agendas. We have to name that and we have to say that is not the point. The point is that we do it well, and the metric for success in our field is not the absence of reports of SEA. The metric for success is how reports come forward, what we find out and how they are addressed. That is how we measure progress.

Safety and protection for survivors is paramount throughout, and particularly setting up meaningful ways in which survivors, women's organisations and community organisations from the global south possess enough power to hold these household names accountable, because often they are the ones doing the work. We cannot expect them to displace their own work to hold us accountable, so we also need to keep working on localisation and on moving more funding directly into local organisations.

The power imbalance happens on many levels. Even in my research, we reflect on how we as researchers hold power, how we could better share power, who gets to ask and answer questions about their lives and who gets to produce this knowledge. There is a lot that we can do, but I would just say that we have to keep making sure we are uncomfortable. This is going to be uncomfortable for a long time. We have to keep asking how we can do better, what we are doing well and what is not working well.

We have to be really open to examining what is not working well and not using it to shame or to completely silence organisations that are found to not be doing well, because, at the end of the day, that is every organisation. There is not one organisation where this does not happen. Some of them have been caught, but it is all of us. At the same time, there is a lot of good work going on. How do we bring that process forward, really put it at the forefront and hold people accountable? Funding is a great way to do that, but we also need to make sure that we are not undercutting aid programmes at a time when we have the largest number of people ever displaced in the world.

Q8 **Brendan Clarke-Smith:** Good afternoon, everybody. First of all, I would just like to ask Alina Potts a question. What impact is the coronavirus pandemic having on efforts to tackle sexual exploitation and abuse in the aid sector?

Alina Potts: It really is having an impact, because the conditions of Covid-19 are putting communities more at risk in many ways. For example, food rations have been minimised in Uganda and other places. A lot of funding is moving to the Covid-19 pandemic response and moving away from things like gender-based violence services. We have communities that have maybe less access to aid and it is harder for them to travel and to move around. There is a lot of fear. There is fear even going to access aid.

We can see a real vacuum as well, where many humanitarian staff can no longer go into the community. That creates a vacuum. People can then exploit that vacuum and say, "I can get you access. I can get you assistance if you have a relationship with me". It is really exacerbating these existing power imbalances and, at the same time, making reporting and complaints harder. For example, for women to access safe spaces where they might receive confidential support that would allow them to access services, a lot of those safe spaces were closed down or moved to mobile services. There is a huge digital divide. Many women and girls do not have access to phones and cannot access mobile services with the technology gap.

We have reports and a whole package of policy briefs around the types of aid that we have studied. We have interviewed almost 300 people in two countries and we put out a brief on Covid-19. We have four recommendations there, and one is to really sensitise frontline personnel, including aid workers but also monitoring and evaluation staff and healthcare personnel, on SEA and GBV, so that they can recognise not just cases of abuse but also, as I said, risky situations, and can address those situations head on.

We need to continue oversight and accountability of aid workers. One thing that the women and girls we worked with in South Sudan and Uganda say again and again is, "We want more female aid staff. We want more women aid workers". We know that in Covid-19 there is this shadow pandemic of gender-based violence and there are also the effects it has on women who work, many of whom also have increased childcare responsibilities now. How can we support women to continue working in our sector? How can we increase awareness of SEA? It is normalised. People think sometimes that this is the way you get aid, so how do we increase awareness? How do we get those messages out in visual ways and ways that are sensitive to different literacy levels? I will say this again and again, but how do we strengthen women and girls' voices in decision-making processes related to aid distribution in the Covid-19 pandemic? Are we asking them what it is like for them and what has changed? Are we incorporating that in our programmes? I would say, overall, we are not doing that, so how can we do that better?

Q9 **Brendan Clarke-Smith:** Just following on from that, how can we ensure that combatting sexual exploitation and abuse is prioritised at a time when the sector is having to shift the focus with a lot of its programming to Covid-19 responses and there is the potential of reduced funding?

Alina Potts: I say again and again that paying attention to SEA does not make things more expensive. I say this to a lot of aid actors, because we can do better, more efficient programming if we do it safely, if we take into account the needs of those who have least power in current decision-making processes. It is about the way that decision making is happening and making sure that organisations are really talking to communities and showing us they are talking to communities. What are those communities

saying? If it is all positive feedback, they are not doing it well enough. There should always be both intended and unintended consequences of our actions, and we need to be looking for those unintended consequences and sharing them transparently so that we can collectively come up with next steps. We need to be able to be forthright about that without worrying about having funding completely cut off.

Can there be benchmarks and metrics, so that, if difficult situations are identified, perhaps there is a period of time in which there is a focus on making it better and, if it is not better, then everything is cut off? Otherwise, it will drive reports and it will drive the need to address this underground, and we really need to bring it above ground. It has been far too long.

Q10 **Brendan Clarke-Smith:** Dr Brown, do you have anything to add on that same question?

Dr Brown: No, I agree with that. We have no really good handle on the figures and data, but I am slightly concerned that over the last few years sexual exploitation and abuse has been normalised. There is this perspective now that basically it happens and, as long as it is investigated and the perpetrator is removed from the organisation, then that is fine. It is a tricky one, because we do not want to push reporting underground, but, on the other hand, we do need to keep the focus on this being totally unacceptable. It is not acceptable.

UK taxpayer funds are being used by aid organisations that commit these abuses. There must be organisational accountability, and that is just missing. That is not being addressed. We focus quite a lot on the employment cycle and on removing perpetrators, which is what we have to do, but there also needs to be a culture change and there has to be a higher level of accountability at the board level of these NGOs.

Q11 **Brendan Clarke-Smith:** Professor Freedman, do you have anything to add on this?

Professor Freedman: Preventing sexual exploitation and abuse is often added on. It is seen as an add-on to a conference. It is seen as an add-on to the aid objectives and agenda, as though it is something we can just tack on at the end and, therefore, can easily be removed when there is not enough funding to go around.

We need to refocus on this and see preventing sexual exploitation and abuse as central to every single organisation. On the one hand, as Alina said earlier, these organisations see themselves as being out there and doing good—doing good work and helping lots of people—so they almost see preventing sexual exploitation and abuse, accountability for it or organisational accountability as an additional extra that is a good thing, rather than seeing it as central to the organisation's purpose and central to every aspect of the organisation's work.

Having those organisations refocus on organisational culture might be through sticks and carrots. Organisations ought not to be funded by UK taxpayer money unless they have sewn prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse throughout all of their programmes, all of their work and all of their mission statement, rather than seeing this as, "We do really great work and, if we can, we will also try to prevent our staff from perpetrating sexual exploitation and abuse". That is not good enough.

I understand why you have framed the question in that way, which is, "How can we ensure that we continue to prevent this stuff in a climate where we have limited resources and more and more issues to address?", but actually the question should be, "Why are we thinking about this as an add-on? Why is this not central?", in the same way that we would not ask organisations to add on preventing financial corruption. We would expect that all organisations we give money to will prevent financial corruption. We should have that same expectation around SEA.

Q12 **Mr Bacon:** Professor Freedman, how difficult do you think that would be to do?

Professor Freedman: It is not difficult to do when it comes to private sector; we expect it from Coca-Cola or Google. Even in the public sector, we expect the Foreign Office or the UK Government to prevent sexual exploitation and abuse as part of their work or, where it exists, to make sure there is accountability and remedies. For some reason, we look at these aid organisations and think that, because of the good work they are doing, they are somehow special and different. Yes, on the one hand, we are talking about organisations that are operating abroad and, therefore, there are different scales of law: you have international law, national law and the law of the country they are headquartered in, but we have multinational corporations and we do not say that it is okay if they just cover up abuse, if they do not have reporting systems or if they do not address it effectively.

It is not that it will be difficult to do. There are very concrete steps we can take, but we all need, as a public, to stop looking at these organisations as though they are angels going out there doing good. They are organisations that are bidding for funding, that are funded and that are doing work that is important in the world—we should never take that away from them—but that does not mean that they can then operate outside of the normal rules that we apply to everyone else.

