

Environmental Audit Committee

Oral evidence: Voluntary National Review of UK progress against the Sustainable Development Goals, HC 2108

Wednesday 8 May 2019

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Members present: Mary Creagh (Chair); Kerry McCarthy; Anna McMorrin; John McNally.

Questions 1 - 90

Witnesses

I: Baroness Sugg CBE, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for International Development; and Neil Briscoe, Head, Global Partnerships and Multilateral Effectiveness Department.

Written evidence from witnesses:

- [Department for International Development](#) | [PDF version \(287 KB\)](#) 

Examination of witnesses

Baroness Sugg CBE, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for International Development; and Neil Briscoe, Head, Global Partnerships and Multilateral Effectiveness Department.

Q1 Chair: Welcome, Baroness Sugg and Neil Briscoe from the Department, to this, our final session in our review of the voluntary national reviews. Can I welcome you, Baroness? I believe this is your first Select Committee outing.

Baroness Sugg CBE: It is.

Chair: I congratulate you on your recent appointment.

Baroness Sugg CBE: Thank you.

Chair: As I said outside, this is a bit of a battlefield commission. You are stepping into another Minister's shoes. His shoes are walking I think from Belfast to Brussels at the moment.

Baroness Sugg CBE: They are. Big shoes.

Q2 Chair: You are very welcome. We might have a division at 3.45 pm, but we might not—we might have to suspend the sitting.

Could I perhaps kick off? We have been following the VNR process. I think it has been quite an unhappy one in terms of a failure to engage with stakeholders and civil society, and a failure in fact to engage across Government. We were told that these goals would be put into the single departmental plans; they were not. We wrote a letter and they were. Why did it take so long for stakeholder engagement to begin, and why was the process of it not transparent and set out well in advance?

Baroness Sugg CBE: We have had quite extensive stakeholder engagement. That has really ramped up since we committed to doing the VNR for this year, and there is obviously a planning process, once we had done that commitment, to work out how we were going to do the stakeholder engagement.

Ever since we published the Agenda 2030 document, which was I think back in March 2017, we have had four phases of engagement. First of all, going out and trying to highlight and promote the VNR and explain what we were doing on that. Then we have had a series of engagement events in person through DfID. Also, across Government, as you will be aware, each goal has a lead Department, and they have held goal-specific events.

Q3 Chair: The process, you will admit, has been flawed. We were told two years ago, just before the general election, that it would be in the single departmental plans, then it was not. We have had criticism from Stakeholders for Sustainable Development, who were given three days'



notice for an event by BEIS on goals 7, 9 and 13. Disability Rights UK told us that non-professional members were not heard from and invitations were sent with limited notice. WWF said the process was unclear and not transparent. Bond and UKSSD provided recommendations on the process to DfID and the Cabinet Office, recommending a timeline. Was that timeline ever produced?

Baroness Sugg CBE: It was produced. We have set out on the website—

Q4 **Chair:** Early 2019, so six months.

Baroness Sugg CBE: Yes. I have read those criticisms and I understand that of course people would want longer to engage. That is a fair criticism.

This is also a learning process for us. This is the first time we have done a VNR as a country. I also take your point on embedding the SDGs in the SDPs, and I know the Committee wrote about that. I hope you have seen a real improvement in that since they were first put in there, and I know the Cabinet Office, and Oliver Dowden in particular, are working hard to make sure we continue that process and continue to improve. The last SDPs that came out did show improvement—BEIS, for example. There are some really good ones. I think all of the global goals were covered across the Department.

The VNR is a really good opportunity to have an overview and look at how we are doing across Government, how embedded the SDGs are within the Department, and how we are measuring up.

Q5 **Chair:** Will you commit to stakeholder engagement in the future delivery of the SDGs and the development of the national implementation plan? It feels to me like Government have kept this very much as a Whitehall process; it is not a citizens' engagement process. I feel like I have done more stakeholder engagement work than the Ministers on this. When will we see a national implementation plan?

Baroness Sugg CBE: On your first point about continued engagement, I can absolutely commit to doing that. As I said, the VNR is a really good opportunity to raise awareness of the goals across the country, across Whitehall, and to all interested groups. It is obviously not just Government who are responsible for delivering the goals—we all are. The VNR is an opportunity to raise that awareness and then continue the engagement.

We have been really struck by the enthusiasm and appetite for this across the country, whether it be Bristol, which is doing its own review into SDGs, or the many different groups that we have spoken to. We absolutely will continue to engage with stakeholders. Within the VNR itself there will be a clear "next steps" chapter in which we will set out a bit more on that.



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On the implementation plan, we are clear that the way to do it is through our single departmental plans domestically. As I said, we are getting improvements in how Departments are reflecting the SDGs in their SDPs, and that needs to continue, but we think that is the right way to account for departmental activity. Of course, the spending review is linked to those activities, and the next spending review will be the first one after the VNR. We definitely think that the accountability and the way for Cabinet Office to grip across Government activity is through the SDPs. We just need to make sure that the global goals are properly reflected in that.

Q6 Chair: Is it not also to grip the spending review and make it an SDG spending review and a net-zero spending review?

Baroness Sugg CBE: I cannot commit to how their spending review is going to be carried out, but as I said, it is the first one after the VNR when we have that cross-governmental picture, and the first one after each Department has a lead goal.

Q7 Chair: I accept you were not in post, but we had an evidence session with Lord Bates in October, who assured us that Parliament would be consulted on progress. We have had one session with Penny Mordaunt in February, where we got a document that told us proudly that 100% of people in the UK have access to electricity. This is banal and would not even pass the geography GCSE, and I know because I am doing mine in my spare time—no, I am not; I have children doing them. My point is the level of engagement is not even a geography pass. We have had electricity since the 1950s, so that is not a Government achievement. There has been one session.

This Committee has written to Chairs of other Select Committees asking whether that document reflects what they are finding on their Select Committees, and we have had a whole series of responses from Education, from Department for Work and Pensions and so on, and we will be asking you about some of the issues that they, as Select Committees, are looking at and are not reflected in your VNR.

Can I just ask? When are you intending to share the VNR with Parliament?

Baroness Sugg CBE: I think the document you are referring to is the “Emerging Findings” document, which was not aimed to be a draft VNR. We are using it as a tool, if you like, to continue the engagement and continue stakeholder engagement.

