HOUSE OF COMMONS

International Development Committee

Oral evidence: Future of UK aid, HC 100

Tuesday 22 March 2022

Ordered by the House of Commons to be published on 22 March 2022.

Watch the meeting

Members present: Sarah Champion (Chair); Mr Richard Bacon; Theo Clarke; Mrs Pauline Latham; Nigel Mills; Dr Dan Poulter.

Questions 211 - 252

Witnesses

I: Katherine Nightingale, Head of the Advocacy and Policy Team, CARE International UK; Kathleen Spencer-Chapman, Head of Policy, Advocacy and Research, Plan International; Naomi Gokwat, Programme Coordinator for Nigeria, Women for Women International.

II: Hannah Loryman, Head of Policy, Sightsavers; George Graham, Chief Executive, Humanity & Inclusion UK.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Katherine Nightingale, Kathleen Spencer-Chapman and Naomi Gokwat.

Q211 **Chair:** I would now like to start this one-off evidence session on the equalities impact assessment, which was written by the FCDO last May but published by this Committee last week because the Department was reluctant to do so. The equalities impact assessment said that "there will likely be a significant reduction in the number and size of targeted programme activities aimed at reaching those furthest behind—including women, girls and people with disabilities". We are going to discuss the reality of that advice in relation to the cuts the Government went on to take to their aid budget.

We have two panels today. On the first one, we are joined by three witnesses: Katherine from CARE International UK, Kathleen from Plan International and Naomi from Women for Women, who is joining us from Nigeria. Thank you all. Could I ask you to briefly introduce yourselves and your organisations?

Katherine Nightingale: Hi. My name is Katherine Nightingale. I am head of advocacy and policy at CARE International UK. CARE is an international NGO set up following the second world war and the refugee populations in Europe, primarily by the US, Canada and Australia sending packages to the UK and Europe at the height of the refugee crisis at that time. Since then, we have grown as a development and humanitarian organisation. We now work in over 100 different emergency and development countries. Currently, programmes include programming in Yemen, Syria and Bangladesh, and now responding to the crisis in Ukraine, among the other 100 countries that we do development and humanitarian response in.

Kathleen Spencer-Chapman: I am Kathleen Spencer-Chapman. I am the head of policy, advocacy and research at Plan International UK. Plan International was set up in the UK during the Spanish civil war to support children affected by that war. Since then, we have also expanded globally and deliver development and humanitarian programmes in over 70 countries, working with children, with a particular focus on equality for girls.

Naomi Gokwat: I am Naomi Gowkat, the programme co-ordinator at Women for Women International Nigeria. I started work as a field trainer and rose up to this position, where I work with community and state stakeholders to create visibility for the Stronger Women, Stronger Nations programme here in Nigeria. I am passionate about touching people's lives, especially women and young people, and I enjoy sharing my life experiences for them.

At Women for Women International, we have worked with the most marginalised women in post-conflict countries for over 30 years, in

countries like Congo, Afghanistan, South Sudan, Rwanda and Nigeria, where I am based. At Women for Women, through our tested and transforming Stronger Women, Stronger Nations programme, we work with women individually to equip them with resources and knowledge to build their lives and learn about their rights, to save and to start income-generating activities to support their families, and then form support networks. We also engage with stakeholders and male leaders at community level to create a more enabling environment for the women we serve to be able to advocate for issues in their communities and advocate with policymakers that will influence change for the betterment of their lives.

Q212 **Chair:** The first question is to all of you, please. Based on what your organisations have seen, what direct impact have these cuts to the UK aid budget had on programmes that are specifically designed to reach women and girls?

Katherine Nightingale: From our own programming, but also from the analysis we have done last year and this year, we can see that the aid cuts have had an overwhelming impact on women and girls. Analysis that we did along with other organisations and submitted as part of our submission to this Select Committee last year highlighted that there were significant cuts in the first round responding to the contraction of the economy; committing to 0.7% meant that, in line with the contraction of the economy, cuts were made. They saw cuts across programming for SRHR, gender-based violence, girls' education and a whole range of programmes that were directly focused on women and girls and would impact women and girls.

In light of the decision to reduce funding from 0.7% to 0.5%, we saw £4 billion-worth of reduction in overall aid, significant parts of which were targeting women and girls. Overwhelmingly, we saw that programmes for family planning, girls' education and GBV prevention were cut. Programmes for humanitarian response that would have benefited particular vulnerable populations of women and girls were cut. The recent best assessment that CARE has been able to do with Development Initiatives, a research body that specialises in tracking aid, has identified that the gap in funding between 2019 and 2021 that included a marker for gender equality—a marker that something was either significantly or predominantly contributing to gender equality—equated to a drop in funding of £1.9 billion.

