

International Development Committee

Oral evidence: Sexual exploitation and abuse in the aid sector, HC 840

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Members present: Stephen Twigg (Chair); Richard Burden; Mrs Pauline Latham; Mark Menzies; Paul Scully; Mr Virendra Sharma; Henry Smith.

Questions 474 - 517

Witnesses

I: Corinna Csáky, International Child Development Consultant.

II: Kevin Watkins, Chief Executive Officer, Save the Children UK; Steve Reeves, Director of Child Safeguarding, Save the Children UK.

Examination of witness

Witness: Corinna Csáky.

Q474 **Chair:** Good afternoon, everyone, and welcome to this oral evidence session as part of our inquiry into sexual exploitation and abuse in the aid sector. We have two panels today, and I am really pleased to welcome Corinna. I am grateful to you for coming to give evidence to us today. Slightly unusually, we have agreed that Corinna will give a slide presentation by way of introduction. We understand that will take about 10 minutes, but please, before that, introduce yourself, and then move straight into the slide presentation.

Corinna Csáky: Good afternoon. My name is Corinna Csáky and I am an independent development consultant. I am author of the Save the Children 2008 report, "No One to Turn To". However, I am here in an independent capacity, as I no longer work for Save the Children. I appreciate the opportunity to present to you before we move into questions. This way, I can present the perspective of victims and survivors and their communities using their words, rather than mine. I will talk about who this abuse is happening to, why, why they are not reporting it and what can be done to address it.

I want to commend the Committee for seeking out the voices of victims and survivors. This is not only morally right but also means your recommendations will be effective, rooted in the realities of life for children and communities on the ground. I am speaking on behalf of children in communities in South Sudan, in Haiti and in Côte d'Ivoire. These were people we consulted for the 2008 report. Before I start, I want to thank the bravery of those people who took part in the research.

Chair: Absolutely.

(PowerPoint presentation given)

Corinna Csáky: It is very important for you to know who the victims are. This is because it has central bearing on what should be done about it. These are children who are already highly vulnerable. This quote summarises so much of what was told to me time and again: "There is a girl who sleeps on the street and there were a group of people who decided to make money off her. They took her to a man who works for an NGO. He gave her one American dollar and the little girl was happy to see the money. It was two in the morning. The man took her and raped her and in the morning the little girl could not walk".

These children are often alone. They are separated from their families. They are living in extreme poverty. Without the protection and support from parents, many are using transactional sex just to survive. It is really important to remember that they are usually outside the system. Many are not registered at birth. They are not registered for schools and other basic services and they are not registered for humanitarian



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assistance, so they are living, in a way, outside the system. Please keep this fact in your minds throughout this presentation. It is these children we are asking to come forward to report a case of abuse, and it is these children that we should try to protect.

It is also very important that you note that the abusers are both foreign and national staff. Some come from overseas, but many more are local people employed by international humanitarian organisations. With the exception of peacekeeping forces, local people make up the majority of humanitarian staff. It is no surprise therefore that they make up the highest proportion of abusers. From the perspective of victims and survivors, there is no difference between the two.

As a mother in South Sudan points out, "The humanitarian staff committing the abuse are often from the local community. Therefore, you cannot consider abuse by humanitarian workers and abuse by other people separately. You need to think of them both together and deal with them both together".

A resounding message from victims and survivors is that most cases of abuse are not reported. People are not speaking out. In the words of a teenage girl in Côte d'Ivoire, "We have never heard of anyone reporting the cases of abuse". This is vital, and it is vital because the aid sector's safeguarding mechanisms are mainly responsive. They are mainly triggered when a victim or their community reports the abuse. I want to talk about why these people are not speaking out, as I think it is key to tackling the problem.

Many victims, survivors and their communities regard this abuse as an inevitable fact of life. They do not see the need to report it. These are contexts ravaged by conflict and disaster, where the social fabric is threadbare, where children, especially girls, are often regarded to be worthless, and where exploitation and abuse have become normalised.

I want to read this quote from a 14-year-old boy that I think captures the essence of this statement: "We are all working at the peacekeeping camp. We go there to earn money to help support our families. Sometimes they ask us to find girls, especially our age. Often it will be between eight and 10 men who will share two or three girls. They also use their mobile phones to film the girls. I find them girls in the town. They are often keen because of the gifts that they are promised, such as mobile phones and food rations. For us, we say to ourselves that even if it is bad we are gaining too, such as money, new t-shirts, souvenirs, watches and tennis shoes".

Victims and survivors also described how speaking out carries several real risks. Foremost, they risk losing the food and money earned through transactional sex with humanitarian staff. In the words of a teenager, "He is using the girl, but without him she will not be able to eat". Children and communities are also scared of retaliation. In their words, "Some children are scared they might even be killed by the abuser".



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People are also fearful of the stigma associated with this abuse, which often carries harmful economic and social consequences. In their words, "Your name will be ruined".

In South Sudan, some girls fear speaking out because they may be forced to marry their abuser. Her virginity carries vital economic and social currency, upon which she and her family very much depend. If she reports being abused then she may be forced to marry her abuser in exchange for a dowry. In the words of a Southern Sudanese girl, "The father would try to persuade the man to take the girl as a bride and to pay cattle for her. He would not ask the girl whether she wants this", so really the girl gets no advantage from telling anyone about the abuse.

Speaking out carries huge risks and very little gain. The lack of support provided to victims is both a problem in and of itself and a major factor putting people off coming forward. Very few people in Haiti, in Côte d'Ivoire and Southern Sudan had ever heard of a victim receiving medical, legal, psychosocial or financial support. In fact, not once was this ever voluntarily mentioned to be a necessary requirement of the response.

Overall, people feel they have no one to turn to. They cannot turn to the local authorities. In the words of a Haitian boy, "Who would we tell? We would not tell the police. They cannot do anything. Anyway, I have heard that the police do this kind of abuse too". The humanitarian organisation itself is often not regarded as a viable option either. In the words of a young Haitian girl, "The people who are raping us and the people in the office are the same people".

Moreover, people do not know how to report a case of abuse. Whilst children may tell a friend or a parent, very few people could say how this would be taken forward in any official capacity. As one father in Côte d'Ivoire says, "How will we even get in to see the managers?"

People describe a situation of almost total impunity. In those few cases that are reported, the perpetrator is rarely, if ever, punished. This reinforces the normalisation of child abuse and is a major disincentive to report. In their words, "They don't even hide what they are doing"; "If a case is reported, the fact that nothing happens can put people off coming forward"; "The organisation should dismiss the person so that other men will learn you cannot go around abusing children in this way". Often, no action was taken, and that is the problem.