I know there was only one all-parliamentary meeting co-hosted by the APPG with my predecessor and also the previous Secretary of State. There have of course been other meetings with interested peers and MPs, both—

Q8 Chair: Which ones?



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Baroness Sugg CBE: My predecessor certainly met regularly with the APPG, for example, on the SDGs, and again—

Q9 **Chair:** There have been two meetings with the APPG on the SDGs, and they were both before the February meeting. I do not think there have been any since.

Baroness Sugg CBE: Sorry, not a formal APPG but I know that he met regularly with the chairs of that.

Q10 **Chair:** That is one Conservative Back Bencher and one Labour Lord. That is not consulting Parliament.

Baroness Sugg CBE: I can understand the criticism on that—the first big engagement and the only engagement was in March. Again, I think that is something we need to do better next time.

On the document itself, we are due to be submitting that to the UN mid-June, and we will be publishing it very shortly afterwards.

Q11 **Chair:** Parliament will not see that document before you submit it. Is that what you are saying? You will not consult Parliament on that document?

Baroness Sugg CBE: We will not be formally consulting on the formal document. As I say, it will be being submitted in five or six weeks or so. There will be an opportunity after we have published it to have the parliamentary involvement to understand and hear back people's opinions on the document and to make sure we reflect that in the final presentation, which will be done in July.

Q12 **Chair:** Other VNRs that have been carried out by national delegations have brought in Opposition politicians and groups from civil societies. We were led to believe, perhaps wrongly, by your Department that the Chair of the DfID Committee, myself and potentially other groups would be invited. Is that still the case?

Baroness Sugg CBE: To the presentation itself?

Chair: In New York, yes.

Baroness Sugg CBE: I am afraid there might be a few things where I cannot give confirmation because of the new Secretary of State on that. We are still considering exactly how best to present that report. You are absolutely right that other countries have done it in really interesting ways with different cross-party and stakeholder involvement, and that is certainly something we are actively considering, but we do not have a final plan for that yet.

I did speak to the new Secretary of State this morning about it—he has shown really great enthusiasm for this, for the VNR and for the goals. I think you will find that he is going to be very involved in it, and it is something he is carefully considering.

Q13 **Chair:** Great. Thank you. Perhaps we can move on to some content now



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and away from process. Just before we move on, we submitted a report on hunger. We looked at one of the goals, which is zero hunger, and we do have a specific question on that, but the response from the Department is now two months late.

Baroness Sugg CBE: Yes, I am sorry it is late. I have obviously chased that up before today, and I am assured that it will be coming in the next couple of days. Obviously, with all of these things, there are many different Departments involved in the response to that. It will be with you very soon. I am happy to answer any of the questions around the SDG part of it, but I am sorry it is late.

- Q14 **Chair:** Thank you. We had a look at some of the Select Committee reports and we were very concerned. For example, in the Health Select Committee's report on prison health inequalities, no mention is made of prison health in the "Emerging Findings" document, when it could have been included in SDG 3 or 16. Prison is obviously a very expensive process and is an opportunity to address serious health inequalities and break that cycle of disadvantage. Your document recognises that further work is needed on prison safety, but does not look at cross-cutting issues like health. Why is that?

Baroness Sugg CBE: Are you referring to the "Emerging Findings" document?

Chair: Yes.

Baroness Sugg CBE: The "Emerging Findings" document does not contain everything that we are looking at, and that has been part of the criticism of it. It does not address every issue. There are lots of examples where there will be things included in the VNR that were not in the "Emerging Findings" document, including food insecurity, which I know your report focused on.

On prison specifically, our new Secretary of State was Prisons Minister and is very across the detail on that. I expect that that will be included in the final VNR along with myriad other things—food insecurity, welfare reform—across all of the different goals. The "Emerging Findings" document was never meant to be a comprehensive list of all the things that we still need to address in order to deliver the goals.

- Q15 **Chair:** According to the Justice Committee in 2015-16—this is all stuff that Parliament has looked at—rates of death, suicides, self-harm and violence inside prison have risen considerably, and they have reached record highs over recent years. I have two prisons in my constituency in Wakefield, so this is obviously a huge issue not just for when people are in prison but when they leave prison. There are higher rates of smoking, alcohol, substance misuse, mental health problems. Also, people with learning disabilities are entering the criminal justice system with autism, ADHD and acquired brain injury, and they are not receiving any form of treatment or help to help them engage with probation, and they are going back to that cycle of in and out of prison.



Baroness Sugg CBE: Those are exactly the kinds of issues on the Leave No One Behind agenda, which we want to make sure is properly considered across every goal. The VNR will of course highlight what has been achieved, but it will absolutely be an honest account of where we still need to go. What are the areas we still need to address? I mentioned some of them, and prisons are of course another.

Q16 **Chair:** Do you think that prison health will appear in the VNR?

Baroness Sugg CBE: I cannot guarantee that because the lead Departments are writing the chapters at the moment, and I have not specifically asked about the prison side of things. I have specifically asked around the food insecurity side of things, as well as no poverty and affordable clean energy. Knife crime was mentioned in a previous Committee. All of these things are gaps that we still have to achieve in order to reach the global goals, and they should and will be addressed within the VNR. The “Emerging Findings” document was absolutely not a comprehensive list, but what the VNR will allow us to do is really look across the goals and show where there are gaps.

Q17 **Kerry McCarthy:** Apparently, stakeholders are being told that only positive case studies would be included in the VNR. Is that true?

Baroness Sugg CBE: Not to my awareness, no. We have had a really good response on case studies—around 230 or so. We are still looking at how we use case studies. We want to use as many of them as possible within the VNR. No, there should not just be positive case studies. Yes, there are lots of things to be positive about, but the VNR is an opportunity to show where we still have work to do.

Q18 **Kerry McCarthy:** Will the case studies all be published? You may need to anonymise some details of it but—

Baroness Sugg CBE: We are looking into that. As I say, we are going to try to include as many of them as possible within the VNR, and we will look at how we can best publish them.

Q19 **Kerry McCarthy:** Could it possibly be an annex to the VNR or—

Baroness Sugg CBE: That is one possibility, yes.

Q20 **Kerry McCarthy:** The aim is that you are aspiring to publish them.

