

International Development Committee

Oral evidence: Selected humanitarian situations in Africa; and global education, HC 112

Tuesday 29 October 2019

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[Watch the meeting](#)

Members present: Stephen Twigg (Chair); Richard Burden; Mr Nigel Evans; Mark Menzies; Mr Virendra Sharma; Henry Smith.

Questions 1 - 42

Witnesses

[I:](#) Andrew Stephenson MP, Minister of State for International Development and Minister of State for Africa; Mary Hunt, Head of Department for International Development Sierra Leone; Emma Spicer, Head, Education Policy Team, Children, Youth and Education Department.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Andrew Stephenson MP, Mary Hunt and Emma Spicer.

Q1 Chair: Good afternoon. Welcome, everyone. Welcome, Minister, to your first appearance before the International Development Select Committee. We are going to cover global education and then a number of specific Africa situations. I will kick off.

At the UN General Assembly, the Prime Minister made a very welcome announcement of additional funding to help get over 12 million children, half of them girls, into school. Are you able to give us a bit more detail today in terms of the breakdown of the channels, such as the Girls' Education Challenge, Education Cannot Wait and other mechanisms, including bilateral country programmes? Over what time period will this apply?

Andrew Stephenson: Thank you, Chairman. It is a pleasure to be here. Seven new country education programmes have recently been approved, of approximately £640 million, for sub-Saharan Africa, where education is lagging behind the furthest. These new programmes are providing frontline support to Ministers of Education and tackling the learning crisis, specifically in Ethiopia, Ghana, Nigeria, Tanzania, Zimbabwe, Malawi and South Sudan.

Then, as you mentioned, at the global level we have pushed our policy agenda through the replenishment of the Global Partnership for Education with £225 million; Education Cannot Wait has £90 million¹; and there was a recent pledge of £300 million to capitalise on the International Finance Facility for Education.

As you will be aware, these all tackle different issues. I know Education Cannot Wait is something that you personally have pushed for very strongly. We have our own programmes and the UN programmes, which should all be complementary, but we are seeing at every forum how we can take this further. The Prime Minister raised this and made an announcement at the G7. He talked about this at the UN General Assembly. He will be pushing for this as in the run-up to the next Commonwealth summit. In every forum, this is a priority for the International Development Secretary and the Prime Minister, as highlighted by the Prime Minister citing this in his first speech on the steps of Downing Street.

Q2 Chair: I personally welcome it hugely. We as a Committee have said, via our report on global education two years ago, that we felt that the Department needed to give a bigger focus and higher priority to education. Let me say that I think you have done that, and credit to the Department and to the Prime Minister for that.

I am very interested in the seven country programmes. It sounds like

¹ Witness correction: Education cannot wait has **£85 million**



some of them are countries where there are existing programmes. We went to Nigeria in the previous Parliament and looked at some of the work in education. Is this additional to existing bilateral work that DFID is doing in those seven countries on education, or does it have a particular focus that is different from what has happened before?

Emma Spicer: The programmes that the Minister mentioned are new country programmes approved since the launch² of the Get Children Learning education policy. Those are the names you have heard. As the Minister has said at UNGA specifically, the channels were the new country programme in Tanzania, which was part of the £515 million announcement, and the support for the International Finance Facility for Education.

Q3 **Chair:** When we went to look at DFID's general work in Nigeria, we looked at some of the systems we use there, in terms of both state education and low-cost fee schools. Would this be a distinctively new education programme for Nigeria?

Andrew Stephenson: There are multiple overlapping programmes in Nigeria. There is the Girls' Education Project Phase 3, which is from 2012 to 2020, and which is £88.3 million. There is the Partnership for Learning for All in Nigeria, which is from 2019 to 2027 and is £170 million. Then there is the North East Nigeria Transition to Development Programme, which is from 2017 to 2021 and is £14 million. Those are the key programmes. Through the Girls' Education Challenge, the Global Partnership for Education and Education Cannot Wait, there are other programmes active in Nigeria, but those are the three key bilateral programmes and their timescales.

Q4 **Chair:** In the announcement of this additional funding, the Department said, "UK funding will ensure even more girls can fulfil their potential by...mobilising an additional £5 billion of investment for education in Africa and Asia, with a focus on the most marginalised children". Can you give us a sense of how our £515 million will multiply to that £5 billion figure?

Andrew Stephenson: There is £300 million for the launch of the International Finance Facility for Education, to mobilise the additional £5 billion of investment for 40 lower and middle-income countries in Africa and Asia. We are focused on the most marginalised. Obviously, that has been the focus of a lot of these programmes. That is why we are so off-track on meeting this goal, and one of the reasons why you were pushing for the additional funding that specially went into conflict-affected areas. I might have to turn to Emma for more details.

Q5 **Chair:** That is fine. Is it the International Finance Facility for Education that creates that multiplier effect? Is that right?

² Witness correction: Country programmes approved since the launch **2018** of the *Get Children Learning* education policy



Emma Spicer: Yes, precisely. The Prime Minister's announcement was focusing on the new programme in Tanzania, a very important programme that will focus on transition for the most marginalised girls—over 11.5 million girls³—and, in addition, the UK's contribution to the launch of the International Finance Facility for Education with the Netherlands. That, as you have said, Chair, is all about leveraging in more money for education for these lower and middle-income countries that are at the end of good financing terms from the World Bank and the Asian bank.⁴ This is to make lending more possible for those countries, focusing on the most marginalised.

Q6 **Mr Sharma:** What, if anything, has DFID done to increase its focus on, and delivery of, early years education provision since conducting the review promised in response to our 2017 report on global education?