What can we conclude from this picture? What needs to change? These are recommendations that come from children and the communities we spoke to themselves. First, children and their communities must value their own rights and protection in order to speak out when they are violated. They must have confidence that speaking out will bring about a positive change. For example, victims must be given effective medical, psychosocial, financial and legal support. Children and their communities must receive feedback on how this issue is being addressed and what



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action is being taken against the perpetrators, in order to build their confidence in the system and to hold others to account. Finally, the reporting and response mechanisms must be child-friendly and effective for all children, especially those who are living on the edge of society.

I wish to end by reminding you who we are trying to protect and what we are asking them to do. In the words of a mother in South Sudan, "An orphan cannot say anything against her abuser because she has nothing". Thank you.

Q475 Chair: Corinna, thank you. That was a very powerful presentation. You have highlighted some of the most significant and challenging issues in terms of this issue that we have been dealing with as a Committee for a number of months now, not least some of the questions around reporting, the importance of reporting and the barriers to reporting, and, as you rightly say, the utter bravery of the children and young people who took part in the study. There are a number of questions from colleagues following up from your presentation. Let me just start with one before coming to Pauline. From the testimonies and the work that you did, what sort of insight did that give you into the scale of this?

Corinna Csáky: The research did not look at the number of incidents. We spoke to 341 people, mainly in focus groups but also in in-depth interviews. Of those, just over half could recall incidences of coerced sex with children. You cannot equate that to a scale of incidence, because obviously any number of people could be recalling one incident, but it does give a sense of the magnitude of the problem. We held 38 focus groups and only four of those could not recall an incidence of sexual abuse against children. We covered a range of locations in three countries, all of which were receiving humanitarian assistance of some kind and anecdotally had reported this problem previously.

Q476 Chair: What was the range of ages in those focus groups?

Corinna Csáky: We consulted 341 people. 250 of those were between the ages of 10 and 17, and over half of them were girls.

Q477 Mrs Latham: Did you come across evidence of a wider context of sexual abuse and exploitation, or, more generally, of violence against women and girls in conflict and forced displacement scenarios, including sex trafficking? How clear do you think the distinctions are between sexual exploitation and abuse by aid workers and peacekeepers, and sexual exploitation and abuse by professional exploiters of displacement and refugee environments?

Corinna Csáky: That is a very important question, because tackling this problem by the aid sector is absolutely integrated with tackling the problem in those communities as a whole. These are contexts that are ravaged by conflict and disaster. As I said in my presentation, this normalisation of sexual exploitation and abuse is rife. The acceptance of it being an inevitable fact of life was widespread. It is happening by people in the local communities, businessmen, teachers, as well as



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people associated with the aid sector. I suppose from the perspective of victims and survivors, they described how they are growing up in a context where this is normal.

The conclusion one can draw from that is, in order to do something about it, you have to also tackle the broader context and invest in addressing the drivers of this abuse. As we have seen, these humanitarian workers are not operating in a vacuum. Many of them come from these local communities. The fact that they are being supported by aid money from overseas means we bear some responsibility.

Q478 Mrs Latham: In terms of the perpetrators, most NGOs will have western men working for them. They will have local people, but mostly they come from western areas to go and help in these situations. It is not very often an African NGO, is it? It is going to be more western people coming, and they should be setting an example to the local people, who may think it is normal. Western men should be saying, "No, this is not normal. It must not happen".

Corinna Csáky: Bar the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, which is very often international staff, the majority of humanitarian workers in any setting are local people. There are some international staff that come but the victims, survivors and communities that we spoke to identified people of various races, ethnicities, colours and nationalities. They were keen to emphasise that it is very much integrated into the local context. We are talking about a problem that is both local and international. It is certainly not a case of a few white western men coming in and abusing children. It is far more integrated.

Q479 Mrs Latham: It is endemic. We know that between 3% and 6% of all men around the world have paedophile tendencies. As they are being pushed out of other areas, like the church and teaching and what-have-you, would you say that this area is attracting more people with paedophile tendencies because they have access—easy access and anonymous access—to the girls who we are talking about?

Corinna Csáky: I am here to talk about the perspective of victims and survivors, so I do not feel that is something I could comment on. Having worked in the aid sector for over 20 years, I would say the overwhelming majority are people doing lifesaving, excellent work, and we are talking about a few unscrupulous individuals. From the perspective of the victims and survivors, as I say, they feel they are very concerned about this issue. It is a major issue that worries them and they want something to be done about it, but I do not think we should draw the conclusion that every aid worker and peacekeeper—

Q480 Mrs Latham: No. I am talking about the 3% to 6%, which is not the majority. That is very much a minority, but it is a significant minority, as we have seen in the Catholic church and other areas. Although it is the vast majority that I believe do a good job and want to do a good job and want to do their very best, that is still quite a significant minority who I



believe are being attracted to the industry because of the easy and anonymous access, where nobody says anything. The victims, as you have said with your slides, do not feel they can come forward, because there is nowhere for them to go.

Corinna Csáky: I will say that from this research, from the perspective of victims and survivors that we consulted, certainly they feel the scale of abuse is significant. Those children who are in circumstances that I have described—those that are alone, those that are separated from their families—are very vulnerable to abuse.

Mrs Latham: Yes, and underage.

Corinna Csáky: It is important to think about the circumstances they are in and to focus on the additional risk that is posed to them by anyone—by an aid worker, by a peacekeeper.

Q481 **Mark Menzies:** Can I just ask what the victims and the survivors said were the main barriers to reporting?

Corinna Csáky: Currently, they have a lot to lose and very little to gain from reporting. They talked about their fears of losing the money, resources and services they get in exchange for transactional sex. They talked about their fears of the humanitarian workers and peacekeepers leaving the area. They talked about their fear of retaliation by the abuser, and a huge fear of stigma, and that has real social and economic consequences for them over a lifetime. Children are very aware of this.

They also just did not know how to report. Some of them felt, given the right circumstances, they may tell a friend or they may tell a parent, but that did not translate into an official report, so they were not sure how that would be translated into action by telling a parent or telling a friend. Many of them said, "If we knew about our rights we would know how to stand up for them". They do not know that this is not an inevitable fact of life.

Q482 **Mark Menzies:** Do you think there is a conspiracy of silence between the aid organisations and the people on the ground, so the recipients of aid, and that they want what would be reputationally catastrophic allegations not to come to light, potentially for fear that aid organisation or that NGO would leave that area, and therefore leave people in a worse position, and so clamp down, say nothing?

Corinna Csáky: Victims, survivors and their communities talked about their fear that humanitarian assistance would go away if they spoke out about it. We spoke to 341 people. Only a handful of those people could recall an incident actually being reported. One of those was in South Sudan and the response within the local government was to go to the parents. The victim actually died and the Government went to her parents and went to the community and said, "Do not take any action because we are worried the humanitarian assistance will go". Their very



strong advice was "Do not speak out. Do not take this forward through any official capacity".