Baroness Sugg CBE: Yes. We really want to show a proper cross-section of the case studies that we have received.

Q21 **Kerry McCarthy:** I am trying to find back in the brief now where we got this idea from that only positive case studies would be included, but you would rebut any suggestion that you are just cherry-picking?

Baroness Sugg CBE: Yes, I would. I have looked through many other countries’ VNRs, looking to best practice to make sure that ours is a really good VNR. We have talked a lot with the Republic of Ireland, which got a lot of credit for having a proper, balanced account. In order for it to



be taken seriously and for us to be able to use it as a way to make progress, it absolutely has to be an honest account of where we are as a country.

- Q22 **Chair:** The evidence was from Disability Rights UK. It stated their stakeholder session gathered only positive examples: "Engagement did not feel tokenistic, but the civil servants involved only wanted to hear good news. Requests were made for case studies, but only positive ones, not areas that needed improvement. Civil servants were receptive to hearing about the (many) areas of failure identified by stakeholders but were very clear these would not be included in the review."

Baroness Sugg CBE: I am afraid I was not in that meeting. My expectation is that the case studies we use will be a proper cross-section. One of the many positives we have had from the stakeholder engagement—we have had a lot of different meetings over the past year on this—and one of the things that was highlighted after the "Emerging Findings" document was the Leave No One Behind angle to it. I think that is where quite a lot of these negative facts come in.

One of the changes we have made since that is to make sure that within each of the goal chapters we have a Leave No One Behind section to ensure that we can properly highlight where the gaps are and where there is still a lot more work to do.

- Q23 **Chair:** That document did not contain a single case study from the disability sector, possibly for that reason, which is extraordinary in a country with 5 million disabled people.

Baroness Sugg CBE: Yes. Of course it is really important, given the number of disabled people, that we properly reflect that. We have worked hard to try to reach minority, vulnerable, and disability groups. We have had sector-specific events. Disability Rights you mentioned, the Minority Rights Group, Leonard Cheshire—we really have tried to properly reach out.

That is definitely one of the things we can do better. We have struggled to make sure that we are reaching out to the right people. We have done lots of work with Bond and UKSSD on that, but there is definitely more we can do in that area.

- Q24 **Kerry McCarthy:** It is odd because, as any MP will tell you, if you have a meeting with a disability group, the first things that will come up are case studies and examples of actual people being affected. In some ways it is one of the easiest sectors to get that sort of evidence. Is it because people just felt that they were being asked for the positive and that you were not interested in anything that they wanted to draw to your attention that was going wrong?

Baroness Sugg CBE: I would hope not. As the Chair said, in the meeting people were receptive to understanding those stories and hearing those



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stories, and I would expect, as I say, a cross-section of case studies to be included in the final VNR.

- Q25 **Kerry McCarthy:** It says they were receptive to hearing about them but very clear that they would not be included in the review—I am not quite sure that that is being particularly receptive in a broader sense. It means they sat there politely and listened. Is that your understanding, Chair?

Chair: Yes.

Baroness Sugg CBE: I am sorry that that was the feedback from that meeting. As I say, I was not there. We do need to ensure that we properly take that feedback. DWP in particular has held a number of events and will be involved in drafting that side of things, and I am sure that will include a balanced account.

- Q26 **Kerry McCarthy:** Can I ask about food insecurity as another example? As you know, we have done the report on hunger and the weight of the Government response. The Committee found that the UK's food insecurity was among the worst in Europe, particularly for children. That is not in the "Emerging Findings" document. There is no reference to the growing food bank use. There is no reference, for example, to the latest figures from Trussell Trust about how many emergency food parcels—an increase. It just seems to report the median calories consumed by adults, so why is that the case? Median calories does not really tell you very much because, as you will know, we have problems with obesity and we have problems with malnutrition, and it is not necessarily about how many calories you consume. It is what healthy food that represents—whether they are empty calories or nutritionally good. What is the point of just reporting a figure on median calories?

Baroness Sugg CBE: There needs to be a lot more than that, absolutely. As I said before, we were not trying to cover everything in the "Emerging Findings" document, but within the goal 2 chapter of course we need to address food insecurity and food banks. We have met with the Trussell Trust and other groups and Action Against Hunger UK to make sure we have their information, as well as the Government data that we collect.

- Q27 **Kerry McCarthy:** That figure is not addressing hunger. It is not addressing the public health issue. I am not sure what the purpose is of including it in there at all, other than a space-filler.

Baroness Sugg CBE: I agree it does not address those things. We do have other data points that do address those things, and we will be reflecting that in the final VNR.

- Q28 **Kerry McCarthy:** Can I ask also about children's services then and education? A recent Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee inquiry into children's services found that the system was at breaking point and needed £3 billion more funding by 2025. Is that the sort of thing that is going to be in the VNR?



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Baroness Sugg CBE: I do not know about that specifically, I am afraid. As I say, the responsible Departments are drafting that.

It is definitely fair to say that while they are drafting it, as well as the feedback they have had from their goal-specific stakeholder events, they are of course taking into consideration previous parliamentary reports, including this Committee's report, and we have passed on the responses you got to your letters to the Chairs of other Select Committees to the relevant Departments to make sure that is taken into consideration.

One of the things that, as I said, we are very keen on as a Department in working with Cabinet Office is to make sure we have this fair picture of what is happening in our country right now.

Q29 Kerry McCarthy: Yesterday we had the Timpson report in the Commons about school exclusions. There is a real concern about that. There is no mention in the "Emerging Findings" document about the rising number of permanent exclusions, particularly for BAME pupils and those with special educational needs and disabilities. I know we could come up with lots of examples of what is not in there, but you do seem to be missing some fairly big, current problems.

Baroness Sugg CBE: There are a lot of examples because the "Emerging Findings" document was not an attempt to list all of these things. It was a tool, as I say, to continue the conversation. The VNR itself does need to address those things, and we were discussing the Timpson report as a good example this morning with the Secretary of State, including the kinds of things that do need to be included.

The universality of the sustainable development goals is obviously new and different to the previous millennium development goals. It is not a straightforward agenda, so it has not been a straightforward task putting together the VNR. Every country across the globe is doing it, but we have different challenges to other countries. We need to talk about our successes, and ensure that we properly reflect the gaps in the UK delivering the goals.