Q13 **Mr Bacon:** Surely the very point that they are bidding for funding says that the work could be being done by various different people and not necessarily them, including perhaps through a direct labour organisation through the Government themselves, through DFID or an equivalent donor country. My taxpaying constituents would be horrified to think their money is being misused in this way. It ought to be relatively simple through the power of the purse to require these big NGOs to act in the correct way, should it not?

Professor Freedman: It should be and DFID has started to take that step. It has assessed 31 of its biggest NGOs to look at whether they have safeguarding, risk assessments, whistleblowing protection and communities, beneficiaries and recipients involved in all of these processes. They have required that of 31 of the largest NGOs, but they have not turned around to them and said, "If you do not have these in place, we will not give you any more funding".

It goes to the heart of a problem with DFID generally and the heart of the problem with what they have done since 2018 around safeguarding. DFID has a large amount of money and it is very difficult to give that money to small organisations. It is much easier to give large pots of money and then say to the organisations, "You must now be accountable for this". Whether it is the safeguarding resource hub or whether it is a big NGO operating in 50 countries, DFID is almost just shifting the responsibility on to those organisations and saying, "We have done our job. We have thrown the money at this and now the organisations must do it".

They are asking the people who have created the problems or who have overseen the problems happening to now respond to and address them, which is not the right way to do it. DFID or the UK Government should be looking to models that have worked, whether it is in FIFA, the private sector or multilateral organisations, and thinking how to use those processes that have worked and transplant them into the aid sector.

Dr Brown: To follow up on what Rosa has said, in a way, the automatic handing over of these taxpayers' funds means there is no competition. Therefore, there is no incentive to improve on the standards of aid delivery. That has to be created. There has to be an environment where these organisations have an actual incentive to improve their performance. I know DFID has been doing a lot of work in looking to make sure it has all these policies in place, but they are not being implemented. Where there are reports coming out that organisations, be it the UN's human rights office or others, are not performing, DFID, the UK Government or the new Department needs to take action. At the moment, that is not happening. That is something that could be done quite quickly.

Q14 **Mr Sharma:** What is your assessment of efforts taken by NGOs and the private sector since 2018 to combat sexual exploitation and abuse? I think Alina touched on it earlier. Could I ask Miranda to respond first to this, please?

Dr Brown: To be fair, there has been a lot of activity from NGOs and the private sector. There has been a significant focus on the employment cycle, which is very important. We need to go back to basics. We need to go back to higher-level accountability and the fact that there needs to be a carrot and stick. That is not being used. In terms of progress, in some areas there has been substantial progress, but in the potentially more important areas there has not been.

Professor Freedman: There was an awful lot of good will and desire to do something about this. That desire started in 2003 after all the sexual exploitation and abuse of children in west Africa and has continued every time that a large scandal is uncovered. There is more good will and more desire to do something about this. I do not think that anyone stands up and says, "Sexual exploitation and abuse is a good thing", or that it is something that we want to continue.

In 2017 and 2018, there was a big drive and push, and a hope that DFID and the UK Government would really do something to address these problems. Unfortunately, I do not think much progress has been made. A lot of money was made available. There needs to be some discussion about what that money has been spent on. The safeguarding resource hub, which was meant to be one of the big things that DFID was pushing for, really is a website that gives links and access to information that was already available. It is not information that is making any new impact on the ground.

Organisations are now aware that they are expected to do safeguarding and change their organisational cultures, but how much of that is a tick-box exercise remains to be seen. Most of the people involved with this work are the people who were involved when these scandals were ongoing, including the head of safeguarding at Save the Children, who has had a very important role in the last two years under the work that DFID has been funding.

It is very easy to say that progress is slow across any area of sexual exploitation and abuse, because we have to change power dynamics, understandings and hyper-gendered societies, but progress has been exceptionally slow here. There was an awful lot of good will and an awful lot of good things said, but not very much tangible action that we can see making changes on the ground. It is a real shame, because there are excellent experts around the world, many of whom DFID has access to and the Select Committee has had evidence from, including colleagues who are on this call now. For some reason, even though all of that expertise is being put on the table, those suggestions are not being taken up or taken forward.

Q15 **Chair:** Rosa, could you speculate on why that is?

Professor Freedman: No one wants to be the person who says, "Let us try something radical and different", because it could fail. They are not looking at the fact that the current state of play and the incremental changes are failing people in the immediate here and now. People are being exploited and abused because of the reluctance to try to implement radical changes. I do not mean radical changes like having a new criminal court for the entire world to look at these things. I mean radical changes in terms of our expectations from organisations and in terms of trying new things, like an ombudsman. I am not even a particular fan of that idea, but these proposals get blocked very early on because they sound too different.

I say this with the greatest of respect to the civil service: the civil service is not set up in a way that allows individuals to take forward radical proposals. Even though the evidence is there and the researchers have gathered that data and placed it on the table, there seems to be a blockage at some level within the civil service.

Chair: It is rather shocking to me that protecting women and children is described as radical. I share the view of Richard Bacon: that our constituents would expect that their taxes are going to protect them. I am shocked by what you hear.

Q16 **Mr Bacon:** Is it the civil service, or is it simply that Ministers, of whichever political party incumbency or particular Department, have not decided to grip it enough? To be old fashioned for a moment, civil servants exist to implement the wishes of the Government of the day, certainly in our arrangements. When nothing happens, it tends to be because Ministers do not prioritise it enough. When it happens, it is for the same but opposite reason.

Professor Freedman: We saw that William Hague took up the preventing sexual violence in armed conflict mandate. He took this up as a particular issue and the UK became a leader on preventing sexual violence in armed conflict. That was very much about the parties to the conflict and using sexual violence as a weapon of war. We have not seen anyone pick up preventing sexual exploitation and abuse by the aid sector, by the peacekeepers and by the people who are intervening in quite the same way. Yes, it requires one or more people to really pick this up and champion it, not only as an add-on, an additional positive, but as something that needs to be at the front and centre of this work.

Dr Brown: Yes, I agree. I actually have a background working for the Australian Government. I agree that it needs ministerial engagement. We need to have high-level Government engagement. For example, with the UN, there are so many competing political priorities that this issue falls down the agenda whenever there is an engagement. Ministers need to say to aid organisations and the UN, "We are accountable for taxpayer funds and you need to clean up your act. You must do it now. We will support you to do it". The strong wording is not given. The message is not conveyed or at least, if it is, it is ignored. There must be high-level political engagement for this issue to be resolved.

Q17 **Mr Sharma:** In the absence of an aid ombudsman—Rosa said that she is not very keen on that, but that is one of the options people sometimes consider—are there any options you would recommend this Committee pursue to provide victims and survivors with a path to appeal when an established reporting mechanism fails to provide justice?

Dr Brown: I agree with Rosa that there are issues with an international ombuds. It would be great if it could be established. One area we could look at is that many countries have what are called national human rights institutions. The UK has the Equality and Human Rights Commission.

Australia has a commission. They are many countries around the world and there is a process for rating these institutions. They are domestic institutions that are empowered to investigate human rights abuses, in most cases. They are ombuds mechanisms. We need to empower those institutions.

At the moment, in the UK, there is the Charity Commission, which can look into the conduct of a British NGO, but it has limited resources. I am not sure that they actually have the skillset, even, to look at sexual exploitation and abuse cases. Indeed, I have heard that they do not necessarily consider individual cases. Why not see if the Equality and Human Rights Commission in the UK could be empowered to hear these cases, at least in relation to British NGOs or NGOs that are based in the UK that have international operations? It is an idea that has been discussed.

To give you an idea, I think DFID and the British Government more generally work with many of these national human rights institutions around the world. There is a system of rating them, so they are rated. A-rated means that they are independent from Government and receive substantial funding, et cetera. For example, there is one in Zimbabwe that is A-rated. There are countries around the world that have these institutions. They should be empowered to hear cases of sexual exploitation and abuse. That is something that should be explored. Certainly the one in the UK needs to be engaged.

