

International Development Committee

Oral evidence: UK's progress on the Sustainable Development Goals, HC 1732

Tuesday 11 June 2019

Ordered by the House of Commons to be published on 11 June 2019.

[Watch the meeting](#)

Members present: Stephen Twigg (Chair); Richard Burden; Mr Nigel Evans; Mrs Pauline Latham; Chris Law; Mark Menzies; Lloyd Russell-Moyle; Paul Scully; Virendra Sharma; Henry Smith.

Questions 163 – 191

Witnesses

I: Richard Curtis CBE, UN SDG Advocate; Kate Garvey, Co-Founder, Project Everyone.

Examination of Witnesses

Richard Curtis CBE and Kate Garvey.

Q163 Chair: Good afternoon, everyone. Can I welcome Richard and Kate, who are here to give evidence in terms of the UK's progress on the global goals? Perhaps I will ask each of you to introduce yourselves first.

Richard Curtis: My name is Richard Curtis. I am a writer and a co-founder of Comic Relief and Red Nose Day. As a result of that, I became interested in the millennium development goals and then the sustainable development goals. I am a UN advocate for the sustainable development goals.

Kate Garvey: I am Kate Garvey. I started life in politics, but I have been working on campaigns and issues globally for the past 10 years or so. I set up Project Everyone with Richard five years ago, primarily to launch the goals, and now we are looking at how to continue to make them both famous and actionable.

Q164 Chair: Clearly, one of the big challenges you are seeking to address is how we can mobilise public interest in and support for the global goals. What can we learn from successful movements like Make Poverty History in this more challenging period?

Richard Curtis: First, you have to try. Make Poverty History was created not as a result of an emergency or a crisis but because there was a G8 that the UK was in charge of in 2005. So you have to pick your moments. At the moment, in 2019 the UN has its first report back. We are trying to create a situation where we have a year of campaigning to get to 2020, which is a third of the way through the sustainable development goals. You have to have the courage to pick your moments. One of the things I am very disappointed in is that the world did not do anything in 2010. We did Make Poverty History in 2005, and then we let 2010 slip by.

You have to find your partners. There are many more partners available than there were in 2005, because of the strength of support, particularly from business, for these goals and also because of the fact that the goals are both domestic and international. Then, to make things happen, you have to make things. You have to organise concerts, do merchandise, gather meetings, exploit meetings that are already happening and point them in the direction of the goals. You see the huge support for environmental issues now among young people. You have to see whether you can channel that energy, introduce them to the goals and make it all part of a bigger campaign that has a bigger effect.

Q165 Chair: You have anticipated my follow-up question, which is to look at the climate protests recently and Extinction Rebellion. Climate change is clearly on the agenda now in a way that it was not so much back in 2005. What practical things can we learn from the climate movement for this movement?



Kate Garvey: In general, we find that young campaigners have been using the common framework that is the goals to work on issues, whether that is climate, FGM or period poverty. Those issues affect all the countries that are signed up. That framework has helped them. We also see that the 2030 deadline is a deadline they can all agree to. In Paris and France the SDGs have a high recognition factor. We think that was partly because Paris had the COP and the Paris agreement in 2015, which was the first success of the goals.

There is a COP next year. If the UK had that, it would channel some of the energy of the climate movement, together with the general movement for the SDGs. That seems like a great thing. We are seeing that young people do use the goals and bring together climate and development. Back in 2005, we were not doing it in the same way.

Q166 **Chris Law:** During the course of this inquiry, we have regularly heard how there is too much focus on the goals being “famous rather than useful”. Would you say that is a reasonable assessment or unfair?

Richard Curtis: No, I would say that is not a reasonable assessment. In a way, you are talking to the wrong people about that, because we have been part of trying to make it famous. If you take a look at the work of the UN, in fact, Kate and I commissioned the design of the goals, which is that brand of colours. We had many arguments about simplifying the names of the goals. I remember a massive long discussion about whether it should be “peace and justice” or “peace, justice and strong institutions”, and the UN said that, if it did not include “strong institutions”, it would not accept any of the short names.

It was quite a struggle to simplify and manifest the goals, because the UN is primarily reorganising itself and its resident co-ordinators everywhere to be more practically effective on the subject of the goals rather than marketing them. Once again, at the General Assembly this year they have organised these five big meetings about the SDGs, finance and climate et cetera. We are the ones who are trying to ask them, “Can we make sure that the statement that comes out at the end is a call to arms for 2020?”