I am happy to talk more about some of that data later on if it is helpful. One thing that we have tried to do for this Government and want to put before your Committee is quantify what it looks like to return funding for women and girls. It looks like a return of £1.9 billion.

Let me say something about CARE's own experience with programming in Yemen, in Syria—in some of the hardest to reach countries and contexts—but also with girls' education programmes in Rwanda. We have seen a cut of £12 million to a programme there that meant that support

for education and support for young adolescent girls was cut and 200,000 girls were not supported. We have seen cuts to programming in Syria that mean that some of the women in the most vulnerable camps and their families no longer receive protection services in those environments.

My colleagues can expand a little bit on the nature and reality of what those cuts feel and look like to staff on the ground delivering that message to staff who have spent months and years building up trust with those communities. There was one programme where, as a value-for-money exercise, we had spent almost two years identifying effective strategies of reaching the hardest to reach women with sexual and reproductive health services in some of the world's hardest to reach environments. Six months into the programme, that programme was cut. The investment of all that expertise was lost because those programmes were cut.

Q213 **Chair:** What notice were you given of that cut?

Katherine Nightingale: It varied from programme to programme, quite honestly. Sometimes it was very little notice. Colleagues can expand on that.

Q214 **Chair:** What is "very little"? A month?

Katherine Nightingale: It could be a month. It could be weeks. Sometimes you would have these conversations where it was not clear to the staff themselves that you were dealing with. That is the honest answer. It is not that the people you are dealing with directly on the civil servant side know and cannot tell you; it is that they do not know. They themselves are trying to make the case for why certain programmes are really valuable. They are doing their work to try to make the case for what is happening. You are trying to support the evidence around the high quality of programming.

In Syria, the programmes that saw a cut by almost a third were some of the highest-performing programming. It was a really difficult time and, as you can imagine, the reality is that every penny of that money that you see in those big figures is people that you are engaged with on the ground. Those people had to walk into camps and explain to them why that money was not going to be there.

My job is far easier in comparison, but I had to go on calls with colleagues all around the world to try to explain why this was happening. They would say, "What is it that we have done? What could we have done differently? Is there something we can do differently?" I had to say, "It is not what you have done. Your programme is not a bad programme. It has not failed to do the things that it is doing." I had to try to explain the context here that was making those decisions. I had to say, "There is nothing you can do," and they had to go and have that conversation in Syrian refugee camps, in Afghanistan, in Yemen. That is a conversation nobody should have.

Q215 **Chair:** I feel your pain and frustration at that. Were the Government here, they would say that it was a global pandemic so they had to make cuts to pay for that. One understands that that was their priority. How could they have dealt that news to you better to avoid the impact? Or was the impact you discuss inevitable if the cuts were going to have to be made?

Katherine Nightingale: There were some significant things that could have been done better. That is a really key point to focus on here. Even in the understanding that there were decisions being made, at one stage, to contract in line with a reduction in the economic output, let alone a second decision to make further cuts, do not underestimate the fact that, when you are delivering to 0.7%, you have a period in which you do not have to make immediate cuts; you can do that over time, so you are making a choice when to make those cuts.

On the basis that those cuts have been chosen to be made, actually discussing and engaging with the NGOs, the community organisations and the women's rights organisations that are involved in making those decisions would have been really helpful. We were not involved in any discussion. We were not involved in discussions about how we could mitigate the worst impacts of this. We did not see an equality impact assessment. We did not get any figures on what aid cuts would look like. We did not even know what other people's aid cuts would look like. We were trying to work in the dark in many respects.

It felt like there was nobody trying to help us make this the least worst outcome. There are ways that we can do that. I would say that in any decisions being made or considered now, please consult with INGOs, NGOs and civil society, even if it is about a decision that is a hard decision to make. We are best placed to try to help make it the best, most successful decision.

The other thing I would say is the lack of clarity, accountability and transparency translated into an environment in which we had very little notice to manage expectations for the communities that we worked with. That places significant risk on the people in some of the world's most vulnerable contexts. It places risk on the staff who have to explain and therefore face perhaps quite angry or frustrated people in very dire circumstances.

In a GBV prevention programme, for example, where you might be working with communities to try to reduce incidence of interpersonal violence or domestic violence, if you have worked to encourage those people to come forward, you have to have time to make sure they are now not in danger because they have done that. If you do not have time to do that well, you have aggravated the risks to those women and girls in that environment, in terms of what they are experiencing.

With time, you can also try to negotiate at times with other donors. I think at that stage the US was expanding some of its programming in

certain areas. If you can have an open and honest conversation, that enables you to go to other donors and say, "We have to pull out here," or, "Here is where we are trying to make some reductions. What options do you have on family planning, on girls' education? How can we work on this together for the best interests of the people involved?" I have to say that I did not see any of those conversations happening. We were not asked to try to help those conversations, which is what we would have done in that environment.