Q483 **Mark Menzies:** Finally, what are the experiences of those who have gone through this and actually reported?

Corinna Csáky: As I have said, the overwhelming majority of cases are not reported, and that is the problem. There were so few people that we spoke to who could speak to that experience. One was, as I have said, the family of a victim who were told not to take it any further. In another instance, a perpetrator was advised on his mistake and asked to pay financial compensation to the girl's father. Those were the two examples.

Q484 **Mark Menzies:** Do you have any examples of people who have followed this through, who have reported?

Corinna Csáky: No, not a single one.

Mark Menzies: No examples at all, none.

Corinna Csáky: Not a single one, not of the people we spoke to. Nobody in the research we had said that they had reported or knew of anyone else that had reported, other than the couple of cases that I have described.

Q485 **Mr Sharma:** What did those you spoke to think should be done to improve prevention and the response to sexual harassment and assault in the aid sector?

Corinna Csáky: The children and their communities were very clear that they need to know about their rights and they need to value their rights and protection in order to speak out when they are violated. That was number one. They needed to be trained in child rights and to value them and value their own protection. This goes hand in hand with tackling this problem of abuse by the aid sector.

They also said they needed to have confidence that speaking out would bring about a positive change. They wanted to see victims receiving assistance, whether it be medical, financial, psychological or legal. They wanted to see perpetrators being brought to justice. It is not only the fact of it taking place; it is that feedback to communities that is also important to build their faith in the system. They wanted somewhere safe that they could report to. This issue of not having anyone to turn to was of major concern to them.

They talked about the importance of child-friendly spaces where they could talk to each other and have confidence and trust that they would not be stigmatised and penalised for speaking out. They talked about the central importance of awareness-raising and designing reporting and response mechanisms that are of service to those who are living outside society, those who are not in school, those who are not in church and those who are living on the edge of society and experiencing that discrimination and marginalisation.



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Q486 **Henry Smith:** Thank you for speaking on behalf of victims. It is very powerful and disturbing evidence that we have heard this afternoon. In your opinion, what is the importance of having a victim, survivor-centred approach to SEA?

Corinna Csáky: The victims and survivors must be aware of their rights and be willing to report. Without this, the safeguarding system is essentially flawed, and so a victim and survivor approach is absolutely critical. Without this, you are designing a system in a vacuum that, essentially, nobody will use. At the moment, the impression the victims and survivors get is that they have very little to gain from speaking out. That is what a victim and survivor approach adds to this. They can talk about the need for investment in responding to their needs, in making reporting and response mechanisms effective for marginalised children. A victim and survivor approach is absolutely critical. They need to be empowered with the knowledge and the circumstance to avoid being exploited and abused and to speak out about it if they are.

Q487 **Henry Smith:** If I may, just as a follow on, you very articulately set out the challenges in reality. The words I was struck by just now was some sort of reporting system in a vacuum. Of course, in reality, that does not exist. In your opinion, and given your experience, how do you think that challenge can be overcome to allow victims and survivors to have a system where they can be confident that the abuse they are reporting will lead to action? You have expressed some of the challenges about the fear of aid being removed. That is pretty powerful and potent. People are being forced to marry their abuser. I almost cannot imagine how powerful that is. Are there any ways you think that challenge can be overcome?

Corinna Csáky: It is incredibly important that you understand and champion the idea that there is hope. There are proven solutions to this. There have been over two decades of recommendations. There have been fantastic technical guidance and political statements, and the child protection sector has moved forward in leaps and bounds in the last two decades in coming up with solutions to these problems. What falls down is the implementation. It is the funding and the political commitments.

I see a very important role for this Committee in tackling that. It is about making sure that aid organisations, donors and politicians invest in those children and communities on the ground in the ways that I have described. It is also about holding them to account. There is one thing on that I really want to emphasise. The worst thing that could happen is the withdrawal of humanitarian funding. It will make these children so much worse off and so much more vulnerable. There is a role to play in achieving balance, in recognising that these things take time, that change is possible, and that solutions are out there. There are many positive examples of children being supported through children's clubs, through child welfare committees and through effective targeting of aid. There are many positive recommendations that are proven to work. The



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challenge is to implement them at scale. There is definitely hope. It is just a question of prioritisation.

Q488 Paul Scully: Corinna, I echo what everyone else has said about the powerful report you just presented to us. You first published your report 10 years ago, in 2008. When you did that, did it have the impact that you had hoped at that time?

Corinna Csáky: At the time of publication, the then UN Secretary-General held a meeting, a cross-UN-wide meeting. The then CEO of Save the Children, Jasmine Whitbread, was part of that. There were several high-level political statements made that we were pleased about. It has translated over time. One can see the impact that there has been some harmonisation work on reporting mechanisms between different aid agencies so it is simpler and more streamlined. There remains the problem of the lack of implementation and resources. At the time, we were pleased with the political attention it got, but we have not seen that result in an equal application of resources.

Q489 Paul Scully: Did you actually see any investigations as a result of your report?

Corinna Csáky: As I say, I would like to focus my comments on the words of victims and survivors. I will say that there was a flurry of activity within the UN and with other NGOs to invest in those coalitions—the Keeping Children Safe coalition and other technical bodies—trying to find better solutions to this problem. There definitely has been some investment, but it has remained very much at the technical guidance level. We need to see more implementation on the ground.

Q490 Paul Scully: Yes, implementation but you have not seen that investigation. At the time of the report, in 2008, were you in demand, not by media but more by other aid organisations asking for more information and trying to get to grips with what you had uncovered and shown?

Corinna Csáky: Again, I invite you to speak to Save the Children about this as well. At the time of the report, Save the Children was already part of the Keeping Children Safe coalition and many taskforces that cover this issue. This boosted the level of activity of those groups. I will say it is something that has been ongoing for quite some time. I would say organisations across the sector have been looking at this, aware of this as a problem, for some time.

Q491 Chair: Thank you again for the evidence you have given so far today and giving voice to the victims and survivors. “Two decades of recommendations” I think was a phrase that you just used. This is what we have been grappling with as a Committee, in particular in the context of the action that DFID is now leading, and leading into the planned summit in October. Is there one thing, or maybe two things, that you think would make a big difference?