It would be unfair to say that people are focusing mainly on marketing. We are trying to make them accessible, marketable and famous. However, if you look at companies that are trying to apply the goals, they will definitely say they are applying the goals, but all the work goes into measuring everything they do and applying it next to the goals and everything like that. I am glad you asked the question because it implies that people have heard of them, but as always it is a question of communication and action.

Kate Garvey: Some of our best work has been when we have partnered with people who are about the action side. We had an initiative around the “leave no one behind” agenda with Civicus and development initiatives. We brought our communications, films and comms expertise to help them communicate with grassroots organisations and train them



HOUSE OF COMMONS

on the goals, so they can use them more.

Goalkeepers, the initiative we created with the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, is about bringing together emerging and established leaders to increase their partnerships around the goals. The Gates Foundation produces a report every year monitoring some of the indicators of the goals. We try to make those things more interesting, but the substance is actually what is driving it.

Q167 Chris Law: Richard, you talked about a call to arms for 2020. It is a couple of years since you gave evidence to the Environmental Audit Committee. Has there been an increasing awareness of what the SDGs are and their implementation in the last two years or do you feel it is flat-lining? Is that why you are suggesting that a call to arms is really needed?

Richard Curtis: No matter how well we were doing, I would have suggested it. I think we all know that it will never be enough. It is a great big, huge agenda. There are signs in terms of when they do polls. The numbers are rising; they are not rising at anything like the speed I would like. I do find an enormous amount of interest. I can only say that. I do not know how many countries are doing our World's Largest Lesson.

Kate Garvey: It is over 150.

Richard Curtis: You know children are hearing about that. This week I am talking at CogX, which is a meeting of a huge number of technical leaders. They have made that their subject. The Cannes Lions now has a special area that is about the goals. We are talking to the financial community. This is the thing I am really interested in, by the way, the idea of making people understand that their pensions are in fact being used as investments, and those investments in pensions could be things that make a huge difference.

I would have a much less busy week if the goals were not catching on in some way or other, but, just as a general thing in the general populace, we are not as high as we would hope to be. I used to talk about it as the 10 commandments. People do not know them yet as they used to know those.

Chair: "The 17 commandments" is not quite the same.

Richard Curtis: The marketing side will help, but the real aim of doing it is trying to get more businesses and more Governments to change their policies and work in the direction of the things they are out there to achieve.

Q168 Chris Law: Why do you believe the work of the UN advocates and Project Everyone is important if we are to achieve these global goals?

Richard Curtis: Let me talk about the UN advocates, and then Kate can talk about Project Everyone. The UN advocates are there in order to advocate. Here I am in my own country, and they do it in all their areas



to argue for that. The UN advocates are not an official position. They do not have a job where they make policy changes, but they should be encouraging people to make policy changes.

As a random example, I have been in contact with the Islamic Development Bank, whose awards scheme for people who are experimenting with new things that they then fund is trying to help the SDGs and based on the SDGs. That is just an example of an advocate, in a way, helping flick a switch for someone who wants to do it. We are people who are advocating and trying to get people to focus on the goals and change their goals. I hope that will be helpful and that we become increasingly helpful.

Kate Garvey: For Project Everyone, when we started in 2014-15 we wanted to make the goals communicable. One difference between Make Poverty History then and the SDGs now is that social media was not a thing in 2005. We have worked with the tech companies, and that has had a big impact. Google and others are starting to look at using the goals in a different way, but the mobile phone industry has also come on board and helped us get the goals out there.

Then we have these longer-standing initiatives such as the World's Largest Lesson, which takes place in the UK but is in over 150 countries. That is about working with teachers and children to explain sustainable development in a way that did not happen before. There are long-term initiatives that come out of these spikes in 2015 and hopefully again in 2020, bringing in the partners to do the real work that needs to be done.

Richard Curtis: Can I say one abstract thing? It is quite good to have a group of people who are only obsessed by one thing. If you take a normal charity or a normal Government, you have quite a lot of things to do. It is quite useful to have a group who are just saying, "What are you doing on the goals? Have you turned toward the goals? Are you doing more?" We are even doing that at the UN.