Q216 **Chair:** Kathleen, Katherine has painted a pretty brutal image of what happened at the time. Does that resonate with you? What impact have you seen on the ground as a consequence of those cuts, and indeed the way they were handled?

Kathleen Spencer-Chapman: Absolutely, our experience is very similar to what Katherine has outlined. As one example, Plan International was a partner on a six-year flagship programme in Malawi to prevent and tackle violence against women and girls. This programme was about two years into its running at the point when it was told it had to cut 80% off its budget. This was last year, having already had 30% cut off the previous year, which, in the end, meant it had to close. We did everything possible to avoid closure, but that scale of budget cut just meant it was not possible to continue.

This was a programme that was very ambitious. It was operating at multiple levels, working to try to improve the Malawian justice system, to improve access to justice for women and girls. It was working at the family and community level to engage with families, girls and boys, women and men, to try to address attitudes, gendered social norms that underlie violence against women and girls. This is the kind of work that takes time. It was planned as a six-year programme. That meant that when it ended—and so abruptly, as Katherine has outlined—we did everything we could to try to work with communities to avoid putting the women and girls at risk of harm.

Having been planning for six years, we had started conversations in communities. We had encouraged survivors of violence to start speaking out to seek support, then suddenly withdrew that support and pulled out before those sorts of conversations had concluded, and the programme was no longer there to support the women and girls involved. That left those women and girls at risk of harm and backlash in those communities, which is a terrible outcome and one that goes against the Government's own principles to do no harm and the duty of care to those women and girls.

It also really undermined all the initial investments in that programme. It was a £17 million programme, so millions of pounds had already been spent on this, with very good results. It was scoring very highly. As Katherine has outlined, it was not that it was not delivering; it really was, and it had achieved some significant successes in those first few years. That was wasted as a result of pulling out.

On the question of how it was done, the experience of our staff involved at all levels—staff implementing on the ground and those managing the overall programme—was that there was very poor communication; it was very chaotic from the FCDO's side. One time they were asked to provide, within two days, a remodelled programme with a 50% budget cut, which is a lot. This is a six-year programme. A lot of time goes into the design of these programmes. They provided that and then a few weeks later were informed that there was an 80% cut, which led to it closing.

This lack of certainty, with different bits of communication coming out here and there, led to a really poor ability to plan and manage the close-down as effectively as possible. Similarly to what Katherine has said, we found that, although it was not necessarily the fault of individual FCDO staff trying to manage this, there was not that time or care given to be able to really properly plan an exit to avoid that risk of harm at a minimum, let alone trying to safeguard some of the progress you have already achieved.

It needs consultation with the communities, with the organisations that are implementing. There are a lot of partners implementing in Malawi. There is the Malawian Government. There was no real attempt to consult with anyone to work out how to do this in the least harmful way possible. That was one of the most shocking and painful things about the whole process of the cuts—that speed and lack of consultation at the time.

Q217 **Chair:** Naomi can I turn to you, specifically thinking about Nigeria? What has the impact of the cuts on programmes supporting women and girls been like in Nigeria?

Naomi Gokwat: Kathleen and Katherine have outlined similar issues to us in Nigeria. One of the great impacts on the programme, when we received the news of the funding cuts, was that it was, first, shocking news, because it came shortly after we did our annual report on the first year. The results that we shared were beautiful. At enrolment, just 3% of the women reported earning above $1.90 a day. At graduation, the report stated that 61% of the women had moved to that level of earning. That was great for us. We also had reports that the male leaders in the community who supported women's rights, giving space for the women to voice their issues, had increased to 61%. That was really great. We felt, "These results are great and will further encourage FCDO to move on with its promise."

Unfortunately, a few weeks after—I think just at the end of April—the news came and it was a sudden cut. It was really devastating. I remember when we started work in Bauchi. Initially it was difficult working through the communities, because we have a patriarchal nature of communities here and the experience with the community has told us that previously other organisations have come to the community and made promises that were not fulfilled. Politicians have come. People have lost trust in organisations and other people that come keeping their

promises. It was a bit difficult. We had to make a lot of effort to build trust.

When this news came, it was like all the trust we have struggled to build had been punctured. It is like the hope we are giving these people has been taken away. We had promised them that it was going to be a three-year funded programme and just a year and a half into the programme this is taken away from them.

I remember in one of the communities one of the stakeholders said, "Wow. You mean this programme will end. It is like you have opened our eyes and have asked us to close. It is like you have brought something that has brightened our world and you have made it dark again. In my community, where we have experienced conflicts, where Christians and Muslims do not relate, now, because of your programme, you have made us believe in dialogue, talking together and living fully. Now you are taking away this opportunity. It is unfortunate. We wish we can see FCDO and give them our message: 'Please restore this funding, because it is creating a lot of impact in our lives.'" That is an example.