Andrew Stephenson: That is a very good question. Early childhood development and education, particularly pre-primary, is really, really important, and we need to ensure that all children have the best start in life. While DFID's focus is on 12 years of quality school education, we are leading in building the global evidence base for what more can be done through a £20 million research programme entitled THRiVE, which we launched in 2019. We invest directly in early childhood education in Rwanda and Ghana, and we are asking the World Bank to expand its work on early years as part of its human capital approach. This is something we are very much looking at. It is an expanding field of work for us, and we are hoping that that research programme will deliver us some more positive suggestions going forward.

Q7 **Mr Sharma:** Since the review was undertaken, has there been a distinct look at how to prioritise girls' early years education provision in particular? You have mentioned that, but is there anything extra you want to add?

Andrew Stephenson: We are prioritising early years. One of the biggest things with girls' education is looking at the disparity we have between the number of girls starting education and the number of girls completing their education. Our focus has normally not been on early years or getting girls into education, but on keeping girls in education, because that is what really concerns me when you look at rather stark statistics. In sub-Saharan Africa, for example, 75% of girls start primary school but only 8% complete. That is where one of our really big focuses has to be, and I know that both the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State have talked about this. Through the Leave No Girl Behind campaign and various other things, and the work and discussions that were had at CHOGM, we are focusing on this. We are very keen to take on board any suggestions that the Committee has, because that is something we really need to focus on.

³ Witness correction: Over **11** million **children**

⁴ Witness correction: World Bank and the **Asian and African development banks**



Q8 Chair: We are going to move now to Africa and a number of country-specific questions. Do you want to say anything by way of introduction about how you see your priorities as Minister for Africa? Then I will move to the country-specific issues that we want to raise.

Andrew Stephenson: I am delighted to take on this new role. Three months ago, I took over from Harriett Baldwin. I have been on a very steep learning curve since. My first visits were to South Sudan, Uganda, Somalia and Mozambique, along with fleeting visits to Kenya and South Africa. I have been getting to know the territory, getting to know some of the people and learning a lot in the Department. It is an interesting role, which is joint FCO and DFID, so you really get the bigger picture.

What I was told when I started was that Africa would be affected more than anywhere else by climate change. That is coming true, as we are unfortunately seeing with the droughts and the ensuing increase in humanitarian demand in many countries. We are also seeing a number of problematic election periods and transitions. We have a transition deadline approaching very soon in South Sudan. We have just had elections in Mozambique and other parts of the continent that have led to protests. It is a challenging and interesting part of the world. It is one that I am ably assisted in looking after by an incredible team of civil servants, and I can already tell that we are doing some fantastic work. We are saving and transforming lives across Africa.

Q9 Mr Sharma: I take your point about your busy visits and the learning curve, but I am sure you have taken an interest in other parts as well. What is your response to the findings of UN investigators in Burundi last month that all eight common risk factors for atrocity crimes are present in the country? What action is HMG taking as a result of the findings?

Andrew Stephenson: We are very concerned about human rights and the humanitarian situation in Burundi, particularly because we have presidential elections coming up in May 2020, which creates a risk of further instability and displacement. There has been massive instability in the past, and a lot of people will point back to the 2015 elections in that country, so we are very concerned about the ongoing situation.

We are limited, to some extent, in what we can do, because you will be aware that there are EU Council sanctions on the country, so we do not have a presence on the ground, but we do a number of things to work with the country to encourage it to take steps in the right direction, and we ensure that our approach is closely aligned with other countries and international partners. This is one of those countries where having a joint Minister in FCO and DFID really helps, because we need to ensure that we are taking a united global approach to encouraging Burundi to go in the right direction, and to work through international mechanisms to resolve the root causes of the problems and instability in the country.

Q10 Mr Sharma: You have partially touched on this, but as the UK Government is actively involved in creating the conditions for credible



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and peaceful elections in 2020, are there any extra steps that you have taken in this direction? Is there any point at which the UK Government will call for the elections to be postponed in Burundi?

Andrew Stephenson: DFID works closely with the FCO on agreeing the overall country strategy for Burundi, and our overall programme of support has been focused on supporting returnees and resident communities in the areas of return. There were about 350,000 refugees after the 2015 elections, so we are still dealing with the consequences of that.

The operating context remains very complex. There are increasing restrictions and regulations being introduced, particularly for international non-government organisations. The UK therefore has to work in consultation with other donor countries to support international agencies to address governance and human rights concerns in Burundi.

I do not think we should see the elections postponed, but there are a lot of unanswered questions and there is a lot of uncertainty, even as to whether the current President will seek re-election. As things stand, we need a concerted effort to ensure that Burundi is heading in the right direction, but a lot of that will be through working with our international partners diplomatically, rather than necessarily financing any election reform programmes or civil society programmes within the country, some of which are prevented by the various sanctions in place.

Q11 **Mr Sharma:** Following on from that, our predecessor Committee criticised the Government for closing its bilateral aid programme to Burundi in 2012. Given the changes in the political and humanitarian situation in Burundi since then, have the Government given recent consideration to restarting a bilateral aid programme?

Andrew Stephenson: We keep these things under constant review. The issue we have with Burundi is that we are very keen to stand with the people of Burundi and to deal with the chronic malnutrition in the country. At the same time, we have to recognise that there are EU sanctions in place. Even as we leave the EU and come to a position where we decide our own sanctions, I see no argument for us lifting those sanctions until we start to see the Government abide by human rights norms and other international norms.

At the moment, our focus remains on supporting internally displaced people and some of the refugees, particularly in neighbouring Tanzania, and ensuring that none of those refugees from Tanzania is forced to return. It is a difficult operating environment and it is hard to get the balance right, but this is one of those countries where the international community needs to sing from the same song sheet. We need to ensure that there is a coherent and co-ordinated approach to our dealings with Burundi.

Q12 **Mr Sharma:** As a last question from me, does the risk of crimes and the



lack of preparedness for free and fair elections mean that Burundi is not a suitable recipient for bilateral aid?

Andrew Stephenson: We always have this challenge around the world. We will help the people in the most difficult-to-reach parts of the world, regardless of the actions of their Government. We want to stand shoulder to shoulder with the people of those countries, even if we have significant disagreements with their Governments. There is still a strong argument for our humanitarian support.