I suppose that is one of the things I would say to this Committee: if the SDGs are really going to work and be useful in the UK, it is worth thinking about who in the Government is specifically and only thinking about that. Obviously, DfID has that responsibility. I have a great list here of what is being done in other countries, as I am sure you would know, in terms of SDG committees and cabinet offices underneath the Prime Minister or President, and everything like that. Project Everyone, in our own modest way, is trying to do that for the goals.

You should ask yourselves this: if we think the goals could be useful, particularly for partnerships, progress and deadlines, do we have a system in place where there are enough people obsessed by them with enough time on their hands to make them work?

Q169 **Chris Law:** That dovetails crucially into my final question. This afternoon, we will have a general debate on sustainable development goals in this



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Parliament. What one message would you want us to give to the Government?

Richard Curtis: Show leadership, as Britain has shown astonishing leadership in this area before. Make extra commitments in these areas. We are a great country that is doing many and most of the things the SDGs require, but the SDGs do make you look internally at how we are doing on energy, jobs, gender equality. In terms of international behaviour, Britain is at 0.7%. It is the home of Band Aid, Live Aid and Save the Children. There are all these extraordinary initiatives, such as the Jubilee Debt Campaign and the Make Poverty History campaign. Britain is there to show leadership in this area, and that will be incredibly important.

Chair: Let us delve into that a bit more.

Q170 **Mrs Latham:** Recently, this Committee saw BEIS and DWP, two domestic Departments, and it was fairly obvious from what they said that they have been relatively unaware of what they should do domestically. Certainly, before the VNR was raised they did not really know much about it. If you were Secretary of State for International Development, how would you go about engaging other Government Departments, particularly domestic ones, in this universal agenda?

Kate Garvey: The key thing is that it is universal, but there are definitely issues that are as important in the UK as they are overseas. There are issues such as FGM and gender equality where you can look to other countries, in terms of representation in Parliament and that kind of thing, to spur you on. That could be a stimulating way of looking at it: you can look to other countries and see how you could be improving. That common framework and common measurement is, I would have thought, stimulating.

The other question is whether, as you create manifestos for elections, you can include the goals within them. In 2005, I remember that every party had an international development day. I do not know whether you could move that on to be a bit more universal and have a global goals day, which every party agrees to. That might be an interesting thing to explore. It is hard because the international development side of it is super-important, but there are common areas, whether that is climate, gender or poverty, where you can look to other countries to spur you on and you can test your own Departments on how you are delivering.

Richard Curtis: It is really interesting to find out whether you think there is a nomenclature problem here. Since the SDGs have been placed inside the Department for International Development, people think that is its primary purpose. As the SDGs progress, I am hoping that people see more and more that that is not the issue. For instance, I am looking into impact investment. Every time I talk about it I say, "What are you investing in within the UK?" People think that impact investment is probably solar panels in Kenya, which is a brilliant investment, or coffee co-operatives, but they do not know that it is also affordable housing and



wind farms here.

There is probably a job and a responsibility to say, "It is both domestic and international". I do not know how you solve that issue, but, if you found that people in Government did not know about, it would be a concern, would it not? I do not know what method you could use to say, "This is really useful". It is amazing when it happens. I had one conversation with someone at GSMA, which is the group of people who unite all the phone companies, and suddenly a year later they have massive documents that juxtapose every area of their behaviour with what they are doing. This is increasingly happening in business. Businesses are going to be benchmarked on where every single goal is and where every single part of their company is on the goals.

Governments should be doing that and thinking about it. It is not meant to be a critical or unhelpful thing; it is meant to be a deadline, a thing about focus. When the UN talks about child poverty in the UK, it is not criticising the UK, so much as saying, "Are you alert to the fact that this is an issue that is in the goals and that you should be thinking about?" There is nobody here who would say, "Child poverty is a good idea". If you are finding that it is not spread enough through Government, that is an issue that you should be looking for solutions to.

Q171 **Mrs Latham:** It is really encouraging that business is taking it up, but earlier you talked about leadership. You mentioned it being settled in DfID, and I think you are right. People think, "It is out there. It does not affect us in our schools, our social services or anything that we do here". Because of the VNR they are beginning to be alert, but they are being alerted rather too late, in my view. Would you say there has been sufficient leadership within the Government? Business has cottoned on to it, and really we need Government to cotton on to it in a better way. How could leadership help? Where would the leadership come from?