Q18 **Chris Law:** Part of this question has been answered in terms of the lack of action by a Minister in the Government. James Cleverly said last week he will be the Minister responsible for safeguarding and the issue will be an absolute cornerstone of the work of the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office. In a sentence, what would your message to him be, in terms of what he should be doing as an absolute priority?

Alina Potts: I want us to zoom out and remember that we are talking about systems in which power imbalance is very entrenched. We really need to focus systematically. We need to look at the whole system. We start to zoom in very quickly to complaints and reporting mechanisms. That is one piece of a much larger ecosystem. There is a lot of normalisation of this. I want to leave with one sentence from a South Sudanese adolescent girl, who talks about how normalised this is. She said, "For us girls, we fear to report because it is someone who helped you and you have done something wrong. You cannot report because you have done something wrong". I would leave him with that.

Dr Brown: I would encourage him to use the carrot and the stick, to be public about that and to engage with a group of like-minded Ministers and work with other Governments to make this a priority. It has clearly been a priority for DFID. I would hope that the new Department would make it a priority, but we are going to need a Minister who is going to advocate that, who is going to take up the cudgel and who is going to make this a

priority on the foreign policy agenda. That is the very least that should be done.

Professor Freedman: It is really heartening to hear that there is desire to keep safeguarding front and centre. I would hope to remind the Minister of the phrase, "Nothing about us without us". If you do not involve aid recipients, survivors and victims in designing programmes and the delivery of programmes, you have no hope in involving them in designing reporting mechanisms, or one-stop shops for support, or anything else they will need. We know sexual exploitation and abuse has been perpetrated by men against women and girls in every society throughout history and will be throughout the future. We are trying to limit it, prevent it and have accountability when it exists. "Nothing about us without us" is the key message.

Mr Bacon: Will panellists be knocking on Minister Cleverly's door and asking to meet him and brief him?

Chair: All our witnesses are nodding at that and I think they will probably have the International Development Committee standing right behind them. Thank you hugely to our first panel of witnesses. That has been somewhat shocking but very informative. I hope we will be able to draw on your expertise as we continue with this evidence session. We are really keen to make a difference in this once and for all. I do not want us to be coming back to this in two years' time and wondering what changes have been made. Thank you very much to the first panel.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Frances Longley, Sally Proudlove, Sarah Maguire, Jill Healey and Steve Reeves.

Q19 **Chair:** I would now like to turn to our second panel. I apologise that we are running slightly over time. I hope you were able to hear most of that first session and so you understand why we needed to dive a little deeper and get the coalface view. I wonder if I could ask you to all start by introducing yourself and saying what your role is that brings you here today, please.

Jill Healey: I am Jill Healey, the executive director of an organisation called ChildHope, which is a small child rights organisation with a strong focus on working with local organisations. My role in this group and the reason why I am here is that I was a co-chair representing the accountability group.

Frances Longley: Good afternoon. I am Frances Longley. I am the executive director for programmes and policy at CARE International UK. I am here in my capacity as co-chair of the working group that was focused on leadership and culture.

Sally Proudlove: Hello. I am Sally Proudlove. I am the head of safeguarding at UNICEF UK. I am also a co-chair, with Frances, of the organisational culture working group.

Steve Reeves: Hello. My name is Steve Reeves and I co-chair the employment cycle working group.

Sarah Maguire: My name is Sarah Maguire. I am here representing the Safeguarding Leads Network, which is a network of 23 private sector suppliers to DFID and/or the Foreign Office that have signed up to the private sector commitments from the 2018 summit. It is not a governance organisation. It is a network of organisations that are committed to driving up standards. The organisation I personally work for is DAI Global, which is an employee-owned development company that works in about 90 countries around the world at the moment.

Chair: We have 35 minutes. These are going to be quickfire questions. If you want to add to someone else's answer, I will call you in.

Q20 **Chris Law:** In 2018, during our last evidence session, we discovered a big part of the issue was that there were not adequate resources to support safeguarding measures in the programmes. Can I ask if any members approached DFID for additional funding? If so, has it been forthcoming?

Sarah Maguire: I have a good news story to tell on that. We have been encouraged—when I say "we", I mean all the private sector suppliers—by DFID to include safeguarding in budgets for proposals that we put forward. Increasingly, we have also been putting forward safeguarding dimensions into budgets for Foreign Office contracts or through the CSSF and the Prosperity Fund. I think it is right to say that most of the Safeguarding Leads Network members include a safeguarding element. Normally, those safeguarding elements are budgeted. Whether they would be budgeted if they were given even more priority of course is another issue. Thank you for raising this, Mr Law, because it is an issue that we really encourage the new FCDO to pick up and to make sure that there is adequate resourcing for safeguarding.

Q21 **Chair:** Sarah, I am rather troubled by this. In delivering a project, you would expect things like health and safety and financial accountability to be an automatic part of delivering that programme. It is part of project management. Why is safeguarding not seen in that way?

Sarah Maguire: It is. I am sure you have not had to bore yourself with trawling through the budget spreadsheets of different proposals, but actually, sometimes wrapped up in a budget, there will be those things that come into what are normally called overheads. With safeguarding, we are making sure that, not only is it in the overall overhead, but that there is actually dedicated resourcing.

For instance, on a high-risk project, like one that my organisation is doing in Ethiopia, working with refugee and host communities, we recognise

that as a really high risk for safeguarding and make sure that there is an extra element. There is a project I am helping out with in Mexico, working with vulnerable teenagers. You make sure that not just our organisation but all the others downstream, and the schools and the education institutions, are also able to really upgrade their own skills, responsiveness and prevention mechanisms on safeguarding. It is both. It is incorporated, but it also deserves particular and special attention.

Q22 **Chris Law:** Can I go a little bit further with this then? As you would have heard in the previous session, I asked a question about what a key suggestion would be. One thing we heard previously was zero audit of whistleblowing, for example. If there are additional resources from DFID, where is the disconnect happening? We heard James Cleverly tell the House last week that he will be responsible for the safeguarding, which will be an absolute cornerstone of the work of the future FCDO. I wanted to ask, if the money is there, why we are still seeing persistent issues around safeguarding. Also, one of the other issues raised previously was the carrot and the stick. There is a lack of incentive, perhaps, for INGOs and multilaterals, as well as NGOs, to pursue safeguarding. I wonder if we could get a little bit of expanding on that, please.

Sarah Maguire: I cannot talk about the NGOs. I will leave that to my NGO friends. In the Safeguarding Leads Network, we would really like to see a universality of approach. We are but 23 organisations, private sector suppliers, and some of those are really small. Some are big and are in the top 10 or 11 gold DFID suppliers. We would really like to see an increase in the standard required of organisations before receiving any UK public funding, whether that is through a contract or through a grant to an NGO. We would like to see improved scrutiny. We would like to see it being made an incentive to say, "If you want to do this work, you have to show us and be really active in demonstrating how you are taking these approaches", not just a tick-box compliance exercise.

I must also say that the safeguarding unit in DFID has been working really hard on trying to address some of the really key problems. I hope that the FCDO will continue with these, particularly around issues of recruitment, the churn of perpetrators around the aid sector and around reporting, making it really accessible for people to say, "I saw a problem", not relying on victims, not giving victims the responsibility to report but actually making it, as everyone has been talking about, a real culture of safeguarding across every organisation so it becomes a no-brainer.

Q23 **Chris Law:** To expand slightly further on that—and I know there are other questions to come—in 2018 one of the main questions that we could not get an answer to was about fear. If you increase the whistleblowing and you increase your numbers in terms of reporting of safeguarding incidents, NGOs, small and large, were concerned about withdrawal of funding. Is that still a persistent issue? Is that a block to actually getting a better representation of what is happening on the

ground?