Q30 Kerry McCarthy: In terms of successes—this is my last question—the sustainable development goals are intended to drive progress in areas that, if the goals were not there, perhaps would be neglected. There was concern that the first ever strategy documents were basically just lifting stuff from the 2015 election manifesto, and that they were things that pre-existed before the goals came into place. When you say that you want to talk about successes, will they be successes that will be driven by the goals, or will they be things that were already works in progress—business as usual by the Government?

Baroness Sugg CBE: Yes, or electricity—the Chair gave that example. Part of the good thing about all countries across the globe doing the VNR is that it is also an opportunity to share learning and best practice. We will highlight where we have made achievements as well as where we



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have not. The issue around whether SDGs drive policy or vice versa is an interesting one. There are huge amounts of activity that the Government are doing that of course relate to goals, and we highlight that within the single departmental plans. Having the VNR, this kind of cross-cutting look across all the different goals, will flag where those gaps are and help us see as a Government, a country, a citizen, and a business, where these holes are where we need to do more, and where the Government need to develop further policies, or where we as citizens need to change behaviours. It is hopefully going to be a really positive opportunity to see where those gaps are and adapt accordingly.

Q31 **Chair:** Thank you. Before we move on, can I just ask you about whether you will publish all the case studies, positive and negative, that you have received, either online or in an annex to the VNR?

Baroness Sugg CBE: We are still considering how exactly to deal with the case studies. As I say, we are seeking to include as many of them as possible.

Q32 **Chair:** I keep coming back to this point. We have been on this for three years. I appreciate you have only had three weeks, but we have had multiple Ministers telling us, "It is the Conservative Party manifesto. It is going to deliver the sustainable development goals". That was early days. Obviously, that has all changed.

The facts are a rise in homelessness statistics, 124,000 children in temporary accommodation. Clive Betts, Chair of the HCLG Committee, said that the "Emerging Findings" document's claim of significant progress in affordable homes is an optimistic interpretation. There is a kind of Pollyanna or Pangloss attitude to this, which we are concerned about, and that is why I raised the electricity thing. It seems like you or the Department or somebody is trying to paper over the difficulties.

Our other question is about data. We are an audit committee, so we are interested in disaggregated data. We are very concerned that the ONS was not asked to do a specific set of indicators for this. It was pulled off that work, and that work was stopped towards the end of our last inquiry. I am trying to remember when we published it—it was the back end of 2016. In terms of the data there are no trends, so we cannot see whether things are getting better or worse, and it is only with trend data. There is very, very little disaggregation. Metrics in the EFEE: two had full disaggregation, three were partially disaggregated, and 10 were not. You cannot get a picture of what is happening. Are things good? Are things bad? It is like when the Prime Minister says spending is at its highest level ever, but then if you look at spending as a percentage of GDP, it is not. Are you going to do more on the statistics on disaggregation?

Baroness Sugg CBE: Yes, absolutely. Having the data to see a complete picture of the goals is really challenging. We have world-leading statisticians and statistical expertise. We are only able currently to report about 72% I think of the 244 global indicators. Disaggregation is absolutely key to understanding exactly what is happening for a Leave No



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One Behind agenda. We are working—I think it is about 46% at the moment disaggregated by at least one variable.

On the trend, you are absolutely right. We are working really closely with the ONS on this. I was not aware that it had been pulled off this. Was that for the VNR particularly?

Q33 **Chair:** No, it was not the VNR. It was the actual SDGs in 2016. It was going to set out a comprehensive set of indicators and have a separate reporting framework, and then it was all pulled. It was told during the course of our inquiry not to do that, to cease and desist work, and our report came out just before the election in 2017. Some of the data is from 2013, so some of the data is old. This is going to be progress since 2015, and we do not even know what the baseline is.

Baroness Sugg CBE: The ONS does an annual report on the indicators and the latest data. There was the last one in November 2018, which is “The sustainable development goals in the UK: an update on progress”. The next one of those is due out November this year. We are working really closely with the ONS—data are absolutely key to highlight the real picture, and the VNR will be really driven by that.

We struggle to get the complete picture, as I say. One of the things we are putting a lot of work into internationally is working with other countries to help them on the data. We do very well at it when you look at a global comparison but we are still not there. We do need to disaggregate more on sex, disability status and ethnicity. The ONS has a work programme to increase both the indicators that they report on and also the disaggregation of it. Within the VNR there will specifically be a using data chapter, which will look at the role that data play within the VNR and talk about the approaches we have on trying to get data on the global indicators. It will also highlight work on data disaggregation. As I say, we do not even have half of the indicators we are able to disaggregate on, but there is clear work in progress from the ONS on that. I am meeting with it soon to hear more about it.

There will definitely be a lot of data within the report, as I say. It has published this annually but we very much hope that we will have updated data for the VNR itself.

Q34 **Chair:** We are back on UKSSD claims of cherry-picking and politicising the data. Written evidence from WWF and UKSSD. No trends, no disaggregation. It is problematic. You say, “We have good data” but if it is old and the Departments have stopped collecting it as part of the deregulation agenda, are you going to finance the collection of that data in future?

Baroness Sugg CBE: The ONS data look at the global goal indicators, and there are some areas where Government do not collect that data. There are some areas where some of the indicators might not be so relevant to the UK—for example, malaria deaths per 1,000 people.



Chair: Toilets.

Baroness Sugg CBE: We are also looking where else we can get that data. It will not just be the ONS data that we use. We have been working with the Ordnance Survey organisation, for example, to understand about distances from roads. That has been part of our stakeholder engagement. Where there are gaps and where we do not measure it, we are trying to get that information from elsewhere.

Q35 **Chair:** For example, the Trussell Trust data on food bank use and food parcel provision: would that be part of the data that you will be looking at, collected by citizen organisations?

Baroness Sugg CBE: I am not sure about that specific example, but Trussell Trust is one of the groups that we have been working with.

Q36 **Chair:** It does have a trend, does it not, which is up?

Baroness Sugg CBE: Yes. The trend point is very important. A lot of these indicators are new and were set as part of the global goals. Obviously, we do not have very many years of them, and as things go on we will be able to see a better trend. Other indicators of course go back many years, so we can see a trend on that. Some of the indicators have not even been developed yet, and we are working closely with the UN to help the development of that data so that we can better track where we are on this process.