Richard Curtis: I have mainly been talking to DfID and getting very passionate and strong support there. I went with Penny Mordaunt to a school where they were doing a lesson on the goals. We had a two-way with a refugee camp in Syria that was doing the same lesson. The Minister for Education, Mr Hinds, was there as well. I got a feeling of knowledge and support, but I would strongly suggest that you may be the team to work out what support mechanism is needed. I certainly would not take it away from DfID.

Use the VNR. Everything is changing. The UN is now saying, "Does the HLPF"—the VNR comes from the HLPF—"have enough teeth? Is it a muscular enough method? Is it a reporting mechanism rather than a changing mechanism?"

Mrs Latham: It is voluntary.

Richard Curtis: Yes, exactly. This probably, therefore, is the moment for you to ask yourselves, "What do we do with this VNR? Do we take it as it is and say that, when we do the next one, it is going to do better? Who is going to make sure it does?"



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Q172 **Mrs Latham:** We are doing ours this year, so it is an important thing, but it seems to be only DfID that is doing it rather than the whole Government.

Kate Garvey: Could you make it annual? The other thing is that, even at UN level, it is only every four years, in September, that leaders, Heads of State and Government, meet to talk about the goals. That is happening this year, but it is obvious that they should do it annually. That is voluntary. Making sure that our Prime Minister attends the SDG summit in September 2019 would be a crucial way of making sure that—

Mrs Latham: Whoever it may be.

Kate Garvey: Exactly, yes. That would be good.

Richard Curtis: A cluster of Prime Ministers could go.

Q173 **Chair:** As a Committee, we have praised DfID for what it does but said that DfID should not be in the driving seat of the domestic implementation of the SDGs. We looked to examples from other countries such as Germany, where it has been very much at the heart of Government, driving domestic as well as global implementation.

Richard Curtis: I do not really know enough about that, but partnership is important. I am just starting to hear about this thing the tech community is calling digital public good, which is where they try to use their skills to help Governments and work with businesses. I do not see the SDGs as a demanding thing that you will always fail on. I consider it as a useful tool. If you are trying to improve your hospitals or schools, by using the SDGs, by finding partners who are enthusiastic about the SDGs and by finding that other countries are doing good things on the SDGs, you might find that the SDGs are a solution to your problem rather than part of it.

Q174 **Richard Burden:** As well as the challenges of developing and understanding, and a focus on action on the SDGs being a domestic issue as well as an international one, even at the level of international action there are concerns that this is often locked into the box labelled “aid”. How well is the UK incorporating SDGs into its overseas engagement generally and Britain’s footprint abroad in diplomacy, trade, investment and business dealings?

Kate Garvey: Historically, DfID has been and is a world leader. Other institutions look to it for guidance and leadership, whether that is the World Bank or others. That is something we have to keep up. Last year, we went to the malaria summit here with the Commonwealth countries. There was a big commitment from the UK, I think £500 million, and many other countries. That is the type of thing we need to see more of. The FGM commitment was the largest ever, and we are seeing real impact there. Kenya is now committed to ending FGM within the President’s lifetime.

We need to set examples and lead on 0.7%. There is an opportunity in 2020 to strengthen that. It could be a leader like it was back in 2005. In



HOUSE OF COMMONS

2015, David Cameron was on the high-level panel. It feels like the right time now. As you say, we have the civil society background, the Live 8 history, but also the leadership within Government and politicians to push it for 2020. Now is the time to show that it is still there and is still delivering, for sure.

Q175 Richard Burden: Britain has this branding of "Global Britain". Are there ways in which the SDGs can be more effectively incorporated into that branding? If so, how could that happen?

Richard Curtis: They definitely should be. That is an interesting question. I do not know how much DfID uses the SDGs as part of its branding when it goes out into the world. In the areas of levels of aid, levels of partnership, use of tech, use of investment, all these areas, it would be very good to use the SDGs as a calling card and as part of the reason people work together.

There has been a huge shift. Funnily enough, I have done a certain amount of work in the area of malaria. It is very interesting. I was talking to Ray Chambers, who is the UN envoy on that issue, and he said, "It is extraordinary, the way that, 10 years ago, it all seemed to be countries like Britain doing everything they can for countries in Africa. Now all the lead is really coming from leaders there and we are staunch supporters of an initiative that is mainly organised in Africa itself". There is a change of tone there.