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I was very struck when you talked about child-friendly spaces; it reminded me of when the Committee visited the Rohingya camp in Cox's Bazar earlier year and we visited child-friendly spaces run by UNICEF. We also saw in the camp the signs up about the aid that was available to the refugees, which had the slogan, "No payment or favours". It was very striking, and clearly better to have that sign than not have that sign. That felt like a step in the right direction but not really going as far as would be needed to provide a truly protected environment there. That is just one, admittedly very major, current example. Would you have one or two things you would really like to see come out of these debates, either in terms of UK policy, the United Nations or more broadly?

Corinna Csáky: On behalf of the victims and survivors that we spoke to, the thing they talked about that would really make a difference is strengthening their voice. It is about the voice of those orphans and children who are on the edge of society, and how one does that is through child protection systems. It is that investment, and DFID and donors leading the way and showing they are willing to invest in child rights and child protection systems and structures at the local level, and that goes hand in hand with the responsibility of delivering humanitarian assistance safely. That would be a game-changing investment. The children's clubs, in the example you are talking about, are part of that, but it is very much the responsibility of local community to design what works best for them.

Q492 **Chair:** Is there a case to say in humanitarian crisis situations that a minimum proportion of the spending should go to child protection?

Corinna Csáky: I have worked in child protection for 20 years. Of course I am going to say, "Yes, you should invest more in child protection". As this research has shown, the issue of reporting is vital to tackling this problem as a whole. It is creating the circumstances and the incentives to report that will make the difference for tackling sexual exploitation and abuse of children by the aid sector.

Q493 **Chair:** Resources are necessary but not sufficient. You also need to have the culture and the leadership to demonstrate that people will be taken seriously, listened to and then acted upon.

Corinna Csáky: There are proven solutions for achieving that, even in humanitarian settings. It is not enough to say, "This is a difficult circumstance and these things are not achievable everywhere". There are proven solutions and it is about delivering them at scale.

Q494 **Chair:** Thank you very much indeed. Is there anything further you would like to add before we move on to the second panel?

Corinna Csáky: No. Thank you for the opportunity to present their voices.

Chair: Thank you very much indeed. Your presentation will be very important for us as we reflect on our report, so thank you. Do feel free

to stay in the public area if you wish to listen to the second panel. Thank you, Corinna.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Kevin Watkins and Steve Reeves.

Q495 **Chair:** Can I welcome you back, Kevin and Steve? You both appeared before us at the very first evidence session before we had made the decision to conduct a full inquiry. During the progress of our inquiry, a number of issues have arisen that we felt we would like to explore further with you. One is the evidence we have just heard, which is what we will start with. The other is the evidence that we took from Sir Alan Parker, relating specifically to Save the Children, and then finally returning to the issues that we discussed with you on the previous session around the future and some of the policy options that are available.

We have just heard some incredibly powerful testimony from Corinna Csáky. I would like to ask, from the point of view of Save the Children, what your view is of the impact and traction that was gained from the “No One to Turn To” report, which of course was now a decade ago.

Kevin Watkins: First, thank you, Mr Chairman, for inviting me back. It is a great privilege to be here. I cannot think of a more important set of issues for our sector and for our organisation, and of course for millions of children around the world. We greatly appreciate the work of the Committee in holding Government to account. When we fall short as NGOs, it is right and proper that we should be held to account as well. I very much look forward to the opportunity to address the issues that you raise.

I will start by saying that the reason these issues and the evidence that Corinna sets out are so important is that we are, ultimately, a values-based organisation. Those values include respect, compassion and basic human solidarity. Discharging those values is right at the heart not just of our contract with the public in the UK, with the Government in the UK and with our partners, but, most critically, of what we do and what we are in business for, which is to deliver benefits to incredibly vulnerable children around the world. Last year, we reached around 50 million children around the world. 10 million of those were in humanitarian emergency situations.

I would say the contexts that Corinna described from that survey apply almost writ large across our programmes. We are delivering programmes in societies that, in many cases, have broken down because of violent conflict, where the rule of law and governance has collapsed, where there is endemic gender-based violence against women, where child trafficking is often a major concern, and in which child marriage is often endemic as well. The safeguarding challenges are absolutely enormous.



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Subsequent to Corinna's report, we obviously took it very seriously in Save the Children. There were a number of reforms that we introduced in our organisations, including the creation of regional safeguarding approaches. The report came out just ahead of when we created Save the Children International, which is our programme delivery platform. It would probably be fair to say, in retrospect, that we underinvested in this area when we created Save the Children International. Probably we had all underinvested in it, certainly in the period prior to the report.

In the period since the report, we have scaled up our child safeguarding capabilities in the UK. As you know, Steve is our head of child safeguarding. He is linked to a network of around 120 or so child safeguarding specialists in-country and in the region. We have strengthened our reporting protocols, so there is an expectation now that there is an immediate escalation to the country office within 24 hours and to head office within 48 hours. We are improving our reporting systems, and that is reflected in an increase in the number of cases that we are capturing. Again, if we are honest as a sector, there is, or there has been in the past, an enormous incentive not to reveal the full scale of what is going on. That is completely unacceptable. We are investing more in documenting the cases, in quarterly reporting. We are scaling up our capabilities in the UK.

One of the issues that Pauline Latham mentioned, which is very important, is that there is clearly a risk that humanitarian response in particular, but development work more broadly, could become a magnet for paedophiles and for organised criminals. If we are honest, there is a limit to the degree to which our own internal systems, operating independently, can capture this. This is a globalised workforce dealing with what is a globalised challenge, which is the humanitarian challenge and the development challenge. That is why for some time now we have been in dialogue with Interpol.

Q496 Chair: You are moving on to the area that I am going to take third, which is the way forward, so if it is okay I will hold that there. Pauline is going to lead off on that a little later on. I am quite keen to drill in a bit more into what happened after 2008, for our understanding. It is relevant for our inquiry, because we want to ensure that any changes that come out of the discussions this year are sustained, rather than stopping and starting, which is the sense that we are getting of what has happened in the past.

Steve Reeves: I have a reflection on the 2008 report, if I may. One of the really significant things about that report was it was a proactive attempt to establish the truth behind some of these issues. The way in which we generally protect children and vulnerable people is through learning through dismal failure, really. Some of the conversations we have had about DBS have come out of public inquiries after the Soham murders and terrible failures. This was a concerted attempt on the part



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of an organisation to get ahead of those failures and try to establish exactly how it can respond more effectively.

I joined Save the Children in 2013, so I feel the presence of the 2008 report in my work on a daily basis. We have seen upsurges in the way in which we fund and resource this sort of activity, particularly in our humanitarian response. We have had a concerted focus and we have tried out some new techniques, some new approaches, in things like the food crisis in the Horn of Africa. We have probably invested an additional \$200,000 over about 18 months simply on child safeguarding in that response, to try to improve our responses in that particular crisis.