As I say, the support we provide is limited because of the various sanctions on the country. The UK is a relatively minor player in Burundi. The British High Commissioner in Rwanda is the non-resident ambassador to Burundi and visits every two months, and we have a UK-based political officer visiting every one or two months as well. We keep a close eye on the situation, and we speak to our international partners about what is going on in Burundi. I am happy to tell the Committee that DFID has recently appointed a development counsellor for Burundi. They will be based in Rwanda, but they will frequently travel to Burundi. We are stepping up our engagement and looking at what more we can do, but it remains a very difficult country to operate in.

Q13 Mr Sharma: Are there different thresholds, relating to the behaviour of a partner country, for the acceptability of restarting a bilateral aid programme, as opposed to stopping one?

Andrew Stephenson: We take everything on a case-by-case basis. There are a number of countries—I am sure some Committee members will want to talk about Zimbabwe—where we have very strong disagreements with approaches by the Government, but it does not stop us running significant programmes in Zimbabwe, because we stand shoulder to shoulder with the people. Not a single penny of our aid money goes through the Government of Zimbabwe. That is one of those measures that we have put in place. We always keep the situation under review.

As I say, we are stepping up our presence, not in-country but with people visiting the country. There is increased UK engagement with Burundi, and we will always look at what more we can do. As with Zimbabwe, until the Government start to show fundamental political and economic reform, and a willingness to comply with international norms on things like human rights, it will be a very difficult operating environment for us.

Q14 Mr Evans: It is good to see my neighbour in this new position, and if we go ahead with the election, he will no doubt be on the receiving end of some aid from me during that period.

All my questions are about Cameroon. I visited it over 10 years ago with the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association. Clearly, it is a different ball game there now. What is happening there is absolutely eye-watering on a multi-level basis. There are 250,000 people who have fled their home in the far north because of Boko Haram, 106,000 more from



Nigeria, and 291,000 more from the Central African Republic. Some 500,000 people from the north-west and south-west are internally displaced on top of all that, and you have 4.3 million people dependent on aid in Cameroon. Of the refugees, 53% are women and girls. I just wonder what has been done to scale up the support in those areas that really need it during this humanitarian crisis. Could you say something about that? Have you been there yet, Minister?

Andrew Stephenson: I have not been yet. I am quite keen to visit. It is one of the countries that is towards the top of my list. If Pendle receives enough aid from Ribble Valley during the election and I am still here, I may be able to get there.

The UK remains very committed to supporting those affected by the ongoing crisis. Obviously, there is the Anglophone crisis, and then there are the challenges in the north-west⁵ as well. We have contributed £2.5 million towards the UN response, which is supporting 25,000 internally displaced people with essential supplies. Humanitarian relief is the focus here. Humanitarian access remains difficult and particularly challenging, for a range of reasons, including restrictions put in place by both sides of the conflict, so one of our key things is calling on all parties to provide unrestricted access for humanitarian actors, so that we can get that aid through.

Q15 **Mr Evans:** You mentioned the dispute. Well, it is more than a dispute. The President, Paul Biya, is trying to hold some sort of dialogue to bring an end to this in the Anglophone areas. Is this realistic? Are they making any progress? Is there anything that we can do to assist in the dialogue?

Andrew Stephenson: We support the dialogue, and the best solutions are normally the local solutions that come from within a country. But this has to be a meaningful dialogue, and the outcomes of the dialogue then have to be implemented. There was a discussion and various recommendations were made. On the face of it, it seemed good, but we have to see the follow-through. Is this really going to address the root causes of this crisis? Is it really going to lead to people having confidence in the system and confidence to stop fighting? Time will tell.

Before the national dialogue, different international organisations were looking at different proposals. There was a Swiss proposal. Obviously, the UK and France speak regularly to see what more can be done, but the national dialogue, if it is a genuine dialogue and is properly implemented, is probably the best chance we have for peace.

Q16 **Mr Evans:** You mentioned £2.5 million. It seems a drop in the ocean, quite frankly, given the scale of the problem that they are facing. Can you give us a guarantee that you will monitor this very carefully to ensure that, if more aid from the United Kingdom is necessary, we will give it?

⁵ Witness correction: It should just be the North as opposed to North West



Andrew Stephenson: Definitely, and that is part of what we do specifically for the UN programme. If we need to put more money and more focus into Cameroon, I am definitely keen to do so. DFID currently has no office in Cameroon, although—I was talking about the Africa strategy and us upscaling our presence there—we will be deploying a development counsellor from January 2020. Again, a bit like Burundi, it is one of the countries we are focusing on, thinking of what more we can do. I very much hope that the national process, the dialogue, leads to a successful outcome. If it does not, we need to look at a range of other options to break this deadlock and resolve the situation.

Q17 **Mr Evans:** That is reassuring. I remember Yaounde,⁶ and it is a lovely area. It is a fantastic country that really should be attracting lots of tourists, so that is a great shame. Added to the misery of what we have just spoken about, you now have unprecedented floods, which are worsening the humanitarian crisis, with heavy rains still coming, and the spread of cholera; we had 123 suspected cases reported recently, followed by a number of deaths. Can you give us an update on the response we are now giving to the cholera and the flooding disaster that is hitting the country?

Andrew Stephenson: You are right to say that this is a big natural disaster that is now affecting the country. We have provided humanitarian support in the far north of Cameroon. At the moment, we are running at about £22 million since 2015 to deal with the humanitarian needs of internally displaced people. Floods are a big issue. I should have mentioned, in my comments before about the national dialogue, that Sir Simon McDonald, the Permanent Under-Secretary at the FCO, was in Cameroon in September for quite senior and high-level discussions with the Government and all stakeholders about ensuring that the dialogue is comprehensive. Some of the other challenges in the country were talked about, and it is really important for the UK to do more on humanitarian relief, particularly to deal with things like the floods and the natural disasters.