The great thing about the SDGs is that they are not about a network where it is all about us giving; they are about forming a partnership for a future planet where you work together with countries with mutual respect and, by the way, have equal expectations of them to spend the right percentage of their domestic taxation on things such as health and education rather than things we would not consider as helpful. There is a change in mood and tone. DfID should be doing its job, as it has always done, with 0.7% and all the things it does, but we should also look forward to a future where it is more about trade and partnership than it is about aid and debt.

Q176 Lloyd Russell-Moyle: What significance do you think the first UK presentation of the VNR to the high-level political forum this year will have? Is it an important moment for the UK not only internationally but domestically?

Richard Curtis: It is not an important moment domestically in terms of the front pages of the newspapers. They will not all be saying, "Fantastic VNR from Britain changes world". Getting the goals written between 193 countries was in itself an amazing diplomatic achievement. If the VNR has caused Government to focus on all that we are doing both internationally and domestically, put it in this context and set it against the accelerated timetable of the goals, that is a good thing.

I suppose this is what I would say: since it is there, use it. Since it is there, this is the moment to say, "This is the moment. We have reviewed



HOUSE OF COMMONS

how we are doing and, both in 2020 and particularly in the next decade, we want to be part of every single moment where we can push these things forward". It is interesting. We are trying to look at what we call a decade of delivery. You see that in 2020 we want to create this amount of things; in 2025 we will be a third of the way through; in 2024 we want to see whether we can take over the Olympics in Paris; in 2027 we want Britain to have the COP. We are looking for opportunities and times and places where we can do our best to use it. It could be—not a slightly late start, because Britain has been doing well in many of these areas—a moment for Britain to formulate a plan of attack to try to spread this more through Government, and for Britain to take its position of leadership in making the SDGs thrive generally.

Another thing has leapt into my mind. Another thing is to talk to the general public, for this not only to be a political thing. My daughter, who is a campaigner, says that everybody is always asking, "What can I do to make the world a better place?" It is a huge question now, which is why I am interested in this investment thing. We are trying to think of a plan. It is a bit glib, but we could have Meat Free Monday, Giving Tuesday, "what you wear and where it comes from" Wednesday, "how is your bank account going" Thursday and recycling Friday. It is about thinking through how the public themselves can affect and feel involved in these issues. That is another thing the Government should be thinking about: the desire of the public to be part of how we deal with these huge issues.

Q177 Lloyd Russell-Moyle: You said "should be", "could be used", "if" and "it is a moment for Government to come". Are Government using the VNR process as a way to consolidate action around the whole of Government? Are they using it as a way to reach out to the public?

Richard Curtis: I do not know the answer to that question. I cannot say. I hope by the end of this Committee you will.

Q178 Lloyd Russell-Moyle: I suspect that, if you do not know the answer to it, the answer is no. That is what I would infer from that.

Richard Curtis: This is how I think about what we are doing. I will make a movie, and then there is a whole group of people whose job it is to sell the movie, to simplify what the film is and market it. This is often one of the questions with Government. You do so much hard work, but you are legally not allowed to sell your work in quite the way that I sometimes wish you could.

It is worth thinking about. This is what we have been saying to the UN. How do you do this marketing? How do you help make it popular? Is it supporting it educationally? Is it supporting it in schools? Is it making more of a fuss of companies that are doing something for it and showing a particular interest in their commitment? Thinking about ways of interacting and communicating with the public on how you can use it would be really worth focusing on, now you have the VNR.



Q179 Lloyd Russell-Moyle: Is part of the problem with the VNR that maybe Britain does not have a very good domestic story to tell about its fulfilment? Look at the increasing levels of inequality and poverty, the stuff with hunger and food banks at home. Does that mean the Government are less willing to take a “warts and all” approach to the universality part of the SDGs?

Kate Garvey: Presumably it will report on these issues and we will get a clearer picture that is comparable to other countries, particularly France and Germany et cetera. That is important to see. I do not know how it does compare. The VNR this year will be important to see that. It should highlight those issues, and I am sure it will. We are reminded in our conversations with the UN that countries in Africa are leading better on representation in Parliament and those kinds of things.