How do you learn from those things going forward? As part of that, we are working with people like the University of Sussex to test out some of the tools that we use to communicate directly with children and vulnerable people.

Q497 Chair: Both of you have answered very fully in terms of what Save itself did. What about the wider sector? How far do you think you were able to use the report as the basis to mobilise other multilaterals, to raise awareness across the sector?

Kevin Watkins: I want to answer this question bluntly. We would not be facing the problems that we are currently facing if we had seen a response on the scale that we needed to.

Q498 Chair: Precisely, yes. That is what I am getting at, yes.

Kevin Watkins: We both have to acknowledge that this is a tough problem to crack. As I mentioned right at the beginning, the environments we are operating in are environments that are highly conducive to the type of behaviour that we are trying to stamp out. The fact that we are operating in these environments is not a case for downgrading our safeguarding systems; it is actually the contrary.

If I may, Chair, just mention that two days ago I was in west Mosul, looking at our child-friendly spaces and our protection programmes there. I met one young girl, whose name was Sala, who had lived for three years under ISIS rule, with all the trauma and anxiety that came with that. She had seen both of her parents killed. She had seen absolutely appalling scenes of violence. She had fled and returned and was trying to go back to school. A child like that, and tens and tens of thousands like her in west Mosul, and millions like her around the world, desperately needs proper and effective safeguarding.

As a sector—and I am talking not just about the NGO community but aid donors, multilateral institutions and regional development banks—we have not, first of all, acknowledged the scale of the problem. We have failed to work together as a sector in generating what I see as a public good. Safeguarding is a public good, because we are so deeply connected in our staffing, in the challenges that we face and in the way that we deliver our programmes. The next phase of this is that we have



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to move towards a rules-based reporting and regulatory system that tackles the underlying causes and is properly resourced.

Q499 Chair: We will get to that in a moment. I am sorry to interrupt you again, but we will get to that in a moment. I think what all of us have found quite frustrating is the sense that there was this 2002 report, there was this 2008 report, and then there has been everything that has happened this year. What reasons are there to be optimistic that this time we will see a sustained change in the way that we do not appear to have done, whatever particular good things Save might have done, after the 2008 report, a sustained change globally and across the sector this time?

Kevin Watkins: I believe that there are some causes for optimism. I think and I hope we have an emerging leadership in the sector that genuinely sees this as one of the great development challenges of our age. In the past, we have seen it as a series of incidental crises that we have to respond to when they erupt. If you look at the statements and the structures that the United Nations have introduced under Secretary-General Guterres, with the creation of these advocacy advisers at a country level to support reporting systems, the quarterly reporting that they are doing and the increased demands of reporting, quite properly. We should be audited on this more stringently than in any other area. That is shifting from DFID, and the signals from the Secretary of State have been absolutely unequivocal on that.

I think and I hope that the general climate for addressing, in particular, gender-based violence issues and violence-against-children-related issues is changing because of Me Too and many other factors. There is some cause for optimism, but there is certainly no cause for complacency.

Q500 Mrs Latham: Could I bring you back to domestic problems? We have heard an awful lot of warm words, lovely ideas and motherhood and apple pie, but we need to look at what has happened in this country with people who have worked for you. First, I want to come on to something Sir Alan Parker said when he gave evidence, and there are other people who are going to ask questions about his evidence. I got the feeling that what you and he presided over was a really nice, cosy boys' network, with lots of good friends amongst each other. For instance, you were on the board but then you suddenly became CEO, and Justin Forsyth was a great pal, and nothing really happened to him. He was able to leave before the actual investigation was finished. It seemed like it was a very cosy club. It is very unusual for a director or board member of the organisation to become the CEO, for instance, after several years. I wonder why that all happened and why these friendships seemed to get in the way of doing the right thing.

Kevin Watkins: Thank you for the question. Let me say first that I had a professional relationship with Alan Parker when he was chair of the SCUK board and I was a board member. I served on the board from



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2009 to 2016. I do not regard myself as part of a network. I also have a professional relationship with our current board chair.

You are completely right. It is unusual for somebody to go from a board position to a CEO position—unusual but not unprecedented, either in the NGO sector or in the corporate sector. It is a fair point to make. My only response to that is that the reason I served on the board was, very simply, that I am passionately committed to this organisation. I believe in the organisation. I resigned from the board in order to apply for the CEO position through a competitive process. If I felt at any point that the process had not been competitive I would have withdrawn.

Q501 **Mrs Latham:** We were told that, but in my view, from the outside, it looks a little strange to have happened like that. Nevertheless, there was also the cosy relationship with Justin Forsyth and Brendan Cox. They seemed to get away with things that nobody should be getting away with in Save the Children or any other organisation. It should not be that cosy that you cannot criticise somebody that is working for you. That is clearly what was happened. There is a statutory inquiry going on at the moment, but, within those constraints, can you categorically confirm that, according to the policies applicable at the time, the HR procedures invoked and followed in Justin Forsyth's case of sexual harassment were technically informal? Despite mediation, despite the giving, recording and presumably monitoring of undertakings regarding future behaviour, despite the issue and lodging of an employer's letter on an employee's file, can you really say this was an informal procedure?

Kevin Watkins: As you said, we have been advised very strongly by the Charity Commission to not make any comment or commentary in areas that might be prejudicial to the inquiry. I know you have had similar submissions from the Charity Commission.

On the specific case, if I may, and I will answer this question to the best of my ability, it seems to me a lot of confusion has been created by this distinction between formal and informal in this context. What specifically happened, to the best of my understanding, in the Justin Forsyth case is that a formal complaint was made initially in 2012. It was dealt with through a mediation process, which resulted in an apology and, again in my understanding, in the issue of a letter that included a timebound warning, which was placed on his file. That is my understanding of the initial situation.

Following subsequent cases, I think one in 2014 and in early 2015, which were also dealt with through mediation and resulted in an apology in that case, there was a formal grievance that was taken out against the board's handling of the previous cases. That was suspended with the introduction of a review by a subcommittee that was created by the chair of the board to deal with the case. I was not part of that subcommittee. It was withdrawn when Mr Forsyth left, or announced his resignation from the organisation. That is my honest understanding of the processes that took place.



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Q502 **Mrs Latham:** Can you confirm, then, that all of this was made absolutely clear to the complainant, that this was all informal, and it was okay for her to have this mediation and an apology given and that was the end of the story? Did she know that?

Kevin Watkins: On that, it is absolutely clear that was not the experience and not the view of the complainant. That has to be acknowledged. In describing what I understand to be the process, I am not for one minute saying it was the right process, and I am certainly not saying that is how it was perceived by the complainant or any of the women affected. That is really a matter for the Charity Commission to investigate and report on.