We have not finalised this year's contribution to help deal with the humanitarian issues in the far north, but it is one of those issues at the very top of my list of priorities. I think there will be a positive announcement soon.

Q18 **Mr Evans:** Normally we talk about the redirection of aid from one area to another. It seems a bit pointless, quite frankly, because you would be redirecting it from one area in crisis to another area in crisis, so it seems to me as if the focus has to be on increasing Cameroon's slice of cake overall, given the unprecedented situation they are facing. Yet again, particularly in the flooded areas where the spread of cholera has to be stopped, can we start to focus a lot more on what we can do to assist them?

⁶ Witness correction: Yaoundé



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Andrew Stephenson: Yes, there is additional money set aside for particular crises like this, so we are not going to be taking it from other projects within the country. This is separate funding, and I hope to make an announcement soon. If matters in the Chamber move fast, I might be making the announcement very soon. I think it will be an announcement that is welcomed by the Committee.

Mr Evans: Wonderful, thank you.

Q19 **Chris Law:** One of the biggest issues facing the Democratic Republic of Congo at the moment is, of course, Ebola. I wonder if you can tell the Committee what contributions and activities DFID is undertaking, and what progress is currently being made.

Andrew Stephenson: Unfortunately, we have passed a very grim milestone, in that we are now at over 3,000 cases and over 2,000 deaths. It is the second largest outbreak in the history of Ebola. A range of reasons have given us cause for optimism, in terms of the number of reported cases dropping. At the same time, there have been a range of reasons why we are still very concerned, and we do not want that to give us false hope. For example, the proportion of people still dying outside medical treatment centres has increased. We are not saying that this is the beginning of the end. As I say, there are reasons to be positive, and reasons why we need to remain very concerned about this. The UK is one of the leading donors here, but we have continued to push other countries to step up their response as well, because I am far from saying that this outbreak is under control and that we have dealt with it. There is an awful long way to go, and if we do not get to the nub of this, thousands more lives will be lost.

Q20 **Chris Law:** I saw a recent report that one of the issues of concern is about Ebola spreading to other countries through people who may not yet be diagnosed migrating away from areas. Have we put in place steps for early diagnosis, and/or to try to contain people in areas that are most affected? Do we know?

Andrew Stephenson: In addition to being one of the biggest funders of the response within the DRC, we are also one of the leading donors in all the surrounding countries aiming to ensure that there are Ebola treatment centres in place and there is screening at the borders. I visited an Ebola treatment centre in Uganda when I was over there. No one had been infected and been there at that stage. There have been two cases in the past of people crossing the border into Uganda, being identified and being treated in centres that had been funded partly thanks to UK aid, and Uganda is now once again declared Ebola-free.

We have also had a suspected case in Tanzania, which the Government of Tanzania say was not Ebola, but, because of that, we recently updated our travel advice to Tanzania to reflect the fact that somebody died with Ebola-like symptoms. Since that happened, there have been no more recorded cases in Tanzania, so it is clear that, whatever that was, the



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Government dealt with it swiftly. But there can be absolutely no complacency, because this is a part of the world with porous borders and lots of people moving. It is very difficult to deal with it in the DRC, but it is even more difficult if it starts spreading to other countries nearby, particularly the more fragile countries. Uganda is very well prepared. I have also been to South Sudan. South Sudan is not as well prepared, if Ebola spreads somewhere like that.

Q21 Chris Law: We heard previously from your predecessor and Minister Murrison that there are other issues that complicate the problems of Ebola, most notably finding sufficient health workers at the front line, and winning and keeping the trust of the affected communities. What developments have been made here?

Andrew Stephenson: This came out of the biggest outbreak we had in west Africa, where the UK played a leading role. When we look at the lessons learnt from that, community engagement was really critical. The DRC is a country where there is scepticism of the Government, of international aid workers, of everybody. We have seen attacks on aid workers. Therefore, trying to win the community's trust in order to deploy vaccines and to open treatment centres is very hard work in the DRC. We have done a lot of work on this. We have been pushing not just our own programmes but all international aid to be very focused on working with communities, looking at how we can ensure that faith groups, community groups and local people are involved and that this is not imposed upon them. That is the only way in which we are going to ensure that people come to treatment centres.

As an example of that work, some people who have recovered from Ebola now are being employed to go round and talk to people about Ebola and what a horrible disease it is, and to talk about their experience in a treatment centre. A challenge we have had in the past is that, when people have gone into treatment centres, and have been cordoned off and hidden away from their families, that is when the rumours start to spread about all sorts of things happening to them that are not true. People who have been through the treatment centres and survived come back out to their communities and say, "This is why it is really important to get vaccinated and this is why, if somebody is running a high temperature and exhibiting other signs, they get reported and taken to a treatment centre as soon as possible rather than trying to care for them within the village".

There are lots of things going on. Undoubtedly, we can do more. This is always going to be a very challenging operating environment compared to the situation we face in west Africa.

Q22 Chris Law: Of course, we are treating the symptoms of the lack of universal health coverage, for example, with this and we will continue to do so. I wonder what DFID's position is going forward with regards to the deeper issue of trying to have universal health coverage. It is a debate we had earlier this year in Westminster Hall. I wonder what position has



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been taken on that and where we are going forward with it.

Andrew Stephenson: I will say a bit on that and then hand over to one of my colleagues. You are exactly right. If we look at the biggest outbreak, in west Africa, we went in, deployed lots of resources, sorted out the problem, stopped the deaths, eradicated the disease in west Africa and then left. A lot of the reflective work that has been done on that is what more we could have done to leave a lasting legacy in strengthening the processes in those countries. The DRC is particularly challenging and, as I say, there is no history of positive Government support in some of the parts of the country where this is going on, but we need to look at that legacy. We need to look at resilience in communities. We need to look at universal healthcare, where possible. Other international aid organisations, particularly USAID, have focused very heavily on medical treatment centres and things across Africa. Mary, do you want to say some more?