Sally Proudlove: I was going to add to the point from earlier. I will come in on your question, Mr Law. There is some anxiety in organisations about that issue if they report cases, although I think the message is getting through more clearly that, when we talk about a zero tolerance, we are not talking about a zero tolerance to reporting; we are talking about a zero tolerance to inaction. That is both an inaction to address the issues that are coming up and deal with cases and an inaction to take preventative steps to stop the cases happening in the first place.

That message is starting to get through to organisations: that an increase in reporting, particularly speaking from an organisational culture point of view, is a good sign. Obviously, we do not want there to be any cases at all, but we know that silence and power are the two main ingredients that will enable any kind of sexual exploitation to take place. Being able to speak up and report is really important.

To take that a step further, it is not just about requiring implementing partners to have safeguarding measures in place. It is also about funding streams that will help to support them to improve safeguarding. It is not just saying, "Do you have safeguarding in your budget?" It is about whether you have the right level of resources and, as donors, whether we are being clear that that can be seen from safeguarding, so that those systems can be improved. There has been a real danger that what we do in practices pushes the risk further down the chain, to the tiny little implementing partner in country that maybe has the least resources available.

Frances Longley: I wanted to build very much on what Sarah and Sally were saying. This question of where safeguarding resources sit and what level of safeguarding focus and strength we have across our organisations is really crucial. Exactly as Sarah was saying, we absolutely would expect to have budget lines in individual projects and programmes dedicated to safeguarding, but they only work if your entire organisation has a really strong culture of safeguarding completely woven through it.

My colleague Sally talks in her training often about how safeguarding is not just a blanket you can put over your knees and feel like you will be warm and safe; it has to be a thread that flows through the whole of your organisation. That always sticks in my mind when I talk about these things because Sally is a fantastic trainer, so I have taken the lesson home.

It is really crucial that organisations continue to invest in having that safeguarding approach, culture and expertise in everybody in their organisation, in different ways and at different levels, but everybody must understand the centrality of it in their organisations. All the NGOs that I deal with on a regular basis have taken enormous steps to do that over the last couple of years. It has been a really big piece of shared

work that we have all done to make sure we are all pulling ourselves to the right level there.

In terms of the funding question and looking forward to the new Department, I really want to make sure we emphasise where the funding for organisations to invest in that culture and that shared base of experience and expertise comes from. Often, when Government Departments are issuing grants and contracts with a very strong emphasis, quite rightly, on value for money, there is a real danger that, within their value for money metrics, they scale down the importance of things like safeguarding.

If you are investing on an organisation level in that kind of work, you can find that you will not score as highly, because you need that money to do it. You need your overhead, as Sarah was describing. There will be a line in a project, just as Sarah was saying, which might be for particular safeguarding training, staffing or resources on a particular project, but they cannot sit on their own in thin air. They have to sit underpinned by an entire organisation and a culture of safeguarding, and that has to be paid for. We expect to pay for that from our overhead.

When Governments and other donors are putting out grants and contracts for people to apply to and are chipping away at the portion of those pieces of funding that relate to overhead, they are making it harder for organisations to deliver on their safeguarding obligations well. I would argue, and I know my colleagues would argue, that you should not be cutting back on safeguarding. Of course you should not. None of us would say that, but it makes it harder. If we want to make sure we are enabling all our sector to do their best work on this, because they have to, it is not helpful if we have one arm tied behind our backs when those things are threatened.

Q24 **Chair:** Frances, if I am getting you right, you would expect DFID or the new Department, when it is issuing contracts, to expect safeguarding to be embedded within the delivery of that programme and that organisation. You would expect DFID or the new Department to understand there is a cost associated with having that embedded in. You are not saying that organisations should expect extra money to be doing the safeguarding they should be doing anyway. Is that correct?

Frances Longley: That is exactly right, yes. We all expect to be doing it. It is built into our overhead cost. It should be absolutely running through us like a stick of rock. Where we are constantly being battered to take more money from our overhead—I have to say that does happen—it makes it harder to maintain those services at the right level. We are doing it, but it makes it harder to do. It is one of the unintended consequences of having sometimes a rather blunt approach to value for money. I would love the new Department to continue the best of the work DFID has done. Its safeguarding unit has been fabulous. We have had some really fantastic partnership from DFID in the last couple of years, trying to work towards a common goal here. I would love to see

the new Department have a very joined-up approach to that to take it forward.

Q25 **Chris Law:** What is your assessment of the safeguarding resource and support hub and how would you like to see it improved?

Jill Healey: The resource and support hub has potential, but it needs to have some more development done to it. As a central resource, it is great to have something centrally, but I feel very much that it needs to be brought to a local level. There need to be more local organisations, non-northern organisations, represented in the advisory group. They need to really focus on finding local consultants to deliver training and support to local organisations because, as many people have said, things need to be contextually relevant. The organisations that understand the communities they are working in tend to be local, not international NGOs. They tend to be local-level organisations. There needs to be much more focus on that. There is a research component, so really use that research component to understand some of the great practice that is actually already out there and apply it. My focus is definitely to try to bring that support hub to the countries that it is supposed to be focusing on as quickly as possible.

Q26 **Mr Bacon:** I would like to start with something that Sarah Maguire said, giving, as she did, the example of a refugee camp in Ethiopia. You made it sound as if it was just pretty obvious that that was a high-risk example. Can you say why it is obvious that it is a high-risk example?

Sarah Maguire: You heard from my colleagues from academia before, and ex-aid workers. You are somebody living in the most deprived and vulnerable place, you have already been displaced, you are traumatised and you are totally dependent on the people around you. We find also, in those extreme contexts, that gender norms get polarised. We saw it in 2002 in west Africa. We have seen it in very many countries. Families end up sometimes—I am sorry to be blunt about this—pimping their daughters. If you are in that scenario, if you are a 15-year-old girl, or 17 or 25 years old, you are at extreme risk of having to sell the only thing you have, whether that is to an aid worker or another member of your community.

Q27 **Mr Bacon:** I get it from the bottom-up point of view—the thing Alina Potts was referring to earlier—but I am talking about a top-down approach. You go in with a project, with a big NGO, into a place like Ethiopia, to set up a project to help the refugees. There are people who are doing that, and somebody is managing them, and somebody is managing the people who are managing the people. From a top-down perspective, to go back to what Frances Longley was saying, why is it not already the case, after so many years, that these things are just naturally embedded, so that the alertness and awareness is turned on, switched on high at all times, so that the risks you describe are being managed from the top down right from the word go? That is what I cannot understand.

Sarah Maguire: I see what you mean. The fact that risk is mitigated does not mean there is no risk. The risk to those women, girls and boys still exists even if steps are taken to mitigate it. We find that there are various categories of perpetrators. There are the opportunistic ones, who happen to be in an area and take advantage of the opportunity provided because of, for instance, deep poverty, trauma and displacement. There are also those who seek to go to places where women and girls are particularly vulnerable, where they think they are going to be able to get away with it, where they think they will be met with impunity. They are the ones who travel around the aid sector as perpetrators.

Q28 **Mr Bacon:** These are people who are being employed by the NGOs.

Sarah Maguire: They are people who are being employed across the aid and development sector. One real area in which we have made quite substantial progress, among both the private sector and the NGOs, is in improving our game on recruitment, vetting, communication between ourselves about perpetrators and the misconduct disclosure scheme, which the private sector has not yet joined because we have not been allowed to, but we are going to. That has recently stopped, I think, over 33 people from getting a job in another aid organisation where they have been found previously to have committed an act of sexual exploitation or abuse. I know Steve can talk much more to that. Those standards really are improving. We are not there yet. We will never be there.

Q29 **Mr Bacon:** I did not quite hear it, but earlier I think I heard you use the phrase "churn of perpetrators". Is that right?

Sarah Maguire: A churn of perpetrators, yes—perpetrators churning through the aid sector.