Q503 **Mrs Latham:** You must regret that this has all happened and that it was, clearly, handled extremely badly on behalf of the victims. Then of course this year you spent £114,000 of money that has been raised. It will not be DFID money. Of course it will not, because we track that. It will be ordinary people in coffee mornings and having garden plant sales, open gardens, whatever, raising £400 or £500 at a time. It will be their money. Do you not feel you have let down those people who believe in Save the Children, as I did? I used to be a fundraiser for Save the Children. I have held loads of coffee mornings. It is hard work for actually relatively little reward, and then you get the money and you spend it on expensive lawyers' fees.

Kevin Watkins: Could I take those two questions separately? They are both incredibly important questions. On the first point, I profoundly regret that we have arrived at this juncture. It is absolutely clear that mistakes were made in this process. It is why the Charity Commission inquiry is so important. We need to learn from that inquiry and ensure these things never happen again. I absolutely regret and genuinely deeply apologise to the women who were affected by these events. Again, we owe it to all of those women who were affected to ensure that we become the organisation that will never let this happen again. I accept those points. There is no question that mistakes were made.

In my view, there is also no question that we have to look long and hard at the culture of our organisation. That is why I created, as you might know, the independent review, which is being led by Suzanne Shale. That is precisely intended to strengthen the culture of our organisation so the rules and the protocols we have serve their proper function of protecting our staff. I recognise my responsibility to our staff. I started, right at the beginning, talking about our values as an organisation. If I look across our organisation, at the people working for us on the front line in countries like Yemen, Somalia and Iraq, the people who are engaging with the UK public, such as the volunteers and our fundraisers, these are people who believe in our mission and in global Britain. I owe it to them to ensure we become the organisation that is fit to serve the purpose of supporting them to make a difference.

Q504 **Mrs Latham:** You have only just decided that, because this year you



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spent all that money on expensive lawyers to protect your reputation, not to worry about the victims or anything else; it was about your reputation as an organisation. You spent that money on trying to stop reports coming out in the paper, was it not?

Kevin Watkins: That was the second question I was going to come on to. We have provided the Committee with the details of our legal expenditure, which was £114,000 in relation to the events that you have described.

Mrs Latham: It is a huge sum.

Kevin Watkins: I mentioned to you that two days ago I was in west Mosul, and one of the centres that I was visiting in one of the worst-bombed parts of west Mosul was a child protection centre that was supporting 300 children—

Mrs Latham: I am talking about in this country.

Kevin Watkins: I am coming to precisely the point you are making, which is a really important point. That centre costs us £95,000 to run for a year, so I am deeply, deeply aware of the opportunity costs of the legal expenses that we have incurred. I am not going to try to give you an accountant's answer. The money did come from our contingency funds, but money is fungible and it is real money, and I should be held accountable for ensuring that we maximise the resources that we get on the front line.

What I do want to put to you is that the reason that we undertook those expenditures included protecting the anonymity and the privacy of the victims in this process, preventing defamatory comments from being either printed or broadcast and preventing factually misleading and damaging material being printed or broadcast.

It is completely appropriate to ask the question of whether we got the balance right or wrong. There is, of course, the issue that once these things are out in the public domain, if there is false information, or if privacy is violated, it is violated on sites that are accessed by tens of millions of people. Again, it is for the Charity Commission, which is investigating this issue, to determine whether or not we got the balance right. As CEO I am responsible for all of the expenditures that are incurred by our organisation, so I will accept responsibility if I got that wrong, but what I am telling you is that the judgment that was made at the time was that we had a duty of responsibility to act, for the three reasons that I outlined to you.

Q505 **Mrs Latham:** I would be very interested to know if the victims feel that you were doing it in their interests, because I am not sure that they would. You talk about it costing £95,000 in Mosul. You spent £114,000; that could have kept it going for another year, even with inflationary costs. To me, you were saving your reputation; that is basically what I think you were doing. It does not matter that you say, "Well, it came



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from contingency". Where does your contingency come from? Donors. It comes from little ladies doing coffee mornings. It is not from DFID that the contingency is built up, and you should not have too big a contingency anyway.

I want to go on to one further point. Can you confirm that therefore such a procedure would not trigger any kind of alert, heads-up or warning, even informally, when UN head-hunters come to consult on a senior appointment, which is what happened, and you did not say a word? Do you not think you had any duty to pass on, even informally, the fact that there was an investigation going on and that the person that they might consider, who they were head-hunting for a very senior job, was doing something a bit dodgy?

Kevin Watkins: The rules at the time in Save the Children were that, unless there was a formal disciplinary outcome recorded in somebody's file when a reference was asked for, there would not be a communication to that effect. One of the things that we have learned from this is that the referencing protocols that we have been applying were not appropriate. Our aim now, to strengthen the system, is to create a structure in which, when people come to work for our organisation, they will sign an indemnity clause, which will stipulate that if they are subjected to disciplinary procedure and they leave during the disciplinary process, that will be reported in a subsequent reference and that all of our references will come through our HR system, rather than through informal structures and processes.

Q506 **Mrs Latham:** When did that come into being?

Kevin Watkins: We have already initiated the second part of that, so all of our references will now come through a formal HR structure.

Q507 **Chair:** When did that start? When did you institute that new policy?

Kevin Watkins: I would have to find out.

Q508 **Chair:** Is it this year? Is it as a consequence of this?

Kevin Watkins: It is as a consequence. Clearly, mistakes were made. I was contacted by the global research firm; in retrospect, I regret the decision to talk to them, and I would acknowledge that. The fundamental problem that we are dealing with was a failure of governance in our referencing system. You are quite right: it should not be the case when issues of this nature occur in an organisation like ours that people can move on because they leave during a disciplinary process or before a disciplinary process, or because there are failures in process. I acknowledge this point that there were mistakes and they should not have happened. I can give you my assurance that they will not happen again, but it is a proper challenge to demand that we do have the correct structures in place.

Q509 **Mark Menzies:** Can you clarify what Sir Alan was referring to when he told us, referring to the Justin Forsyth case, that there were quite specific



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HR failings?

Kevin Watkins: The HR failings that I am aware of, which were reported to the board through a report by Lewis Silkin, a law firm, included a failure to notify the complainants in the right way of the processes that were available to them. This comes back to the issue that Pauline is raising, about this distinction between informal mediation and formal disciplinary process. My understanding is also that there was incorrect information given about which part of the website to go to to get information and that sort of thing. I do not want to speak for Sir Alan Parker on this, but I know that we were informed as a board that there had been very significant HR failures at the time.

Q510 **Mark Menzies:** Sticking to the same case and, again, Sir Alan Parker's remarks, you made reference to the fact that you did not give individuals the right information, nor the right advice and options. Can you shed a bit more light on that?