Mary Hunt: I will just add a little more. I have just come back to London—

Sitting suspended for a Division in the House.

On resuming—

Q23 **Chris Law:** It was previously stated by the previous Secretary of State that there had not been enough international funding surrounding support with the Ebola outbreak in the DRC. At this stage, how satisfied have you been with the response? Has it improved or has it not?

Andrew Stephenson: We have been putting our money where our mouth is, but we are quite concerned that other countries do not seem to have been doing so. We have pushed through the United Nations and other agencies to say that we think other countries should step up their contributions. This is a crisis; it needs to be tackled. The sooner it is tackled, the more lives will be saved. We can be proud of what we are doing, but there are some people who really should be contributing more. In particular, if you think of the west Africa outbreak, we played a leading role there because we had lots of strategic advantage in doing so; we have historic links and good ties with those countries. In the DRC, we could do with some of our Francophone partners stepping up their contributions.

Q24 **Chris Law:** I was about to ask who you are going to name and shame. That is really helpful. On 18 October, the WHO's DRC Ebola committee agreed that the situation still constituted a public health emergency under international health regulations. Does DFID think we are winning the battle against Ebola in the DRC, or are we containing it?

Andrew Stephenson: At the moment, I would say that we are containing it, but that is not to say that it is not going to spread, because with the porous borders and things, there is an ever-present danger of the numbers starting to rise again or spread. At the moment, we are



responding as well as we can. Through DFID, we helped fund the creation of the first Ebola vaccine. We have also helped fund the new Johnson & Johnson vaccine, which is going to start being rolled out from next month, November. We can be proud of what we are doing and, as you see the weeks pass, hopefully with other people stepping up, we will be able to finally eradicate this.

Unfortunately, as I said at the start of my evidence, the grim milestones are that we are looking at the most challenging public health emergency in recent times, given where it is, and this is the second largest Ebola outbreak of the 10 Ebola outbreaks we have seen since the disease was first discovered.⁷

Q25 Chris Law: As a last question on what is happening in the DRC with Ebola, what lessons have been learnt from the 2014 outbreak in west Africa and how have they been applied?

Andrew Stephenson: I will answer this and then pass over to Mary. One of the first things I said when I joined the Department was that I wanted to learn those lessons and to read various books and publications on responding to west Africa. That is still on my to-do list. I have been provided with those documents but, with the amount of stuff I have had to get through, I have not yet got round to them.

The key lesson was about ensuring that the responses are properly engaged and embedded in the community, and that we are working with communities and not imposing a response on them. You are working with community groups, faith groups and others, and you are building that level of trust, so people seek medical attention when they need it and faithfully explain who they have been in contact with, where they have been living and various other things. A lot of this is about tracing through communities where people have been, who they have met and who they are related to. That is the key thing.

Another big lesson was about ensuring that we build resilience long term and that we do not just go in, deal with this crisis, sort out the crisis and then leave, but we look at what lasting legacy there can be here of building resilience for a future outbreak. Mary has much more experience on this.

Mary Hunt: The Minister is absolutely right to home in on those two key lessons, and the one around communities is absolutely one that was learnt from west Africa and Sierra Leone, where I have just returned from being head of office.

There are two other things. One is the importance of having systems where you can really respond quickly to early warnings—that goes for the

⁷ Witness correction: The current outbreak is in fact the second biggest recorded globally. It is the largest of the ten Ebola episodes experienced in the DRC since 1976.



UK and DFID, as well as the international community, with the WHO in the lead—and focusing on the research that will build the resilience for future outbreaks. The success that we have had on that, as the Minister has mentioned, in terms of developing the first vaccine and now work on the second vaccine, is really important.

There is a really important point about building resilience of health systems as well. Having been in Sierra Leone two years after Ebola was properly dealt with, you still see that there is a need for us to encourage Governments to really prioritise robust and thorough support through the health systems, as well as wider governance issues.

- Q26 **Chair:** Can I move us to Sudan? There have been some very encouraging developments, politically, in Sudan, but the humanitarian situation, as I understand it, is precarious. Can you set out what DFID is doing to address the particular set of issues around food insecurity and malnutrition? How is DFID building long-term self-reliance in Sudan among affected populations?

Andrew Stephenson: There has been some very encouraging news. Things seem to be moving in the right direction. The messaging that we are getting out is that the new transitional Government will allow unfettered access for humanitarian supplies across Sudan, which would be the first in a long time. That is something we really welcome. We are keen to ensure that Prime Minister Hamdok delivers it. We are working through the Foreign Office with our representatives in Khartoum to ensure that that situation is dealt with.

We have a significant programme, but the challenge in Sudan has always been getting aid to the people who need it in a very troubled part of the world. The latest assessment estimated that over 9 million people require humanitarian assistance to meet basic needs and sustain their livelihoods. Faced with that huge challenge, that has to be first and foremost. We do other things, on macroeconomic and governance reforms, civil society empowerment, tackling climate change and water shortages, and girls' and women's health and education. We have a range of things going on in Sudan, but the humanitarian relief and dealing with getting aid into some of the hard to reach parts of the country is the biggest challenge.

- Q27 **Chair:** Can I highlight a particular one that OCHA, the UN humanitarian agency, has highlighted, which is the cholera outbreak in Sudan? OCHA has said that there is a concern about a lack of funding that could lead to lost opportunities for prevention of new cases of cholera. What is the UK doing to work with OCHA and others to meet this particular and very disturbing challenge?

Andrew Stephenson: It is a very disturbing challenge, and we are keeping the situation under close review. I know we are working closely with UN agencies on the latest cholera outbreak. Mary, do you have more information on that?



Mary Hunt: I do not have anything more specific today, but we can come back to the Committee with an update on that.