Q37 **Anna McMorris:** Going back to engagement with vulnerable people and marginalised groups during the voluntary national review process, can you just talk a little bit more about how you engaged, what groups you talked to, who you talked to, and the method by which you got those information and statistics examples?

Baroness Sugg CBE: As part of the VNR and our commitment to the Leave No One Behind agenda, we have absolutely tried to ensure that we reach everybody. Particularly for vulnerable people, we have tried to address that through a number of channels, including our call for case studies, and we have worked closely with UKSSD and Bond on that.

We have held a number of engagement events that were attended by bodies representing vulnerable groups, including people with a disability, women, LGBT groups, children, the elderly, and those living in poverty. We have also really tried to get outside of the Westminster bubble, and we have had events across the country and webinars so that those people who are not able to attend events have been able to participate.

As I said earlier, engaging directly with vulnerable groups has been a challenge. We want to work to find a way to improve things in the future.

Q38 **Anna McMorris:** Who did you reach out to?

Baroness Sugg CBE: DfID specifically. We held a sector-inclusive society event back in March, where we had people such as the Food



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Foundation, the Equality and Human Rights Commission, Leonard Cheshire, minority groups, and we built that up through UKSSD and Bond.

The goal-specific events have been run by the lead Department for each of the goals. They are the responsible Departments domestically for them. Goal 10, for example, involves the Government Equalities Office and reducing inequality, and it has been speaking to the Equalities National Council and Disability Rights UK. On goal 5, again the Government Equalities office has been talking to AIDS UK and the Mothers' Union. For goal 1, DWP has been talking to the Children's Society, Crisis and the National Housing Federation. There is a full list of all of the different events that have happened on our website, and I think the previous Secretary of State attached that.

I have been in this job for a couple of weeks and I have been speaking to the team that has been involved in this. I have been really pleased by the effort and energy that has gone into genuinely trying to speak to every group that has an interest in this. We all have an interest in this.

Q39 Anna McMorris: Member states, including the UK, committed to Leave No One Behind during this process. Yet, for example, why is the record number of emergency food parcels that were given out last year omitted from the progress reported under goal 2, which is to end hunger? That is pretty critical in terms of showing progress or not.

Baroness Sugg CBE: The "Emerging Findings" document was not designed to be a progress report, if you like. It was a tool to have stakeholder engagement. If the VNR did not have measures like that in there, I think that would be an absolutely fair criticism. We do have to make sure that it properly reflects where we are as a country. I would expect issues like household food insecurity and food banks to be talked about in the VNR.

Q40 Anna McMorris: It does not give that proper evidence from the Trussell Trust, for example.

Baroness Sugg CBE: Not within the "Emerging Findings" document, no, it does not, but when we have the VNR that will give a much fuller picture with much more space to talk about these issues, and then you will find that those issues are addressed.

Q41 Anna McMorris: Going back to people with disabilities, that is not mentioned in goal 8 when the gap in employment between disabled and non-disabled people remains largely unchanged. Why is that not mentioned?

Baroness Sugg CBE: I am afraid I would have to point back to my previous answer. You are quite right to highlight that as an issue, and other people have and other Committees have. DWP is well aware of that.



Q42 **Anna McMorris:** Is this all going to be in the final document?

Baroness Sugg CBE: The VNR will be a comprehensive picture of positives of what we have done well, but absolutely making sure that we highlight the challenges and the gaps of where we need to do better. There is no point to it if it is a glossy, "Haven't we all done well as a country?" As I said before, the great thing about the universality is that there is a challenge to all of us in every country all across the globe. We will have a very different VNR to other countries, but we have not achieved the global goals and we will not be saying that we have. This is an agenda to 2030. We are coming up to the last decade. This is the opportunity for us to show where those gaps are and work towards achieving them.

Q43 **Anna McMorris:** Moving on, we have heard previously that the "Emerging Findings" document is more a glossy brochure—I think you would agree with that, given your responses just now—than an honest assessment because it is not really going into the depths of what we are seeing and what evidence is being shown to us by a number of groups and organisations.

Can you tell us, then, why your predecessors did not carry out a full gap analysis of progress?

Baroness Sugg CBE: I would not call "Emerging Findings" a glossy document. As I say, it was never intended to be a draft of the VNR. It was setting out some of the emerging findings on it. The gap analysis is part of the VNR. This is the first opportunity we have had as a Government and with all the other groups that are involved in delivering the global goals to look at that comprehensive picture and see where those gaps are. That is what we want the VNR to do: to highlight the issues where we still have a lot of work to do.

Q44 **Anna McMorris:** Which areas of weakness in the "Emerging Findings" document will be addressed in more detail in the VNR?

Baroness Sugg CBE: I think all members of the Committee have highlighted issues that need to be addressed. The fact that they are not in "Emerging Findings" does not reflect what is going to be in the VNR. There have been lots of—

Anna McMorris: Can you tell us then which areas those would be in the VNR?

Baroness Sugg CBE: I have mentioned a couple of them, but absolutely on food security and the report that the Committee has done on that, food bank—

Q45 **Anna McMorris:** The rise in food banks and food parcels?

Baroness Sugg CBE: Yes, I would expect that to be in there. On poverty, the poverty data and management, housing issues, minimum



wage—lots of examples have been given today and through our work with the Departments that will be reflected in the VNR.

Q46 **Anna McMorris:** Will Government publish a statistical annex in the VNR?

Baroness Sugg CBE: Yes. We spoke briefly about data beforehand, and I think that is absolutely key, whether it be a trend or a snapshot, which some of the new indicators will be. That is something we are good at in this country and something that we need to develop and expand but also use to track our achievements to the goals. Yes, there will be a lot of data. I have mentioned before that there will a “using data” chapter as well, which will expand on that specifically. Throughout the VNR it will be data-based.

Q47 **Anna McMorris:** Can I just ask one supplementary on that, then? Of course, being only two weeks into the role, you may not be aware, but you may be aware that in Wales we have our own Wellbeing of Future Generations Act, which is ground-breaking in the world but it is also linked to the sustainable goals. In my time prior to becoming an MP, I was in the Government and wrote some of that and established it. That Act holds the hold Government and public bodies to account in meeting the requirements of the SDGs and the goals. Do you have any plans to establish your own Act of that kind?