Mr Bacon: That is someone that perpetrates again and again and again.

Sarah Maguire: They move from one to another to another. If you come and work for DAI and you have that sort of history, or you put one foot wrong, you are out, but that is not going to stop you going and working for someone else, unless we get this communication better. That is things like the aid worker registration scheme, the misconduct disclosure scheme and Project Soteria, which is working with Interpol and national police systems, so we get a multi-sectoral approach.

We know, from both domestic and international environments, that you do not tackle this by one organisation or one part of the sector. You have to have a multi-sectoral approach to it. The more collaboration you have, the better. Frankly, that is where we have seen a huge amount of change since 2018. The siloes between organisations, sectors and parts of this sector have really been broken down, because safeguarding is more important than any one of us.

Q30 **Mr Bacon:** I want to bring Steve in on this very point, but, first, Sarah Maguire, what do you think have been the most important achievements of the safeguarding working group so far?

Sarah Maguire: We are private sector organisations. We are all deeply in competition with each other, but we share learning, information and best practice. Every single one of us has improved something we do because of something else that a sister organisation has done. That has been one of the major achievements.

There is the commitment and buy-in from our heads of businesses. We have safeguarding leads, people like me. I am the global director of safeguarding for DAI. We have other people. The commitment, drive and scrutiny by our own heads of businesses has really been remarkable. My caveat to that is there are still only 23 of us. I would really love it if we could have the direction from DFID and then the FCDO to say, "You have to sign up to the commitments made at the summit. You have to be demonstrating to us that you are working with your sister organisations in order to be even eligible to bid for a contract with us".

Q31 **Mr Bacon:** I am surprised that is not already the case. I worked for VSO in Tanzania many years ago. As a parliamentary VSO person, I had to have an enhanced what was then Criminal Records Bureau check as just a normal part of the process. It was boilerplate that you had to do that.

Steve Reeves: Sarah makes some really valuable points about the way in which the whole sector operates in terms of its personnel. To that point around DBS checks, one of the points where we have not made as much progress as we might have liked, as a set of working groups, is to ask the Government to re-designate aid work as regulated activity, allowing much easier access to those enhanced level criminal records checks. It will be a surprise to some people to know that, through the working groups, we are funding development work in places like Uganda to generate criminal records systems, so that criminal records checks can be done. If you are an aid worker in a UK-based organisation, sometimes getting a DBS check with the current regulations is really challenging.

To that broader point Sarah is making, we have spent time in the last two years—we have some direct benefits from it, but we are laying groundwork—starting to create a framework around the way safeguarding operates globally. If you know about safeguarding in the UK, there may well be flaws in the way we operate safeguarding in the UK, but there is a system. Globally, there was no system before the partnership between private sector NGOs, DFID and other donors started to work.

There are things like the partnership with Interpol, which creates a central hub where NGO or aid workers engaging in misconduct can be reported through to law enforcement officers, regardless of how confident you are about the safety of law enforcement in the particular field location or what-have-you. It creates the opportunity to get criminal records checks in the future from jurisdictions where, at the moment, they are not available. We have put huge groundwork into getting ourselves into a position where we have future-proofed some of this work so that, in future, some of our successors do not have to deal with these

same stubborn challenges that we have been dealing with for the last goodness knows how many years.

Q32 **Mr Bacon:** Sally Proudlove, which is the area where you feel most disappointed about progress not being achieved?

Sally Proudlove: I have been representing the organisational culture working group. We have achieved a huge amount. There has been a great deal of really constructive and useful learning and discussion about what we mean by safeguarding culture. What I would say, though, is that everybody will say culture underpins absolutely everything else we do. If we do not get the culture right, all the policies, procedures and systems in the world will not help to protect people. We have to get the culture right. One of the reasons things go wrong sometimes in crisis and emergency situations is because a small culture exists where different rules apply and people compartmentalise the code of conduct that they signed, or the policy or procedure. We have to get safeguarding embedded throughout, so that it is unthinkable that you would do that.

There is a huge amount more to do in this culture space. We have developed a tool. We have piloted it, consulted on it and are ready to digitalise it and make it into a product that people and organisations can use easily. We have found that to be incredibly helpful. I do not know whether I would call it a disappointment. A challenge is that we have to keep the momentum for that work going. There is a huge amount more to do around culture.

One thing I would really challenge us to do, and it came up in your previous panel, is to think about the intersectionality between the conversations around safeguarding culture and other power dynamics. How do we genuinely operate in a way that is anti-racist and addresses gender and power dynamics, for example? All those things are linked to culture. They are all also interlinked with safeguarding culture. It is absolutely central. It is not that I am disappointed at this stage. There is just a huge challenge ahead of us, and I would ask us not to see safeguarding culture as a nice to have added extra but as absolutely central, with additional funding that needs to be put into that work.

Q33 **Mr Bacon:** You bring me on neatly to the next question, because Frances Longley was nodding furiously at what you were just saying. Frances Longley, you mentioned the whole question of value for money. You were fearful that there would be chipping away at the overhead. Value for money of course is composed of three components: economy, effectiveness and efficiency. If you were delivering an aid programme and there was a lot of sexual abuse and gender-based violence going on, whatever else it was it certainly would not be effective and efficient, even if it were economic. It ought to be completely embedded presumably, but I am, like the Chair, still slightly unclear as to what you would prefer: something that is so embedded that it does not have a separate line item, or something that has to be tacked on as a separate line item and then can be chipped away at. Surely, if it is to be effective and efficient, it

needs to throughout the warp and weft of everything to do with the organisation, not just the overhead. It needs to be in the bloodstream of everything that goes on, does it not?

Frances Longley: I think you and I are coming at this from the same position, Mr Bacon. What I was saying earlier is that there tend to be two types of investment in safeguarding in NGOs. There is the year-round, every single day investment that goes into our cultures, training and recruitment processes and all those sorts of things. That is every day and that is typically paid for through overhead and other funding. That is just in the same way that we have an HR department, a finance team and all those things that were being talked about in the previous session, as well as health and safety and all that kind of work. In many cases, particularly in the larger organisations, that is captured within overhead expenditure.

When you look at projects, as Sarah was saying earlier, you often need to build in additional resource specific to that project. You may need to be bringing in extra people, because, by its very nature, very often with a project you are bringing together a new set of people to do something particular. In that situation you would often have a budget line to say you have a safeguarding team or some particular training.

For example, in my own organisation we are in the process of preparing a large project in Rwanda, which is focused on reducing violence against women and girls. We will be working with about 1,000 trainee volunteers who will be coming in and working from within their communities. We would want to make sure they are very well trained and supported, particularly around safeguarding. We might have a specific budget line to support them. In addition, as an organisation we would be doing an enormous amount of work with overheads.

That is speaking from the perspective of a larger organisation. There are many other organisations that are smaller or have a different funding model. They will sometimes need specific budget lines for safeguarding, because they are often organisations that scale up significantly to deliver on a particular project and then scale back down. A lot of their safeguarding infrastructure is actually of a kind that can be scaled up and down as needed. They will need their funding to be reflected in a slightly different way.

When you talk about the value-for-money calculation, the question I was posing and the recommendation I am making to the new Department is to make sure that, when it is looking at the different criteria within the value-for-money calculation and assessment, it makes sure it looks at all the parts evenly. Sometimes what happens is that the economy part is weighted more heavily in their consideration than the other parts. Particularly in an environment where we know there is pressure to reduce spending from the aid budget at the moment, with the economic climate, and we know difficult decisions are being made at the moment—a lot of that is being taken back to recipients of funding and we are being asked to make cuts—my request and encouragement to the new Department is

to make sure that it applies the value-for-money calculation in an even way and, precisely as you are suggesting, makes sure it does not have the unintended consequence of leaning too hard, for example, on economy and leaving the other components of that value-for-money calculation suffering by comparison.

Q34 **Chris Law:** What progress has been made to improve complaints mechanisms to enable recipients of aid to report sexual exploitation and abuse and ensure allegations are followed by robust investigations?