Kevin Watkins: In all honesty—and this is not me wanting me to be opaque—there really is a limit to what I can talk about, because of the Charity Commission inquiry. I am sure that Sir Alan would respond fully to any specific questions you have following his testament, but I am probably not in a position to say more.

Q511 **Mark Menzies:** Let us look at that in a different way, then. Just to clarify something you said earlier, with the knowledge you have now, bearing in mind what has occurred, what changes have you implemented?

Kevin Watkins: We have implemented a lot of changes. Maybe I could start with changes that we introduced in the immediate aftermath of the events, on the basis of reports that were prepared for the board by Lewis Silkin. One of the things that we did was to introduce an integrity hotline, where staff would have an opportunity, if they felt they could not go through our existing whistleblowing system for whatever reason—they did not have confidence in it or they did not have trust in the people they would be going through. That integrity hotline, overseen by Crimestoppers, would be an alternative outlet.

We introduced an e-learning module, which all staff were required to take, called "Respect in the Workplace", which went in detail through the management of harassment and bullying cases. Since I have started we have introduced a whole raft of training modules to ensure that middle managers and senior managers are properly equipped to conduct investigations and to hold conversations with potentially vulnerable staff. We initiated a process, which we called the People Deal, and that was a dialogue with 500 of our staff about areas in which they felt there were leadership failures that could and should be addressed.

We have introduced a set of trigger mechanisms, so that if a complaint is made against a senior member of staff, a member of the executive leadership team, it is automatically referred to a group of four trustees



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who will decide whether to deal with it through external or internal processes. There is a formal structure now that will escalate it upwards. I could go on and I would be happy to send you more detail on specific measures, but this is something that we have taken incredibly seriously; we have tried to learn from mistakes that were made.

I do have to say—again, I do not want to go into the detail—the question that goes to the heart of the challenge here is about whether these were failures of rules or protocols, or whether they were failures of application. My sense is they were more failures of application, which is not to say that there are not very strong grounds for strengthening the protocols and rules at the same time.

Q512 Mr Sharma: In October they have the International Safeguarding Summit. Are you involved in the preparation for this summit?

Kevin Watkins: We are. Steve, I might pass over to you.

Steve Reeves: After the first summit the Secretary of State called a number of working groups to be established that were led jointly between DFID and Bond. As an organisation we co-chaired two of those four working groups and have contributed actively to their work, and the idea is that the action plans that come out of those working groups feed into the content of that conference in October. We anticipate there being a fair amount of learning from all of the experiences of NGOs in the sector, particularly ours, feeding into the actions that come out of October.

Kevin Watkins: If I may just add one point to that, I do think the Secretary of State has played a really important role in sending some very strong and very clear signals to the sector about the expectation of improved standards, and that is absolutely right. As I said to you back in February, there are certainly plenty of things that we can do ourselves, which we do not need legislative support or international conferences to allow us to move things forward: strengthening the work that Steve is doing, working with our colleagues in Save the Children International to strengthen or investigative capabilities, and all of that sort of thing.

However, I believe that our sector should be a regulated sector in terms of the DBS. I know Mr Chairman that was a subject that you introduced in a Ten-Minute Bill. We very strongly support that, and the case against it is incredibly weak. We are recruiting people who by definition are working with some of the most vulnerable people in the world. If we apply a two-tier standard—one standard for working with vulnerable people in the UK and another standard for working with vulnerable people overseas—that is just morally and ethically wrong. I also believe that the conference is an opportunity to move towards a multilateral system.

We have had very constructive engagement with ACRO, here in the UK, and with Interpol about using their databases, which operate across 192 countries, to create a multilateral system that could be used both for screening paedophiles and other potential violators out of our



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organisations and ensuring that as they are forced out of other institutions they do not end up coming into our sector, but also for positive screening. I believe we should be training our humanitarian workers in particular, but development workers more generally, in the rigours of safeguarding and certifying them to that effect. At the moment we do not have an international certification scheme for this. We have a framework for developing that through our Humanitarian Leadership Academy.

There are other mechanisms that could be used, but if that could be harnessed to an Interpol-type system, it would be an embryo of the global DBS structure that could move us in the right direction. It will not be easy, and I believe it would be critical for the UK Government to work closely with Interpol in developing it, because there are going to be very complicated issues of data and privacy issues that have to be addressed, which will require government involvement.

Q513 Paul Scully: I just wanted to cover five very quick areas. You talked a lot about significant developments in the search for solutions in particular areas. First of all, in implementing a victim-centred approach with all suitable protections, you talked about the integrity line. I just wondered whether there were there any other areas specifically having those protections?

Kevin Watkins: On safeguarding?

Paul Scully: Yes.

Steve Reeves: I think we are trying comprehensively to tackle this issue of how it works on the ground in the field. We have a toolkit that we use in order to consult with children, particularly on the ground, about their experiences. You have already heard today that what is really clear is that most people who suffer abuse do not report it. What we do know is that if you actively provide people with the opportunity to disclose, they are more likely to do that. When we hold consultation workshops, when we hold sessions with children, particularly on the ground in the field, we have a toolkit that supports staff in terms of how they do that.

We are currently getting that toolkit validated and tested out by some independent academics for its effectiveness around that, but I have to say that some of this work is very challenging; some of it actually is not, very often. When I visit programmes I sit down with groups of children every single time I go in the field, and I have never come away from one of those conversations with children without a disclosure of some sort about something that concerns those children in their daily lives. It is simply an act of sitting down, making space and making children feel that it is safe to talk to you. We can do that without massive amounts of additional cost. It is about organisational will, it is about leadership, and it is about creating some space for staff on the ground. We are trying very hard to finesse the way in which we can do that in the easiest way possible, so that existing staff who are already engaging with children in



those circumstances have this extra tool available to them to try to facilitate that disclosure. It certainly is a very challenging area. It is very difficult for people to do, but the reality of making this really centred on the victims and survivors is on the ground in the field, providing the opportunities for people to talk more freely about these issues.

Q514 Paul Scully: You talked about costs, and I suspect Pauline Latham would not have been so frustrated in terms of the legal costs if that cost had actually been built into safeguarding in the first place. The second point was about what you are doing in terms of the significant developments in terms of changing attitudes to safeguarding as a burdensome added cost, moving towards an absolute core priority investment in doing no harm.

Steve Reeves: If there is one criticism of the way in which we as a sector at the moment are tackling some of these themes—though I do not think it is fatal—one of the issues would be that we are looking at these things as very discrete issues across the piece. When you add these things together, actually they are more than the sum of their parts. The really critical thing for us is about how you create an organisation that is focused on and has in its DNA the safeguarding of vulnerable people? You do that by embedding some of these things inextricably in the way organisations operate, but also by adding together these very small measures that you can do. In some places they are very significant. In some places they are very small tweaks about how it is that you engage with people on the field and on the ground.