Baroness Sugg CBE: I have no current plans to do that. As I said—

Q48 **Anna McMorris:** Why not?

Baroness Sugg CBE: We do think that the accountability process we have through the single departmental plans is the right one. That is the way Cabinet Office and the implementation unit hold other Departments to account. I acknowledge the criticism that we did not have enough SDGs in there so it was difficult to track back progress on that, but I do think we are improving. There is still some way to go. I have spoken to Oliver Dowden at the Cabinet Office, who is very enthused about this agenda too. He had a meeting yesterday with lots of stakeholders to discuss how we can improve things more, how we can really embed the SDGs within the departmental plans, and how we can track back. Again, the VNR is a good opportunity to pause and look at where we are on that.

Q49 **Chair:** Can I just pick up with Mr Briscoe? One of the parts of Leave No One Behind is this access to disability groups. How long have you been working on the VNR, if you do not mind me asking?

Neil Briscoe: I started in the Department that oversees it in March 2016.

Q50 **Chair:** We had evidence from the British Deaf Association which could find no materials about the process available in accessible formats, such as British sign language, and it stated that that further excluded deaf and disabled people from the VNR process. Isn't that standard equality impact stuff built into the stuff that you do as a Department in DfID overseas? If



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it is, why are you not doing it here at home?

Neil Briscoe: Fundamentally, it is down to the lead Departments and DfID is only leading on goal 17 on partnerships in the VNR.

Q51 **Chair:** You are saying DWP does not worry too much about equality impact and engaging with deaf people, despite being the lead Department?

Neil Briscoe: No, I am not saying that at all. They pursued their own goal in the formulation—

Q52 **Chair:** They did not come to you for advice?

Neil Briscoe: They did. In fact, we have held very regular advice sessions for all the Government Departments dealing with chapters.

Q53 **Chair:** What advice did you give on engaging blind and deaf people?

Neil Briscoe: We encouraged everybody to look closely at the theme of Leave No One Behind, and a number of them did that through their own channels, through their own networks.

Q54 **Chair:** Are you aware of any Department making any part of the VNR process available in an accessible format like British sign language?

Neil Briscoe: I am not aware of that.

Q55 **Chair:** The British Deaf Association has told us that there is not any. How come that was missed, given that you have the strategic oversight of it?

Neil Briscoe: As the Minister has said, we are learning lessons from this. There have been a number of lessons from how we proceeded with this. It has been with the best of intentions, but I agree there have been areas where, were we to do it again, we would remedy some of these problems.

Chair: The whole system just really feels chaotic, I have to say. We will move on and we will come back at the end.

Q56 **John McNally:** I would like to move you on to leadership and across-Government working, if I may. We heard from the UKSSD that DfID does not have a domestic policy mandate. It is not the best place to lead on SDGs, and it said that, to date, three years after the UK Government have committed to the SDGs, there is little evidence of tangible progress from the Government Department, the Prime Minister or the Cabinet. How effective do you think DfID has been in leading on the production of the VNR and when the Cabinet Office is responsible for leadership on domestic implementation?

Baroness Sugg CBE: That is a criticism I have read a lot and heard a lot in the last couple of weeks, and I am getting to grips with this. Obviously, producing the VNR has required cross-Whitehall input and collaboration. DfID is leading as the expert Department on the SDGs but we do not have domestic policy responsibility, which is why we are working with



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Cabinet Office and other Government Departments that are responsible for domestic policy to come up with the content. We are, as Neil said, meeting with them regularly and offering advice on how best to address things, but it is their responsibility.

We have an interdepartmental group on the goals, which is jointly chaired by DfID and Cabinet Office. We have allocated each goal to a lead Department, and lots of these are obviously cross-cutting. As well as that, there are other contributing Departments. Each Department has a senior lead and a champion for the goals, a director who is overseeing the relevant chapter. It has truly been a cross-Government effort, but, as I said, I have read and seen the criticism on that, and DfID does not have responsibility for that domestic agenda. That is why it is so important that the Cabinet Office and the PM's implementation unit within the Cabinet Office make sure that across the Government we are properly contributing to the process.

Q57 John McNally: Are you telling me then that the Cabinet Office is taking the responsibility?

Baroness Sugg CBE: DfID is leading the cross-Whitehall input into it but the Cabinet Office is responsible for delivering the single departmental plans, which—

Q58 John McNally: Maybe that is why we are getting so much chaos in this. I do not expect you to comment on that.

I would like to move you on, because I know we are short for time a wee bit, if possible. The European Parliament commissioned a study of Europe's approach to implementing the sustainable development goals. As my friend said, the Welsh and Scottish Governments have already integrated the SDGs into their strategies and policies and that puts them well ahead of Westminster. Why then is it taking so long down here?

Baroness Sugg CBE: I have not seen that report. I will go back and look it up. I think there are a lot of good examples in Scotland and Wales of bringing the goals in across the Administrations. We are taking the approach of the single departmental plans, and that is how we have accountability here and how we are planning to continue it. It is an iterative process. It is a learning process. We are through the VNR process itself learning more about how better to do this. I am not going to sit here and say that we have got things perfect in any way. The previous Secretary of State spoke to Cabinet in February on these. Oliver Dowden and the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster from the Cabinet Office side of things are involved in it. We are, as DfID, lead Department on producing the VNR, working with I think 10 different Government Departments that have responsibility for the 17 goals, and we have responsibility for one of them.

Q59 John McNally: I can see there is an overarching responsibility but it seems to be getting lost somewhere along the way. Are these SPGs being integrated? Are they are being integrated in Government strategies?



Baroness Sugg CBE: They are.

Q60 **John McNally:** As it is happening in Scotland and Wales?

Baroness Sugg CBE: Yes, and that has been a bit of a process too. We are improving that. I think every goal was covered in a single departmental plan the last time they were published. It is an ongoing process to get better at it. As I say, Oliver Dowden had a meeting just yesterday with UKSSD, Bond, Aviva, and lots of different business groups to talk about how we can do this better, and how we can make sure that the goals are better reflected and better acknowledged within the departmental plans.

Q61 **John McNally:** I think that is coming in loud and clear throughout the whole report. There are so many interested bodies here. I was reading something earlier on, "Ready and able", the disabled, muscular dystrophy, and I think they do an absolutely remarkably good job. As Anna said earlier on, they have quite a difficulty getting here, and they would certainly need more than two or three days' notice, which has been demonstrated earlier in the report.