Sally Proudlove: I will speak on behalf of the organisational culture working group, as that is what I am representing today. The work we have been looking at is the relationship between complaints, reporting and culture. My personal reflection is that organisations are fairly clear about their requirement to report once an incident is what you might call a serious incident, so a sexual exploitation or abuse allegation, for example. Where there is less clarity is on the relationship between the reporting of lower-level concerns and a healthy safeguarding culture. Also, there is probably less consistency across organisations around what is actually reported at a lower level.

There has been progress in terms of helping organisations understand the need, the requirements and the importance of creating systems whereby those serious instances can be reported and acted upon. What we need to do more on, and this is part of what our tool we have developed in the culture group hopes to achieve, is to help people understand the relationship between a rise in lower-level reporting and a healthy safeguarding culture, so that we can get to issues before they escalate.

We are also trying to get some consistency across the sector about what we mean by lower-level safeguarding concerns. We do not want people to wait until they are certain, because that means more harm has been caused. We have had domestic campaigns from the likes of the NSPCC on that. It is a very powerful message. We need people to report early and safely. There has been some real progress. There is still some work to do.

Q35 **Chris Law:** That is really helpful. On the back of that, what feedback have you received from organisations on the safeguarding report handling toolkit?

Sally Proudlove: I am afraid I cannot answer to that one because I have not had any feedback. I do not know whether any of the other chairs would be able to speak to that one. I know it has been used a number of times. It has been downloaded and used a significant number of times, so I presume it is helpful for people, but I do not have any direct feedback on that, I am afraid.

Q36 **Chris Law:** If anybody does and would like to write in to give evidence on that, it would be really helpful. Are you satisfied with progress made by the organisations to report the full number of sexual exploitation and abuse allegations each year as well as the number of allegations upheld?

If you are not satisfied, what are the key areas?

Jill Healey: This is more connected to Sally's previous answer but also connects with your question. In the accountability working group, we were focusing very much on how to get people to report—the poorest communities and the people who really do not get listened to normally. There has been a lot of work around, as Mr Bacon called it, the top-down approaches. There has been a lot of stuff around the employment cycle and on developing mechanisms and toolkits, et cetera. There has been some really fantastic work there.

Where we have been a little bit more disappointed is the investment in the bottom-up approaches. Investment is made in working with local communities to really find out about what would enable them to report. We know that people will not report unless they are familiar, have trust and the reporting or feedback mechanism is grounded in a local context. No matter how good the top-down mechanisms are, they will hit a buffer zone if the people who are actually receiving the services have not been asked their opinion about how to develop the feedback mechanism. We need to do more work on meeting those in the middle, addressing power issues and decision making—who makes the decisions, who deals with the complaint once it is made and that kind of thing—at the very ground level.

Q37 **Chris Law:** If that was improved quite significantly, obviously through training and resources, do community-based complaints mechanisms negate the need for an independent oversight body or ombudsman, or would you still like to see either of those in place?

Jill Healey: As one of the previous witnesses said before, having a single body probably would not work, because it is too complex and there are too many different contexts that we are dealing with. If we can find ways of the very grounded work and the knowledge from the ground feeding upwards and joining with people who represent at an international level, that would be the perfect result.

Q38 **Chris Law:** Sarah, are you in agreement with that?

Sarah Maguire: Jill is completely right and of course we have to empower communities. They have to know that what is happening is wrong and then they have to know what they can do about it being wrong. There are the expat bars that are full of local young women who are selling sex to somebody. It is not a matter of getting someone to report that who is in that community. That is a matter of having the organisation, and it comes back to Sally's point about culture of safeguarding. It is keeping banging on: "This is not right. We do not accept it". Let us keep and encourage the bottom-up work, also really making sure that it is the responsibility of the individual perpetrator and the organisation that he, or sometimes she, works for.

On what would drive reporting from that level, it is really important to remember that it is one of those things where, if you build it, it will come.

I myself have done training with people, with teams, and had more reports coming from that team, from individuals in that team, who come up and say, "I do not know if you know, but this happened six months ago", or, to use something that Sally talks about a lot in her training, "It is probably nothing, but I would like to talk about…", or, "This happened five years ago and I know this guy is still working in your organisation". That is the reporting that comes, but it only comes about because people know that there is something there. It may be for the first time they have ever thought about this as a violation.

You have to resource the presence of safeguarding. You have to be talking about it. You have to be stopping using euphemisms, for instance. Where you talk about safeguarding, let us talk about sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment. Let us really name it. As I say, build it and they will come. That is not to say all you have to do is build it and they will come, but it is about keeping it going and then building the confidence for people that, when they report, something really happens and that something that happens is proportionate to the misconduct that has been committed, whether that is a little bit of action because it is a minor misconduct or a huge action because it is a huge misconduct, but keeping it really strict.

On your single body, there is an idea that we have been knocking around in the Safeguarding Leads Network, and there is no conclusion on it yet. We have been talking to the Victims' Commissioner for England and Wales about whether to have, in the FCDO, an independent international victims' commissioner, so a bit like Jane Connors in the UN or Dame Vera Baird for England and Wales, but actually having that independent person, a person who has grounding in victim work in sexual violence—not any old victim work—and/or has experience in international work. That would be a "chuck it out there" idea for people to chew on.

Q39 **Mr Bacon:** Would that person, an international victims' commissioner, potentially be based in the United Nations? In kicking it around, where have you discussed where it might be sited?

Sarah Maguire: The kicking-around idea is really for HMG to have our own international independent victims' commissioner. We have Jane Connors already, the victims' advocate in the UN, who is doing enormous work, but it is an enormous mandate. The UK is a leader in aid, so the idea would be to have that person located here, with an oversight and expertise, so a thought leader as well.

Q40 **Chris Law:** I would like to touch on whistleblowing. Do the NGO working groups and Safeguarding Leads Network have any work underway to monitor and improve whistleblowing practices? Have you witnessed any improvement in those protections for whistleblowers? Who would like to take that?

Chair: I have to say I am rather concerned that none of you are jumping at speaking about whistleblowers in terms of reporting abuse.

Sally Proudlove: From the point of view of organisational culture, the work that we have been doing in our group does not entirely speak to the question but is relevant. It is around the relationship between culture and whistleblowing. There are two things I would say. One is that organisations need to have whistleblowing policies and processes that people know about. That does not necessarily mean they will be effective. Through our group, we are trying to take it that step further and say, "Okay, you have the policy. You have the training. People know it is there. What actual difference is that making in terms of people feeling able to report?"

There can be a disproportionate amount of security given, where we feel that we have the policy in place and we have ticked that box. From so much of what we have seen in the sector, I do not think the problems we have are for a lack of policies and procedures. Lots of the organisations that we operate in have lots of safeguarding and whistleblowing policies and procedures. We want to see what difference those are actually making and to help organisations understand the jump from compliance to culture and that those are two different things.

The other thing we would say about whistleblowing, again reflecting from our group, is, if an individual has had to use a whistleblowing policy, that often means that other things are not working for them, if they have had to resort to that. It should obviously be there. They should have recourse to that kind of external, independent reporting process, but it is probably also a reflection that other systems within the organisation are not doing what they should be doing. There should be an opportunity to report internally in a safe way. Reflecting on the work we have done as a group, those are the kinds of conversations we have had around the whistleblowing.

The monitoring of how many organisations have whistleblowing policies and procedures would be something that the Government or DFID would be able to speak to better. They would take that due diligence approach. We, as co-chairs, would not have access to that information. I do not know if that is helpful.

Q41 **Chair:** I have a number of quick questions. Steve, we have not heard very much from you at all. You work for Save the Children, which has not covered itself in glory when it comes to child protection. I wonder if you could tell us the organisational changes you have made and the lessons you would share with other organisations about how to change the culture of an organisation and embed safeguarding and empowering children within that.