Chair: Could you? Thank you very much. From my understanding, this is a major focus of concern for OCHA, and it would be very helpful to have a note on that.

Q28 **Chris Law:** As of 31 August, the UN humanitarian response plan for north-east Nigeria had received only 39.5% of its assessed requirement for funding. What is the UK doing to encourage more donors to make pledges and/or increase the size of their own pledge, to get closer to the target for the region? Is there a risk of the crisis spilling over further into neighbouring countries if it is not contained?

Andrew Stephenson: That is a very good question. The challenges in the north-east do not just affect north-east Nigeria; they affect a range of countries in that part of Africa. The instability does spill over into other countries and, therefore, we need to work with the Nigerians to stabilise the situation and ensure that appropriate funding is going in.

Working with the Nigerians is a challenging situation. You will be aware of the recent closure of humanitarian offices. It is not the kind of thing we want to see. We have made very strong representations about that, and the UN emergency relief co-ordinator, Mark Lowcock, travelled to Nigeria last week in an effort to resolve the situation. He was promised that they would be able to reopen in days. As I sit here today, I do not believe they have been reopened. The concern from our NGO partners would be, even if they are allowed to reopen, what restrictions are put in place. We have seen a closing of the space for civil society actors and NGOs operating in the country over recent years, and that is worrying.

The rhetoric that occasionally comes out of the Government about NGOs having to work closely with the military goes completely counter to how NGOs want to work; they want to reach people in the greatest humanitarian need in the north-east, rather than follow any instructions from the military. It is a very difficult situation in the north-east. This is something that we, as the UK Government, have been looking at closely. We have been working closely with the UN. We have also been working with other partners at various forums. This came up at the United Nations General Assembly, talking about what more we could do to ensure there is a co-ordinated response to what is a regional challenge, not just a north-east Nigeria challenge, around the Lake Chad basin.

Q29 **Chris Law:** Following on from that, what is the UK doing by diplomatic means, either bilaterally or through the UN, to dissuade the Nigerian authorities from abruptly closing NGO facilities—you touched on that—such as Mercy Corps and Action Against Hunger, in the area? What support can the UK make available to enable any terrorism-related allegations to be investigated effectively and fairly?

Andrew Stephenson: The DFID Secretary of State raised this directly with the Nigerian Government. He raised concerns with the Nigerian



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Minister for Humanitarian Affairs during a meeting with the Nigerian Finance Minister, which was in the margins of the World Bank meeting last week. The Finance Minister committed to looking into this issue. We have also raised it with the Nigerian military. The most influential visit to Nigeria has been by Mark Lowcock, who changed his plans specifically to visit Nigeria to talk about these two closures. We are hoping that the facilities will be reopened soon, and that any assets of those NGOs will be returned.

The concern that all NGOs operating in Nigeria have is what restrictions will be put in place. We need to continue the dialogue with the Nigerian Government to ensure not only that these facilities are opened, and that violence against and intimidation of aid workers ceases, but that there are no restrictions in allowing humanitarian workers to go about their job of saving lives and delivering aid to the most vulnerable.

Q30 **Chris Law:** What is being done to encourage the Nigerian Government to regulate the Almajiri schools, and ensure that children in Nigeria have access to an education with a varied curriculum and safe learning conditions?

Andrew Stephenson: This is a challenge that has been identified by the Nigerian Government. We are working very closely with them. We are very concerned by the number of young men and boys facing inhumane and degrading treatment at some of the Islamic schools that have recently been closing down. It is positive that recent raids have led to a national focus in Nigeria on what has been going on. We support the Nigerian authorities in holding to account those who have been responsible for that abuse, but also looking at the education system and how we can work more closely with them across the board on the education system.

Obviously, Nigeria is a very big country. In different parts, we have different programmes. We have significant education programmes in Nigeria but we are very keen, particularly if the instability in the north-east is resolved, that it cannot be resolved in a vacuum and left; it has to be resolved, and then people have to be able to step in, particularly NGOs, which Nigeria should be working with, not against. NGOs can step in to fill that void, and ensure that good education and other things are being delivered to the population in those areas.

Q31 **Chris Law:** In August, we reported on the increase of violence against humanitarian workers. In fact, year on year over the last five years, it has increased quite significantly, yet there is very little done in terms of justice in response to that. What is the UK proposing to do in response to the execution of aid workers in north-east Nigeria, and the further threats to humanitarians posed by non-state armed groups, such as Boko Haram?

Andrew Stephenson: We are appalled and deeply saddened by the news last month of the execution of an aid worker in north-east Nigeria,



and obviously condolences go to friends, family and colleagues. The UK calls on all parties to the conflict to ensure that aid workers and those who uphold international principles are protected. We need to see the military and all parties to the conflict upholding the principles of international humanitarian law.

It is worrying that the rhetoric from the Government and the military sometimes portrays NGOs as somehow being party to the conflict, or not delivering on the ground. I can give you lots of statistics about what NGOs have achieved in Nigeria in delivering aid to some of the most vulnerable people. Civilians should not be the casualties of war. Unfortunately, in Nigeria, like too many places, they end up caught in the crossfire. At a time when the Nigerian military is pulling back from some of its operating bases to super bases, pulling out of certain areas and almost giving up territory, you are seeing limited space for NGOs to get involved in north-east Nigeria and really supply humanitarian relief, which is leaving many more people than we have had in recent years cut off from any support whatsoever. It is too vast a region for us to simply supplement on-the-ground deliveries with drops or something else.

It is a very worrying space. We are very keen to work with the Nigerian Government on these issues but the Nigerian Government and military, in particular, need to understand that we are there and NGOs are there to help them and to help the people of Nigeria, not to take sides in the conflict.

Q32 Chris Law: We asked the Secretary of State previously if there would be some specific action taken by the UK Government on this. After all, it is our report. It is published and it has very strong recommendations. I want to know from you, Minister, if you would support an international summit, perhaps held here in London, to bring together other parties involved to see if there can be a collective response to escalating violence against humanitarian aid workers.