You start to create a safeguarding organisation, rather than an organisation that is safeguarding-compliant, and that is critical for how these things become organic and embedded in the DNA of organisations. They start then to self-replicate, if you like, rather than us continually having to come up with structural changes for these things. Across the sector we have seen people adopting some of these approaches. We have seen an increasing number of agencies, as I am sure Members of the Committee will have seen, recruiting safeguarding specialists, so we see agencies actually spending money embedding specialists in their management chains, in head offices and more locally. We have certainly seen an increase in that in our organisation, but some organisations that did not have any specialist capacity are now investing in ensuring they have specialists themselves.

We talked about how this is different this time or how it could be different this time. One of the indicators that it is different is people are actually investing hard-won resource in ensuring that these things are tackled at all levels of management. That is something that we should not overlook.

Kevin Watkins: If I may, could I just add to that? This is such a critical question. If we look back certainly to the period before Corinna wrote her report, but even until more recently, there is a sense in which safeguarding has been viewed not as an investment but as an additional cost to be absorbed. It is not a cost that most owners want to pay. In



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the same way that development charities and NGOs may have underestimated the investment requirement, we have been operating in a market, as it were, where this has not been valued and has not been priced in the right way by the donor community.

Stephen, you raised the question of whether we should have a fixed proportion of our staff or resources. I know the Committee have been to Cox's Bazar, and this was a situation in which we had almost 900,000 people moving in the space of two to three months, 600,000 of them children, many of them traumatised, people are hungry, they are desperate. We have very clear standards for what we do in water and sanitation or for how to build a school. Do we really have the same frameworks for safeguarding provision or trauma and counselling support? The answer is that no, we do not. It is a moot question as to whether the way to address it is with a fixed proportion or a fixed number; it is not even built into a lot of humanitarian assessments for the moment. Institutionalising it in an auditing sense and a response framework is absolutely critical.

Q515 Paul Scully: Steve talked about embedding people and practices, and it follows on from what you are saying, when you talk about safeguarding, that you then need to look at the reporting. We have discussed the reporting quite a bit and so, again, what significant improvements have you been making in terms of changing cultures amongst yourselves and other agencies as well, when you are working with them, from a position of "defend and deny" to transparency, openness and that kind of thing?

Steve Reeves: Certainly we have spoken about how we regain that narrative around what high reporting figures actually mean. That means positive outcomes for organisations. It is more likely that vulnerable people have those views heard. There is a lot of conversation about how organisations cope with this difficulty around reporting high numbers and dealing with the consequences of that in a more public space.

On the ground, again, this is very much about creating that space for people, so we have seen an increase in the number of focal points being appointed. As far as possible, those specialist focal points trained in receiving and acting on those concerns need to be as close as possible to programmes, so in field offices rather than country offices, for example. The closer and closer you get to where programme activities take place, the more likely you are to get those reports come through.

There needs to be real focus on how you communicate effectively with children. Just in the last few months at Save UK, we have produced some more child-friendly communications. For every child that comes into contact with us, how do we provide them with the right age-appropriate material that explains to them what they can expect and what they should tell us about? Of course, for some very young children that is very different to those who might be in adolescent age groups.



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There are some big structural things that help us fix some of these challenges, things like Interpol and DBS. There are also other things, which are really just about human interaction and the way in which individual members of staff engage with people on the ground and the way in which they value the views of people about their experience, which will make a phenomenal impact across the piece.

I remember talking to a group of women in a community in Asia, and one of the things that came up—this is something that you should mention in leadership training—was the number of senior leaders in NGOs—not particularly Save the Children—who got out of vehicles with sunglasses on and never even made eye contact with people in the village who had come along to wave. The message those people took away was, “These people are not interested in my view about anything”. Taking your sunglasses off and saying hello to the people that are waving to you sends a powerful message that absolutely you are interested in what they think.

I think there are really big structural significant things that we need to do, but there are also some really basic human interaction things that, if we get right, we get a disproportionate benefit from, at zero cost. It is just about human interaction.

Q516 Paul Scully: I know that we have not got long before the vote. I suppose the last point, in terms of asking you about significant developments, is about how you have been moving on the debate in terms of behaviours and relationships with donors, so that you are moving away from penalising action, where people are exposing and dealing with problems, to actually welcoming it, so it is proactive rather than responsive?

Steve Reeves: On the whole donors are stepping up and they understand the significance of the challenge. One of the challenges for organisations, of course, is that donors are now—rightly, in our view—requiring quite robust reporting from us. That is quite a resource-intensive process at the moment, so if we are trying to get an allegation that comes from a field office in South Sudan today to DFID within 48 or 72 hours from being reported to a member of staff, there is a whole suite of challenges that come with that. What we have been trying to do in that whole process is invest sufficient amounts in order to meet our accountability obligations there, but not so much that we detract from the real function of what should be happening when somebody reports, which, of course, is not that we should be zipping a report through for accountability purposes to London, but serving the needs of that individual who reports things.

In the midst of this huge amount of activity around safeguarding in the sector, we have to strike balances consistently in our approach and the way we expend resource around some of these issues. That issue about accountability to donors is very live, and I know there are some donors that are yet to set their reporting standards, for example, and that is



moderately problematic for us. If they are not clear about what it is that they want to be told as yet, it is quite difficult for us to anticipate those needs. Others are stepping up and providing us with some great clarity, which is really welcomed.

Q517 Paul Scully: You talked too about the October summit. Can you just talk briefly about the significant developments, especially about putting the victim at the centre? What can come out of that in terms of preparation for the October summit?

Steve Reeves: Yes. The co-chairs of these working group have come together as a bit of a steering panel for some of this work, and one of the things that we have been pushing very hard is about how we get survivor and victim representation actually there in October. The indications are from Bond and others that there is some good progress being made in those places. There is a working group dedicated solely to the interests of beneficiaries and survivors. The things that are coming out of those working groups are focused on the daily experience of the NGO contributors to that. I know the chairs of the working group around survivors are frustrated that they have not yet been able to find the time to get as much survivor representation into their work as they would like. I know there is some work happening on that.

Most of the content that is being pushed through these working groups has been stress-tested against the needs of survivors and whether or not it actually makes an impact on the ground for survivors. The presence of survivors in October is absolutely critical.

Chair: Thank you very much indeed. That is a very suitable note on which to end today's evidence session, because that is absolutely at the heart of our inquiry; we want to hear the voices of victims and survivors so that we can learn from what has happened in the past. Thank you both for giving evidence to us here today.