Steve Reeves: You are right to say that Save the Children has had its issues around workplace culture and the way in which certain behaviours have played out in the workforce. It is an interesting point about how reflective we are about culture and leadership in organisations. I worked for Save the Children at the start of some of those difficulties becoming realised, and the place is dramatically different now. That has been

achieved through a certain level of investment in specialism and skill and changes in process, but a huge amount about culture and leadership. I would emphasise that point dramatically, in terms of what we expect from trustees, executive leadership and other leaders across organisations. We really can hold each other to account on some of those things.

The situation with Save the Children is obviously very public, in terms of the Charity Commission has investigated and made its findings and what-have-you. I can tell you that the organisation is very different today than it was before. That has been achieved through this reflective approach, being open to criticism, accepting there is learning to happen, and then implementing the learning from that.

Q42 **Chair:** Could you tell us what that learning is and what changes you have made, so that other organisations could hopefully learn from your experiences?

Steve Reeves: We had an external review of our workplace culture, which spoke to huge numbers of people in the organisation, both former and existing members of staff and people engaged with the organisation. It looked at the way they interacted with each other, how it feels to be employed in an organisation like ours, how it feels to report something and how it feels to go through a process or procedure.

It also looked at how people are represented in the workplace. We have done huge amounts of work with our networks of staff, including our LGBT+ network. We have a network of black and minority ethnic staff who have drawn together data. They share their experiences. It gets fed up through a system of organisational change. We have an executive director whose job it is to lead on that sort of change and transformation.

There is this huge amount of work. If you listen to the staff and the people you work with, lots of the answers are already there. If you feed all that stuff into a system with responsive leadership and people who are prepared to change, you can change an organisation's culture dramatically.

Q43 **Chair:** I can see how that would prevent abuse within the workplace. How does that translate to stopping your aid workers abusing the beneficiaries?

Steve Reeves: A huge amount around safeguarding is about culture, of course, and you have heard from colleagues. We have always scored relatively highly—not highly enough, because we always want better from our programme staff. In reality, having some of these systems in place—the way you vet and manage staff and the way you manage concerns—is critical. The way in which you embed this in programmatic work is important. We have done huge amounts of work on the ground. We have increased the number of focal points in our country offices, the people who are absolutely on the frontline with participants in programmes, with

women's and children's groups in communities and what-have-you locally. It has been open in exactly the same way, with that exact same process of consulting and understanding what things feel like for people on the ground.

It is also about having that really clear approach about what it is in your policy and practice that is important. What are you not prepared to compromise on? There are those things around employment standards, adherence to code of conduct, robust and impartial investigations into any suggestion that a code of conduct has been breached. Those things all add together to build this culture of safeguarding in an organisation, but nobody is pretending it is easy.

Q44 **Chair:** You are focusing on the employees and managing their conduct, rather than empowering the beneficiaries to know what is acceptable, unacceptable and giving them the resources to report it. Is that right?

Steve Reeves: No, I would not say that. We obviously have a focus on employee conduct, and that is a critical part of work. A critical part of the way we develop the programmes and create what we are calling safer programmes is how you educate people in programmes about the way in which staff should behave, the way in which they should feel, participating in our programmes. Our position is very clear: that every interaction with a member of our staff or one of our representatives should be a positive experience, even if it happens in a negative scenario. In a humanitarian response, that is an awful situation, but your contact with a member of Save the Children staff or volunteer should always be a positive one and leave you in an improved position.

There is this broad group of activities that all form part of this safeguarding culture, from the way in which you recruit, select and deploy staff and volunteers, right through to the way in which we engage with the children when we operate and the way in which we consult children on the ground.

I would echo the points that were made earlier. When I make field visits, for example, and get to go and visit programmes, I always insist on having an opportunity to sit down with some programme staff and groups of children. Children will tell you very openly about their experiences of these things. On occasion, on each of these visits, someone will raise something and an engaged member of staff with professional curiosity will go away and say, "I would like to ask some questions about what that child meant about that particular comment". When you start building up these small areas of movement, as well as the big systems changes, you can generate quite significant change on the ground.

Q45 **Chair:** Jill, you run a small charity that is child-focused. What are you doing, or what should others be doing, to empower children, beneficiaries of aid, and give them the tools and understanding that some of the behaviour aid workers might be doing is completely unacceptable?

Jill Healey: As someone said earlier, it is really important that children and adults are aware of what is not right and what they should not tolerate. We work with children to enable them to understand that and we also work very closely with local organisations. We do not have programme officers in the country, so we work more directly with local organisations. We ensure that they have a level of competence around safeguarding but also around children's participation, if they are going to be working with us and we are going to be developing programmes together.

It is very much about listening, but also really active participation. We are not just listening and going away. We are listening and then building what they have to say into the programmes and into the projects we are developing. It is being done, but it would be great if that could be done more around safeguarding systems. If children's and adults' active participation in developing those systems and really having a role in decision making could be increased, I think that it would be much safer. The work we do would be much safer.

Q46 **Chair:** Do you think that the beneficiaries could be or should be involved in the development of the safeguarding?

Jill Healey: Both. There is often a misconception that people who are not so educated or live in extremely poor circumstances do not have so much to say. Those of us who talk to them know that they have a lot to say, and it is a lot to say that is very relevant. They are the experts in their lives. They are the experts in what is safe for them and what is not safe for them. We just need to listen to them more.

Q47 **Chair:** Sally, you talked about the culture and also that in an emergency situation, a very intense situation, you have a lot of people coming, rushing to an area to try to help. It must be incredibly difficult to manage that and embed the safeguarding. Do you think it is possible to change the culture within the aid sector? We are hearing that it is very macho, "We are coming to help you. You should be grateful for it", and that power imbalances tend to lead to the potential for abuse. How do you go about changing that?

Sally Proudlove: I absolutely think it is possible to change the culture. We have seen movement around safeguarding culture that we can learn from in other sectors. The example I am going to give is that actually I have worked a lot in the sports sector. It is not perfect and I know there have been some reports in the news fairly recently, but actually there have been changes in what is and is not acceptable, in terms of behaviour. What happens is that becomes normalised. It is like introducing something like everybody wearing a seatbelt. It becomes unthinkable that you would get in your car and not put your seatbelt on, but it took a long time for that to become the norm.

I have absolutely every hope we can do this. It is complex. It is complex in the sense that there can be an awful lot of pressures in that

emergency scenario that we have to take into consideration. It is not complex in the sense that we know what we have to do and what the right things are. People know how they should behave. We can never use the complexity argument as a reason for why we are not trying to tackle it. That is the reason for why it might take time and be challenging. It just means we need to work harder to get it right and we need to understand those complexities.

I have every hope that we can do it. We have seen culture change in other sectors. It will not happen overnight, but I echo Jill's point and the point I was going to raise about involving children, for example. We take a child rights approach, because the UNCRC is our mandate. It is not just that children can teach us things. It is not just that they can contribute to the safeguarding systems. They have a right to have a voice in this space. Anybody who benefits from our work has a right. We will learn stuff from people. We will do safeguarding differently.

We have to be brave enough to not just replicate the same models that have worked in the global north. We have to be willing and able to do things differently. That is coming back to the point that some of our speakers were saying in the first panel. Just to caution about something like the resource and support hub, which has huge potential, let us be careful that we do not parachute in models that have maybe worked in the UK, which has a very specific legislative framework around safeguarding, and just think it will work somewhere else. We have to learn from the expertise on the ground and hear what it is that people have to say. It might look different, but it does not mean it will not be less safe.

Q48 **Chair:** Thank you for that. Sally, if you and your group have any more thoughts about that area-specific type of safeguarding, I think the Committee would be very keen to hear that, if you were able to write in with some more information. That is an avenue I think we would like to explore.

Frances, we spoke about funding and that safeguarding needs to be embedded into that. If DFID or FCDO discovers that an organisation it is funding has a problem around safeguarding, should it just remove the funding?