Andrew Stephenson: I am very keen to support something like that. This is an issue that we have spoken about at the United Nations and other international forums. Humanitarian relief workers should never become targets. There are grim statistics, year on year, on the number who die just going about their jobs, trying to deliver aid to the most vulnerable, not just in Nigeria but across the globe. We should pay tribute to them for that, but we should also look at what we can do to protect their lives and shine a light on these atrocities, because they are atrocities. We need to first and foremost protect our staff and our partners.

Chris Law: I will look forward to the summit, in that case.

Andrew Stephenson: I will see what I can do.

Q33 Richard Burden: Can we move on to Zimbabwe? We did a one-off evidence session on the situation in Zimbabwe back in February. Your



predecessor at that stage talked about the country being in a state of “uneasy calm”. It does not really look much like that now. It seems to be spiralling out of control: rampant national debt; huge price rises across virtually all the basics; a drought that has been categorised as a “national disaster”; renewed sanctions from both the EU and the US; and a recent diamond embargo. The new regime is continuing violent oppression in response to opposition or protest. Putting all that together, with your joint hats on, can you say whether the UK has a strategy for tackling the crisis in Zimbabwe? If so, what is it? Within that strategy, what is the role of DFID?

Andrew Stephenson: Exactly as you say, humanitarian need in Zimbabwe is rising, through a combination of climate change shocks on the country and the deteriorating economic situation. The latest estimates are that 5.5 million people in rural areas and 2.2 million people in urban areas do not have access to the food they need, so 42% of the population now do not have access to food.

We obviously have challenges in working with the Government of Zimbabwe. We have always said that we are keen to work with them, but that UK support relies on fundamental political and economic reform. We need to see changes, and we need to see the Government respecting human rights. When the Committee held the emergency evidence session in February, it followed the shooting of a number of protestors with live ammunition in January. Things like this cannot continue.

We still have a significant DFID programme in Zimbabwe. We stand shoulder to shoulder with the people of Zimbabwe and, of course, we have a deep link with that country. Having said that, we currently channel no money directly through the Government of Zimbabwe, and we will not do so until they start to engage in significant reform, and certainly start prioritising human rights and the rule of law in the country.

Q34 **Richard Burden:** What levers are we using, particularly with international partners? Also, who are the partners we are mainly working with on this, and what are they bringing to the table in terms of trying to effect change there?

Andrew Stephenson: We take a lead in Zimbabwe. It is one of the countries where we very much play a leading role. We work with the European Union. We work with the Americans and others. Obviously, we work closely with the United Nations. You will be aware that a range of sanctions have been placed, if you are talking about tools that have been used. We have tried to encourage the Government to take steps in the right direction. When they have not, sanctions have been imposed by both the United States and the European Union. As we leave the European Union, we will have to take a decision as to whether we continue those sanctions as the UK. That decision will arrive on my desk shortly, but I see absolutely no justification for us changing our approach or differing from the European Union’s approach until we see significant reform.



If Zimbabwe went down a route of political and economic reform, it could become eligible for things like debt relief, which would be massively impactful for the country and its ability to access international financing. While it continues on its current path, unfortunately, we will see a deteriorating situation with the international community. You mentioned in your first question that the Americans have recently imposed more sanctions on the country. Some might say that that shows a losing of patience by our American partners with what is going on and the lack of progress being made in Zimbabwe. We are keen to work with the Zimbabwean people and the Zimbabwean Government, but the Government need to undertake significant political and economic reform for us to really enhance our relationship.

Q35 Richard Burden: I can see that sanctions are a way of expressing extreme disapproval of what is going on over there. Your predecessor said that the current sanctions are “very targeted”, that they are designed to effect change, and that they do not harm Zimbabwe generally. I have to say that when we received evidence from a number of experts in the field—NGOs and others—they took a different view on that. They said that the sanctions were not very effective, and that the effect was more scattergun and harmful than targeted. They also said that one of the real problems is that they are providing an excuse for the regime in Zimbabwe to act the role of the victim of Western imperialism and solidify its support on that. That was very much a line that Mugabe took, but apparently it is being taken over with some gusto by the current regime as well. How would you respond to that? What are the sanctions actually achieving in their current form?

Andrew Stephenson: The European Union, through which we operate the sanctions regime, has viewed the sanctions as an appropriate response to the political violence over the last 15 years. That is why I say that even once we leave the European Union, we would roll over such sanctions. The European Union sanctions are focused very much on a limited number of individuals and on the military, so they are very limited sanctions that should have no impact on the wider economy. Most people who look at the EU sanctions would undoubtedly say that that is the case.

It is true that the Government and various actors in Zimbabwe have blamed sanctions for the general economic problems. I would not say that is true. We have to differentiate, though, between the approach taken by the European Union and the Americans, who have gone for a wider sanctions regime. I do not want to comment on the impact that may or may not have had on the different sectors of the economy, but I will say that the sanctions we impose through the EU are targeted on individuals in that country and on the military, and therefore the impact of our sanctions should be limited. Nobody wants to go down the route of sanctions. This route has been taken after years of difficulty with the former regime, and difficulty with the new Government there. We very much hoped, with President Mugabe leaving office and then his recent



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passing, that there would be a change of course in the country but, unfortunately, we are not seeing that as of yet.

- Q36 **Richard Burden:** Could we perhaps move on to issues of violence against women and girls in Zimbabwe? Again, your predecessor told us about a range of initiatives in-country, including two new programmes: medical and psycho-social support through the Start Fund; and one that we are told is entitled Stopping Abuse and Female Exploitation. Can you update us on those two programmes and what they have achieved so far?