It is super-important to shine a spotlight on all that, but presumably it will. That is the point of it. It should be a way of measuring where to improve in the future years. I think the same thing. Our job should be to try to find ways in which it is more compelling for Governments, countries, businesses, everyone, to feel they need to show what they are doing. We do not know, because it will be the first time a report has been written since they were conceived in 2015, but we suspect, when we see it in September 2020, it will not be good enough. We know we are behind. We need to look at it annually, whether it is through a global goals day or an annual summit at the UN. This is where we can help by making some noise about that.

Q180 Lloyd Russell-Moyle: It took about five years for the MDGs to get the traction they needed before they trundled along. There were successes and failures that existed there. Maybe the same period of warm-up is required for every framework for Governments to get organised. Is there a possibility or a desire from Government to see some deeper learning at the end of this process, and to have a more serious cross-departmental engagement with the SDGs and with the civil society population? Is there a desire there?

Richard Curtis: It is going to be a learning curve, is it not? Everything is new. The fact that this is domestic and international is really interesting. Is it something you have to be worried or embarrassed about? Is it an opportunity to look at the issues that you are wrestling with in the context that every country in the world is wrestling with them?

I remember being very impressed when the SDGs were launched by what President Obama said about them: “My first job is to make sure they are applied in the USA, not to focus on US aid”. It will be really interesting to see what happens in this campaign in 2020 if we can make it work. It will not be paternalistic. It will be about huge issues that are as relevant at home as abroad. When you look at climate issues, there is such a complex mixture, is there not? We are part of the most industrial side and the effects of climate change will be worst on the poorest, yet you do



HOUSE OF COMMONS

not want to deny the poorest the ability to expand their industries. It is a really interested and complicated thing between home and abroad.

There are complicated issues, such as obesity, that all countries share. People will have to get their heads round that. My experience, particularly of young people, is that they are starting to think about the world. They do not think about borders in quite the same way as we want to. Particularly on sexual orientation and those sorts of things, they are equally passionate at home as they are enraged, angry or passionate abroad. It is a generational thing.

The last thing we want to do is say, "This is Make Poverty History part 2", because we have a whole bunch of lessons that we are going to have to learn. If there is a huge concert, I am certainly hoping that it would have artists from every single continent. I know it will definitely have a boy band from South Korea, but you have seen how South American and African music have become so popular recently. We are on a new journey, and the Government should be open to seeing how this new UN framework for the first time is helpful domestically as well as internationally.

Q181 Lloyd Russell-Moyle: In the human rights framework, there is the process of shadow reporting, where civil society puts a completely alternative report to the Government. They lodge it with the UN and they present it there. Is that something that, maybe not for this year but in future years, we should consider adopting in the UK? You could present the people's voice of where we feel we are.

Kate Garvey: That sounds like a good idea. I am thinking about the high-level political forum, but there are ways in which civil society and others can engage. It is a two-week set-up, is it not? We should look at what they do in more detail and see whether that could be applied domestically. Maybe it is applied more globally, so that is useful.

Richard Curtis: Yes, and one used to do the data report every single year for the MDGs. That is an interesting idea. We have to work out how it works.

Q182 Lloyd Russell-Moyle: This "domestic versus international" thing is interesting for donor countries; it is very different for recipient countries in aid. If you are a recipient country, a developing country or however you want to term it, your VNR is purely domestic. Should it be that developed countries or donor countries actually do two VNRs, one that is domestic and one that is totally separate? The Netherlands has done two in this one VNR period. You can do as many VNRs as you want. Should Britain consider doing one to say, "This is our international commitment", and a second one to say, "This is our domestic commitment"?

Richard Curtis: That is a very interesting question, going back to the original question of whether it is tricky for DfID to be in charge of



HOUSE OF COMMONS

everything. That might be something that would encourage doubling the focus of the SDGs.

Q183 Mr Evans: Good morning. It would be horrific if we went through this morning's session without mentioning Brexit. It is going well, by the way. Do not believe anything you read. Has all the noise that has come around because of Brexit and the Government's skilled inability to deliver it on time affected the Government's ability to focus on the SDGs or are they still carrying on regardless? It is a good title for a movie.