Frances Longley: It is interesting, is it not? I think it was Alina Potts in the earlier session who was talking about the dangers of having a defunding approach. In culture terms—I think she was touching on this earlier—something that Sally and I have often spoken about in the culture and leadership group is that the name-and-shame approach to organisations is loaded and dangerous. Any organisation can have a problem. It is not okay that that problem exists, but, if you make the consequences of a problem coming to light so catastrophic that people either do not want to make a complaint or the people who have received a complaint are terrified about acting appropriately in response to it, you

are actually creating a situation where it is very unlikely that we are going to have a healthy culture.

Q49 **Chair:** I would argue the flip of that, in that, if you knew the penalty was going to be that enormous, you might put more energy on the safeguarding in the first place.

Frances Longley: It depends what you mean by an enormous penalty. Let me be completely clear about this: it is unacceptable for anybody in our sector to be committing acts of harassment, abuse or exploitation. Unequivocally, it is unacceptable. It has no place in our work or organisations, and none of the group of us sitting here would give you any kind of compromise about that. It is not acceptable at all and we are all committed to rooting it out.

Where it happens, if you want to create a culture where people feel confident to report problems, you have to have the flexibility to tackle that problem in a way that is proportionate, is going to achieve the right outcome for the victim or survivor and is going to lead to positive change in the organisation. That is not about sweeping things under the carpet. It is not about giving people a golden handshake. It is not about writing bogus references to get someone off your staff list. It is absolutely categorically not about any of those things.

Q50 **Chair:** Sarah, I have been very impressed by what I have heard the private sector is doing. It seems to be presenting this as project management and embedding it in. Are you surprised that NGOs are not quite as front-footing when it comes to safeguarding as it seems, from your presentation, the private sector is?

Sarah Maguire: I am sorry if my evidence has been to say that we are better than the NGOs. The NGOs sometimes work in a different way. Humanitarian NGOs are working in a very different environment from, say, a governance project in Kenya. I do not think it is a competition between the two halves of the sector. It is to say that we, like they, have managed to get ourselves together and work together to improve things. We have the luxury of organisational culture, which means that we see a problem and fix it. As you know, Mr Bacon, it is a private sector DNA that says, "See it, do it", and we are very lucky to have that. As a downside to that, we are not always as collaborative. We are not always as consultative around our own people.

I am not going to say that I am disappointed with the NGOs. We, in the Safeguarding Leads Network, are working very closely and learning a lot from each other, depending a lot and leaning on each other a lot. The misconduct disclosure scheme has come about from the NGOs. The humanitarian NGOs thought of that and they have started now to open their arms to the private sector to say, "Yes, we know this is only going to be effective if we get the whole of the sector". Otherwise, we will have people saying, "I cannot work for Save the Children because they are on

my case. Do not worry about it. I will go and work for DAI or Crown Agents or Chemonics".

The NGOs have broken down the prejudices, such as the idea that we are the fat cat aid barons, which we are not. Yes, we have made a huge amount of progress for a whole myriad of reasons, but the NGOs have as well. There have been improvements.

Q51 **Mr Bacon:** I had one final question in relation to something Frances Longley said in her last exchange with the Chair about the potential damage of defunding. I accept there could be damage from defunding, but I rather sympathise with what the Chair said: that knowing there was a serious risk of defunding might have prompted more action at some point in the last two, three, five, 18 years or whatever it is. Frances Longley, do you accept that there is a difference between defunding an organisation—if one did that, it frees up resources that can be used elsewhere—and defunding the activity? It is possible to keep the activity while defunding a particular organisation? Do you accept that?

Frances Longley: The distinction I would want to make is about an organisation that has identified and is tackling reports of abuse that are going on within it, and therefore may have a count in its reporting of saying, "There have been X number of instances this year and we have dealt with them in this way", and where the staff and other stakeholders in that organisation feel it is possible to report openly when things go wrong, so that they can be tackled appropriately and they feel safe to do that. I would not want that organisation to be punished or defunded for dealing appropriately, openly and effectively with reports.

On the other hand, if you have an organisation that is shown to be organisationally and institutionally negligent or inappropriate in its approach to safeguarding and abuse, yes, I do not have a problem with you saying, "You have failed to meet our standards for being entrusted not only with the funds but actually with the access and the privilege of the work you are there to deliver". It is fair for us to take a serious approach to those organisations. That approach could start with, "How are you going to improve?" depending on the nature of it. If it is shown to be a profoundly deliberately negligent organisation, of course we should not be facilitating that organisation to go and work with some of the world's most vulnerable people.

What is really important in safeguarding, whether it be domestically here or internationally, is you cannot have a completely binary approach to these things. There is nuance and sophistication. That is not to diminish the seriousness of any of the incidents we are talking about. It is just to say that you have to be able to take a sophisticated view in order to deal effectively and unequivocally with abuse and negligence.

Q52 **Chris Law:** This is a follow-up question to the funding challenges that are going to come our way. In terms of safeguarding again, how are the very small organisation, which are already fragile in terms of funding and

delivery on the ground, going to cope with further funding reductions? How do they manage to keep up with the larger organisations when it comes to the protection of their aid recipients?

Jill Healey: As one of those organisations in that kind of fragile situation, obviously the smaller the organisation the more fragile we are. We have much less leeway to manoeuvre if cuts start coming. Potential cuts from DFID are only part of the process that has been continuing over several years. One of the earlier witnesses made a comment about larger and larger grants, larger and larger pieces of work and larger and larger organisations being funded. The diminishing of institutional donors' investment in small organisations has been many years in coming, because I think it is seen as more cost-effective to give a lot of money to one organisation.

We are used to it. We have been becoming very flexible and trying to manoeuvre around these situations for many years. In terms of how we, therefore, protect the safeguarding and the people who we work with, I obviously cannot speak for all small organisations, but there is a certain flexibility and I guess an innovative and nimble approach within smaller organisations, out of the necessity of the past few years. My experience is not that we have weaker protection and safeguarding mechanisms. Many organisations have strong ones.

We probably work more closely with organisations in the countries we are working with, and we will rely more on them to deliver safeguarding expertise, and that is a good thing. The Covid-19 situation has illustrated that in a way, because those organisations are still there, whereas a lot of international organisations cannot get there and be there. The local-level organisations can be there and can still reach some of the most vulnerable people. It is obviously not great to have cuts or anything, but, if it helps with that push towards recognising local organisations and the expertise they hold, there is something positive in this situation. That is my answer, which was slightly longer than I anticipated.

Sarah Maguire: There is a really important point that Jill is making there about capacity-building for smaller and really local organisations down on the ground. They are often faith-based or have come out of four or five right-thinking people in a community, a village, whatever. No, they are not going to have had discourses about safeguarding and have policies and reporting mechanisms. If we can make sure that, during a period of retrenchment, we still maintain the focus on the necessity to build the capacity of the people on the ground who are right next to the most vulnerable, and themselves are also the most vulnerable, so we see that, following it right downstream, we will be doing our duty better. Thinking about the FCDO, we should get that written into the description of work, whether it is contracts, projects or core funding for NGOs, whatever it is, but making sure that is the question that gets asked: "What are you doing to build the capacity of the people on the ground on safeguarding?"

Chair: Thank you to all the panellists and the Committee members for

their time today. What you have been telling us has been really fascinating. You have given us much to think about. Again, I will ask if we can come back to you as we progress this inquiry.

Today, the session has been quite shocking. I have been surprised and disappointed about how widespread people are telling us that the sexual abuse and exploitation of the beneficiaries is. I am very aware that there are cultural changes that need to be made across the sector and that safeguarding needs to be woven deeply into organisations. Also, DFID and the new Department have a responsibility to support, resource and monitor that that safeguarding is in place going forwards.

Thank you again for your time. I hope that we will be able to make a difference with this inquiry and that we will not be back here again in two years, trying to see what has and has not happened. Thank you all very much for your time.