Will you commit to commissioning an overarching delivery plan for the goals or a resource showing a comprehensive overview available of all SDG elements across all of these plans too? Is that an absolute, total commitment?

Baroness Sugg CBE: That is what the VNR will do—it will give this comprehensive sight of where we are on the goals, and where we are on the targets.

Q62 **John McNally:** You are making that commitment?

Baroness Sugg CBE: Yes, absolutely. On the implementation point, I will point back to our judgment that the best way to implement them is through the current process with Cabinet Office and Departments and single departmental plans, but we need to embed the SDGs more within the single departmental plans. We have seen progress on that and we will continue to see progress on it.

John McNally: Just finally, I have to say, I get very concerned when I keep hearing that we need to do this. You cannot keep dealing in the here and now. We should be so far ahead of this by now, in a country like this. I find it quite disappointing that this particular Department does not have at least the same as Wales has.

Q63 **Anna McMorris:** Can I just ask a follow-up on that as well? Are the devolved Administrations attending the VNR in New York in July?

Baroness Sugg CBE: I do not know what the final plan is for that because we need to discuss it with the—

Q64 **Anna McMorris:** Could you come back to us as a Committee and let us know as soon as possible? If they are going or if you need to do something about inviting them, they would need to be invited now.



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Baroness Sugg CBE: Of course. Making sure that this covers all the devolved Administrations is absolutely key. There is a section within each of the chapters that will specifically include their content, and we are working really closely with the devolved Administrations to make sure—

Anna McMorris: You can learn a lot from Wales.

Baroness Sugg CBE: Yes, and I think we have done and will continue to do so. We have high ambitions for the VNR. I really hope that you will be pleased when you see it. I understand the criticism of “Emerging Findings” but we have made progress and we are making good progress. This is to 2030. We do acknowledge we have more to do but there are lots of positives to take from it as well.

Q65 **John McNally:** I just think sometimes we get a wee bit concerned about the horizontal integration of groups. I think everybody certainly in this particular Committee cares deeply about what is happening, as is quite self-evident from us, and it is not exactly reassuring.

Baroness Sugg CBE: We really believe that in order to deliver the global goals it has to be not just Government delivering it, but all people in groups and everybody else we have been talking about today. Of course Government need to provide leadership in that way. The awareness of the SDGs across the country is about 30% or 40% at the moment. We need to do more on that.

The VNR is an opportunity to really push this agenda and to make sure we do bring more people in, that we have proper horizontal integration, and that we can all make our contributions to reaching the goals.

Q66 **Chair:** Can I just come back on how many people are working on this? Mr Briscoe, how many people are working in the Cabinet Office on this?

Neil Briscoe: The Prime Minister’s implementation unit has four people in it, all of whom are engaged with this. Within DfID we have 19, and then across the 16 Departments that are involved, we have 10 lead Departments and six supporting Departments that are feeding in. There are a number of staff in each Government Department working on this.

Q67 **Chair:** Lord Bates told the International Development Committee on 19 March that it was nine people in DfID and then three or four working across Whitehall. Has that really ramped up to 19?

Neil Briscoe: Yes, it has.

Q68 **Chair:** Literally, in a month, you have just chucked 10 staff at it?

Neil Briscoe: It has been longer than a month. We have scaled up in the last two or three months to get this over the line.

Q69 **Chair:** It is almost like it has been structurally designed to fail, isn’t it? What you have described is a process where the Government are using single departmental plans and told this Committee in December 2017, “Don’t worry”. They told us that in their response in July, and then did



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not bother checking. Who was responsible for making sure it is in the SDPs?

Neil Briscoe: There was a Cabinet Office—

Q70 **Chair:** They just did not. They just phoned it in. Then we spotted it and suddenly everyone has done it. It only appeared in Government plans in May 2018, two and a half years into the process. You say, “It is a process. We have 10 years”. We have 15 years to do this, and here we are at year 4, and we are struggling to get to the baseline.

Baroness Sugg CBE: There were some SDPs that referred to the goals beforehand but—

Q71 **Chair:** Two. Treasury, which is not a policy department and it controls everything. I cannot remember what the other one was.

Baroness Sugg CBE: DfID.

Chair: DfID. Yes, of course. Exactly. That is my point. It is like it is structurally designed to fail. Where does this 30% awareness figure come from? Not a single person in Wakefield has heard of this.

Baroness Sugg CBE: If you delve into that, it was an age tracker figure, and that is—

Chair: A who figure?

Baroness Sugg CBE: Age tracker, and I can follow that up.

Chair: I would query that.

Baroness Sugg CBE: We have to continue to—

Q72 **Chair:** It sounds to me like it is an internalised Whitehall process. Who is the Minister for the SDGs? We have had about five in front of this Committee in two years.

Baroness Sugg CBE: In your previous evidence session, you had four Ministers from all different Departments on pretty much one goal. That is one of the challenges. We are clear about that in that they do cut across different Departments, which is why we have allocated lead Departments to each of the goals. We do need to make sure that the SDGs get more attention or have more awareness if we are going to be able to deliver them.

I do not think it is unusual that we are ramping up to the delivery of the VNR. Lord Bates mentioned the 10 extra people who were going to be allocated shortly. I expect there will be more people as we move towards the high-level panel in July, and then there is of course the UNGA, the first heads of Government review of the SDGs around the General Assembly. There will be more resource going into this.

Q73 **Chair:** Are you saying that the 10 extra have already started, or have not?



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Baroness Sugg CBE: They have started, so there are 19 in DfID working on it, and numerous others across Whitehall. I expect there to be more as we approach the VNR.

This very process has helped embed—I guess that is part of the point of countries doing VNRs—the SDGs within Departments.

Q74 **Chair:** Just finally, Lord Bates assured us in October that there would be a mechanism for consulting Parliament on progress towards the VNR before May 2019. You have just told us we are not going to see it.

Baroness Sugg CBE: I imagine he was pointing to the Parliamentary engagement event in March.

Q75 **Chair:** One document that, as I said, was a GCSE fail. You have doubled the number of staff working on this since that event, partly because of the number of parliamentarians, Lords and MPs, who were there scratching their heads and saying, "This has just been written by fairly junior civil servants with no clear political steer. Here is some research. Everyone has electricity".