Richard Curtis: In a way, you will all have been living through this much more than we have, in terms of the opportunity-loss cost of spending that amount of time on one subject. I have not found a lack of focus in DfID when we have interacted with it. It has been going on with its job with as much focus as before. Perhaps it has been a lucky Department in that way. If that is the case, all I would say is that, whichever way the cards fall, the SDG agenda is a very important agenda for the future of Britain. You could say that, post-Brexit, it becomes a more important matter. Everybody has been, to some extent, damaged by the amount of time it has taken, but I feel DfID has been working as strongly as ever, and I hope in the future there will be more.

Q184 Mr Evans: I know Theresa May is going to have mixed reviews as far as her premiership is concerned, but we are going to have a new Prime Minister in a few weeks. Is there any message you would like to send this new Prime Minister as to what they should be doing more effectively than Theresa May did?

Kate Garvey: It will be the end of July. The first job will be the UNGA in September. That Prime Minister must go to the SDG summit. If they do not know enough about it, they will know about it then because it is a deadline. I would focus on September.

Richard Curtis: One of the great things about the SDGs is this cross-party thing. In 2005, we had a development day debate. One of the most frightening moments of my life was when the BBC said, "You can do Live 8 on the BBC if everybody agrees". I remember going to talk to Michael Howard. Finally he just had to say one word, and it was either yes or no. He said yes.

I feel like everyone in the world wishes that there was a higher level of Government that dealt with these bigger issues such as climate and was able to get away from the wrangle of internal budgets and things. I hope that any future Prime Minister would see this as an opportunity to have that. They probably will not be Prime Minister in 2030. We do not know who will be and which party they will belong to, but this is part of a joint effort to achieve something for the world.

Mr Evans: Irrespective of what they think, they are all caretaker Prime Ministers.



Richard Curtis: You can see that with the statues going up. None of them are around any more.

Q185 **Mr Evans:** Looking at the VNR, are you expecting anything out of this at all?

Richard Curtis: Yes, definitely. I am really looking forward to reading it. I hope it will be Britain's moment to say, "Here we are. We are quite late on the stage, but we are now going to take this extremely seriously". I hope that every single Department will know how it fits in with the SDGs, read the relevant bit of the SDGs and see where it can be helpful, who is working in that area, what new partnerships it can have and how it links to people doing different and interesting things in other countries.

I would hope so. It is up to you to say, "It is an opportunity. Let us use this document". By the way, there was a way in which the SDGs themselves would not have even tried to be famous. When we first approached the UN, it had five events that year that it was also focusing on. It is a question of using an opportunity. I hope this Committee will take some leadership in saying, "We have it; now let us use it", rather than, "We have it; now let us file it".

Q186 **Mr Evans:** Finally, with your artistic hats on, what is more effective? Is it the anecdotal stories about how poverty impacts on families, on individuals, the deaths and all that sort of stuff, or is the hard data more important? Are they talking to different audiences?

Richard Curtis: I have a slight obsession about this, which is—we talk about it a lot—the commercialisation of data. In other words, there is often a problem with data people, in that before they draw any conclusions they want all the data. That is going to take exactly 11 years, by which time they will have it. You need to have a situation where those people working on data invest, like R&D, 5% or 10% of their time extracting the data that is most current and tells the best stories.

Kate Garvey: We work a lot with the Gates Foundation, and we have found that starting with the stories but backing it up with the data and the goals is a good framework. We would definitely start with the stories. We should mention *Numbers in Action*, which is a little film you did that brings together quite direct music and the data. We will show you it, because it is quite a good way of bringing the two together.

Mr Evans: People forget that each of these stories is an individual human being, which has a massive impact.

Q187 **Paul Scully:** Richard, earlier in the year David Lammy criticised Comic Relief for the way it was filmed, saying it was sending a "distorted image of Africa" and reinforcing a "white saviour" stereotype. What is your response to those accusations?

Richard Curtis: We took them very seriously. Clearly, it is part of the journey we are on. In fact, our films this year were very different. There



HOUSE OF COMMONS

were only two films from Africa that featured celebrities. One was Stacey, because she has a great reputation as a journalist and also because we are increasingly trying to appeal to the young. The other one was about the people who climbed up Kilimanjaro, because our judgment was that to send people just to climb Kilimanjaro and show no interest in the projects they were going to be giving money to would be a worse thing than the slight dangers of these issues.

They are really complex issues. We are trying to do everything we can to raise the maximum amount of money for our projects internationally, and particularly our projects in Africa. We listen to the leaders of those projects, who want us to have as much money as possible. If it is felt that Comic Relief is so influential in terms of image that you start to send out the wrong image and the people in this country with African backgrounds feel as though they are in some way demeaned or negatively affected by Comic Relief, we really have to listen to that.