Andrew Stephenson: Certainly. Since the last oral evidence session in February, DFID's Zimbabwe's Stopping Abuse and Female Exploitation programme has been approved. This is a £12 million four-year programme from 2019 to 2023, designed to find the most cost-effective approaches to preventing and reducing violence against women and girls in Zimbabwe, and that programme began this month.

DFID's Zimbabwe's Child Protection Fund is a £32 million programme over six years from 2016 to 2022, and that supports UNICEF in providing child protection case management, responding to and preventing cases of violence against children, in partnership with social workers and several specialist NGOs. Some of those cases of violence against girls involve girls living with disabilities, who are twice as vulnerable as other girls.

There has been some significant progress there. There is obviously a lot more to do, but those two programmes are now very much up and running.

- Q37 **Richard Burden:** We heard back in February that DFID used to support a large UNFPA/UNICEF sexual and reproductive rights programme in Zimbabwe. It is not clear to us what has happened to that support—whether it is still not there, and whether it is going to be reinstated, given the UK's recent commitment to "healthcare for everyone that prioritises women's sexual and reproductive health and rights". That last bit is a quote from DFID itself.

Andrew Stephenson: We prioritise access to good-quality sexual and reproductive health services. One of the announcements made at the UN General Assembly by the Secretary of State was £600 million for reproductive health, and we are very committed to that as a country. It is something that we have renewed our commitment to, despite some political differences with other countries, which may now be shying away from funding sexual and reproductive health services locally.

- Q38 **Richard Burden:** Is that support for the two programmes I have talked about, which DFID used to support, or is it something different? Are those two programmes still there and not being supported, or are they there and being supported?

Andrew Stephenson: On those two specific programmes, I will have to write to you.



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Richard Burden: If you could, that would be great. Thank you.

Mary Hunt: We can get the specific information on that for you. Sometimes DFID works bilaterally through the country, and sometimes we have interventions that are done at a regional or global level. There is an African regional programme—it actually goes into Asia—that the Zimbabwe team may well draw down on, but we will get you the data.

Q39 **Chair:** Can I take us to the Sahel now? There is a greater focus from both DFID and the Foreign Office on the Sahel. Can I ask in particular about Burkina Faso? The UNHCR is reporting a “humanitarian crisis” in the north of that country, where displacement is affecting almost 500,000 people. Minister, what is the UK doing to address this humanitarian challenge in Burkina Faso?

Andrew Stephenson: We are very much stepping up our engagement in the Sahel. Part of our new Africa strategy a couple of years ago was to recognise that this is a part of Africa where, historically, we have not been very well represented, so we are both increasing the number of our people on the ground there and increasing the number of our people working through organisations like the African Union and others to ensure that a real focus is brought on to some of the challenges. Of course, it is an area where we are working closely with the French and other Governments.

On humanitarian relief, we contribute to various initiatives in the region. It is very difficult; it is similar to what we said about the situation in Sudan. Access to parts of the area is incredibly challenging, so trying to open access for humanitarian relief is one of the main priorities. There is a significant team now in the Foreign Office and in DFID focusing on this part of Africa, because we acknowledge that, historically, it is an area where we have not been as strong as we should have been.

Q40 **Chair:** I will ask a broader question about the Sahel in a moment, but specifically on Burkina Faso, one issue that has been drawn to the Committee’s attention is the security measures that the Burkina Faso forces have to undertake to combat insurgency and insecurity. Are there discussions between the UK and the Burkina Faso Government about how those measures can protect civilians during that challenging process of combating insurgency?

Mary Hunt: That is a matter I would be very happy to come back to the Committee on.

Q41 **Chair:** Thank you. Perhaps I will finish with the broader question on the work in the Sahel. It was reported in May by the BBC that most of the pledged funds by partners and donors, including the EU, had not yet been handed over. Are you able to give us an up-to-date picture of funding of the work in the Sahel, and if there has been a delay, can you set out why there has been a delay?

Mary Hunt: Is that UK direct aid to the Sahel?



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Chair: It is more partners and donors. This is more a question about money not being provided that was due to come from other partners and donors, in particular the European Union.

Mary Hunt: It is not something that has come to my attention, but again, we would not want to leave you without a clear answer on that.

Andrew Stephenson: We can write to you on that.

Q42 **Chair:** Thank you very much indeed.

We have had a bit of a Cook's tour of Africa, as well as covering some of the big challenges on global education, and I thank you for answering all those questions early in your tenure in this role. We would be grateful if we could have a response on the specific questions that you were not able to answer today.

Unless any colleagues have any supplementary questions, can I thank the Minister and officials for joining us here today? As this could be the last meeting of the Committee prior to the election, can I use this opportunity to thank everyone I have worked with over the four and a half years that I have chaired the Committee, in particular the other Committee members, the various witnesses, including Government witnesses, who have come before us, and in particular the team of Clerks, specialists and other staff who support us? I put on public record my appreciation, and that of my colleagues on the Committee, of the team that ensures the Committee is able to operate effectively, and of the DFID and other Government staff who support Ministers and ensure that they are fully equipped when they come before us.

Andrew Stephenson: Mr Chairman, I pay tribute to your leadership in this area. While I have only been in post for three months, I know my predecessors have found the reports from this Committee incredibly useful, along with the recommendations you have made, many of which have been taken up. I pay tribute to your personal leadership on things like education for some of the most marginalised in the world. That has shone through in the reports and the findings of this Committee, which is very much down to your personal commitment. Thank you.

Chair: Thank you very much indeed.

Richard Burden: I know that members of the Committee would absolutely endorse that. You have made a really important contribution to Parliament's work on international development. You are a pleasure to work with. I have to say that your style in chairing the Committee, which is very inclusive and very collegiate, is well appreciated by everyone here, and it works. We have had an impact as a Committee, and a lot of that is down to you. Thanks very much indeed.

Mr Evans: Chair, that is absolutely cross-party. You are the one thing that has brought us all together.

Chair: Thank you very much indeed, and best of luck to all colleagues.