Baroness Sugg CBE: I would again say that the "Emerging Findings" document was not an attempt to be a draft. The current Secretary of State is absolutely building on the previous Secretary of State's enthusiasm for both the global goals and the VNR. I can see that one parliamentary event in March has not been—

Chair: For one hour.

Baroness Sugg CBE: For one hour.

Q76 **Chair:** You say 30% awareness. I would not say 30% or 200 MPs know about this. If the MPs do not know, you cannot expect their constituents to.

Baroness Sugg CBE: To caveat that, that is one of the statistics I have read, which again I—

Q77 **Chair:** I think that is another GCSE fail. Failure to source, failure to trend, failure to bottom it out. Have you conducted any new research from YouGov—other polling firms are available—to work it out?

Baroness Sugg CBE: It is a really important question of how many people are aware.

Chair: I am asking it. What is the answer?

Baroness Sugg CBE: Yes, we are. We do have plans to do a further survey around it to understand what the awareness—

Q78 **Chair:** Of whom?

Baroness Sugg CBE: I will have to send you the specific details, but members of the public. I will have to send you the specific details of the plans for that.



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Q79 **Chair:** Mr Briscoe, do you know the details of the plans for the polling?

Neil Briscoe: No. Our communications team is working on that. We will send the details.

Q80 **Chair:** It just feels like an essay crisis, and God knows I had a lot of those in my time. Fine. There are a variety of things that you said you would come back to us on. That would be very helpful and we will maybe write you a letter about that.

Can I ask, is our report that we did on hunger going to be included as part of your voluntary national review, or is that too early to say as well?

Baroness Sugg CBE: Of course your report has been read by DEFRA, which is leading on that, but I am afraid I have not seen the latest content around that.

Q81 **Chair:** Whose decision is that? Is that your decision, Minister?

Baroness Sugg CBE: The lead Department on that is DEFRA. It is drafting the content of that part of the report.

Q82 **Chair:** Do you not decide what goes in? Who is the guiding mind in this process?

Baroness Sugg CBE: The Secretary of State for the Department of International Development has overarching responsibility for delivering the VNR, but for each of the goals there is a lead Department that is responsible for the content of it because they are the ones that are delivering it.

Q83 **Chair:** If the DWP does not want to hear any difficult things from disabled people or deaf people, it just does not consult with them, presents you with the thing saying, "Everything is tickety-boo with the disabled community", there are no case studies, and you go, "Okay, that is fine".

Baroness Sugg CBE: That is one of the roles of Cabinet Office and why we are co-chairing the interdepartmental working group on this with Cabinet Office—it is responsible for ensuring that Departments are delivering.

Q84 **Chair:** If that is the role of Cabinet Office, are you saying that David Lidington, as Secretary of State for the Cabinet Office, is going to go back to DWP and say, "We are worried about disabled people. They are not adequately reflected in the inequalities data or the case study data"?

Baroness Sugg CBE: I think that is difficult to say because the Department is responsible for that part of the chapter and we have not yet seen that. Both Cabinet Office and DfID have been very clear that it needs to be a fair and honest reflection of where we are as a country on achieving the goals.



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Neil Briscoe: DfID is doing, with Cabinet Office, very detailed quality assurance of this. I would just like to reassure you that the “Emerging Findings” document is not how the VNR is looking. The VNR is more nuanced in terms of areas of success but also areas for challenge. There will be case studies in every single chapter. Where we are seeing that there is insufficient non-Government content, we are asking the Departments that are leading this to step up to provide that.

Q85 **Chair:** DfID is doing that?

Neil Briscoe: With the Cabinet Office. With the team that we have that is looking through every draft chapter, we are having very detailed discussions with each of the lead Departments on this. We ultimately are responsible for the consistency and the coherence of the report, as well as the tone. As the Minister has said, we want the tone to be honest and we want it to not just whitewash or to cherry-pick but also to show areas for further work and where work is ongoing.

Q86 **Chair:** Thank you. That is helpful. What is your target publication date?

Neil Briscoe: The report will need to be delivered to the UN by 14 June. The high-level political forum begins at the ministerial level on 16 July. Between those two dates the intention is that we will be releasing it in the UK, so before it goes to the UN.

Q87 **Chair:** Minister, the danger with this—and what I would expect fully—is that after this process it just appears as a DfID written ministerial statement. That would be the absolute classic: bury it on a Friday before the Whit recess or bury it on a Thursday. Are we going to be able to see it, debate it, have it launched, discuss it and so on in Government time?

Baroness Sugg CBE: Yes. The reason we will be publishing it after submitting it to the UN is to be able to give everyone an opportunity to see it and come back to it. I cannot commit to parliamentary time. I can commit to holding another parliamentary—

Chair: It is not like we are doing anything else.

Baroness Sugg CBE: I can commit to holding another parliamentary engagement event, certainly with myself, hopefully with the Secretary of State.

Q88 **Anna McMorris:** You can commit to seeking Government time?

Baroness Sugg CBE: I will need to take that back and discuss it, but the Secretary of State is highly involved in this. He has been here for five or six days. You will really see him take leadership on this. When the report is published, we will of course send it to all the Select Committee Chairs and we will hold another parliamentary engagement event, but I am afraid I cannot commit at the moment to parliamentary time. I will take that back to the Secretary of State.

Q89 **John McNally:** There was a comment by Mr Oliver Letwin to this



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Committee some time ago. Myself and Rebecca Pow at that time had asked about a Sustainable Minister being in place, and Mr Oliver Letwin probably just confirmed what you are saying. He said, "I have to say, I have the impression that we do quite a lot of work trying to bring these things together, but government is a complicated thing." It does not appear to have improved much.

Baroness Sugg CBE: I think government will continue to be a complicated thing. We are improving. I am looking forward to sitting down with Oliver Dowden and discussing how we can do things better, as is the new Secretary of State. It is not a straightforward agenda, the global goals, and it is not a straightforward task bringing it all together, but we must do so in order to see where we are and galvanise everyone for further action to reach those goals.

Q90 **Chair:** Minister, thank you very much indeed for coming, and we look forward to welcoming and debating these issues with you again in the future.

Baroness Sugg CBE: Thank you.