What I am searching for year by year are new ways of telling the stories. Traditionally, the sadder the film, the more money it makes, but I am sure there must be a solution when you show such radiant joy and success that it would encourage you to give more money. We are doing all we can to encourage filmmakers and new ways of making money in Africa that give the major voice to the people who are working on the projects. We did a brilliant film this year about a woman called Rose in Kenya and about a little girl who was just going to school. The truth of the matter is that we heard the criticism. We were doing stuff to address it; we are accelerating the way we address it.

Q188 Paul Scully: Yes, so it sounds like you listened and partly took the criticism. You did not accept it in total. You cannot just do a binary change, but you used Stacey Dooley, as you say.

Richard Curtis: You cannot do an instant change, because our responsibility is to raise as much money as possible and that is a very complicated thing to do. There is a slightly odd thing about Red Nose Day. If criticisms occur during our fundraising period, that is the one moment we most do not want to discuss them. We want to be saying, "Buy your Red Nose; do an event; watch our TV show". Suddenly all the oxygen goes into these crucial discussions, so I would welcome the discussion much more now, to get into it viscerally. How do you do it? How do you change it? What is your responsibility? Then we are not losing money as a result of that discussion. Comic Relief did not react very robustly, because we were just trying to get on with the fundraising. Internally, we talk about it all the time.

Q189 Paul Scully: Last year, Liz Warner talked about how she was looking at changing it and moving away from films fronted by celebrities. You have talked about how Comic Relief has moved on by using fewer celebrities. How do you see that panning out in a few years' time, for example? Where are you moving to in the long term?



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Richard Curtis: For a start, we are at a very interesting moment in terms of raising money online and raising money as a result of the television programme. We are on a big journey. A lot of the most successful fundraising initiatives at the moment, such as DonorsChoose, Giving Tuesday and charity: water, have no television exposure. We are not strong on that yet. As we go into this new future, I imagine it will not be based on celebrities going abroad. We will start that new initiative not going that way.

On the TV, we have to do what we think is best. It will be heading in the direction of not using celebrities and particularly being very careful to give voices to people abroad. It is a really complicated issue, because we feel this desperate and passionate need to raise as much money as we can, but, if we are doing harm as well, that will not do.

Q190 **Mrs Latham:** We could give you an extremely good example of a special-needs school in Africa that is doing the best job it could possibly be doing. It is a very happy story. Maybe you would like to look at that. It is not a British project. What was the charity?

Chair: It was Leonard Cheshire, in Kisumu, Kenya.

Mrs Latham: Leonard Cheshire is funding a lot of it, but not totally. It needs money, but it is doing an amazing job.

Richard Curtis: Could we get in touch about that? I would love to see it.

Q191 **Chris Law:** While we are on Comic Relief, are the red noses this year going to be 100% biodegradable? I know that was a bit of a debate last year.

Richard Curtis: That is another thing. We are all on a lot of journeys. Next year is Sport Relief, so we do not have to deal with the red nose issue, but there will be exciting things happening in 2020-21. In a way, that is kind of an exciting challenge as well. A charity like us wants to be ahead of the curve, as we have been. These climate issues are really great in the way they have been integrated into society.

I would say one other thing about the SDGs. When we did Make Poverty History, our motto was, "Launch and launch and launch again". You may not have noticed the first three launches, because in fact it was when Nelson Mandela came and spoke in Trafalgar Square that we suddenly felt as though we had got it. The SDGs provide an opportunity for something extraordinary to happen. I do not know what that huge breakthrough will be or what that moment will eventually be, when everyone in the world will say, "This is the thing", or a leader will take it so far forward that it becomes key. The SDGs are there, and they are there to be exploited. I hope you are finding out ways of doing that.

Chair: Can I thank you both very much indeed for your evidence today? That note is a great one to end on. As Chris said, we have this debate this afternoon, so we will take your points into the debate in the



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Chamber. A number of us are going to New York for the high-level forum and we as a Committee are determined to have a very strong and sustained focus on the global goals going forward. All power to your elbows in the work you are doing to connect this with citizens, because in the end that is what it is all about. Thank you very much indeed to both of you.