Another great impact it had on the programme is value for money. I know that, while implementing the programme, FCDO holds value for money in high esteem. Having gone just one and a half years, with so much investment put in, before the programme was cut, I do not see that as value for money. The outcome of the project had not been attained. We are dealing with human lives here. The cuts came without consultation, just like my colleagues have already mentioned. There was no consultation. For us, on our programme, we teach and encourage the women that, for any decisions to be taken, it is important to have a discussion. You are a stakeholder. You need to be part of the decision process.

We felt that the FCDO just took this decision. We acknowledge the fact that they also had their challenges, but we would have appreciated it if they had brought it to the table for us to look at it and then make alternative arrangements, because we have stakeholders on the ground and we interface with those stakeholders. They do not see them. These stakeholders only know us and whatever we have told them is what they hold to heart. It was really heartbreaking when the news came that affected our programme.

We also had to make a lot of effort. It took a lot of time to go back to the community and explain to these people why the cuts had been made. They felt, "Is it that you people do not want to keep your promise? We have believed you for the past one and a half years. What is it?" It took a lot of effort to explain and make them understand, to see why the cut happened and that it was not from us but that this was the situation we had found ourselves in.

Q218 **Chair:** Naomi, let me pause you there. This is really interesting; it is just that my colleagues have questions for you as well. The Foreign Secretary

says that she will restore the funding to women and girls in the future. Does this go far enough?

Naomi Gokwat: This is fair enough. However, for the funding to be restored, we would appreciate a lot of dialogue and consultation before that is done. We know that it is important to know the people's problem. However beautiful your project or your funding is, it may not suit the people, so you need to talk with the people on the ground. You need to engage with the women's rights organisations—organisations working with women and girls—so that you hear from them and let there be an understanding. Let it be on the table. Let us all be on the same page, so that it will be appreciated and you will know the right support to give your target audience.

Q219 **Theo Clarke:** Katherine, you painted a pretty grim picture of the number of programmes being cut. What are the likely long-term consequences of cutting these programmes that specifically reach women and girls?

Katherine Nightingale: It is hard to say. We know what funding programmes supporting women and girls does. We know that those programmes give a much better statistical chance for those girls to go on and have access to a higher income rate and better family planning. Girls in full-time education are much less likely to experience child, early and forced marriage. We know that, for the girls who have higher education levels, not only does it fulfil their rights but it also benefits their family. There are health benefits and wider benefits on their income and their community. There are benefits both to them and to their community.

In the humanitarian context, there are communities and families in hard, stretched humanitarian crises, with overwhelming social norms that might be unequal. When you take funding away, the likely impact is that girls will not get to be in education, and that they will be more at risk of child, early and forced marriage. Girls will be at risk, therefore, of not accessing health benefits in the way that they would do with greater education and some of these other component factors. You are already going to be seeing children who are born to women who would have had family planning. You are already going to be seeing maternal and child mortality levels rising in communities that would have had benefits. The lack of transparency and accountability means that it is really hard to track that. That is one of the reasons why you want that kind of information to be really clear. It is really hard to track a really comprehensive way of directly looking at some of that.

What we do know from our programmes is that women and girls have been really affected. We did some interviews in Rwanda with some of the girls from the communities who had previously been part of a programme. The programme that was cut was the second part of a programme. We tried to talk to the girls who had been part of the first programme and hear from them what the benefit was. They described enthusiastically how being part of an education and adolescent girls programme had really changed their outlook on life. It had enabled them

to see possibilities about what they could have been and what they could have achieved. We could not, in all good faith, go and talk to girls about how they would feel because now they will not have those. That is not an appropriate thing to do, but we talked to the girls who had received it and said, "How would you have felt if you hadn't had this?" They just said, "I would have felt so sad." It is impossible to say, but we can be absolutely sure that there are devastating impacts being felt around the world.

We did some analysis looking at the gender markers and what that means practically. That says that 20 million women and girls would be affected by aid cuts; 700,000 fewer girls would get girls' education programmes; 2 million fewer women would be supported by humanitarian assistance; 8 million fewer women and girls would get nutritional interventions for themselves and their families and children, and 9 million fewer women would be supported to access clean water and sanitation. They will not have all the knock-on benefits that achieving those things would have contributed to.

Q220 **Mrs Latham:** I have a similar question to Kathleen. In your experience, what types of programmes aimed at women and girls will be most affected by the reduction in aid?

Kathleen Spencer-Chapman: One area that it is clear was particularly hit was programmes around sexual and reproductive health and rights. We saw the 85% cut, for example, to UNFPA Supplies, which provides 40% of the world's contraception. It has been estimated that, simply as a result of that cut, along with the other cuts to sexual and reproductive health programmes, over 9 million women and girls just this year—one year alone—will not have access to contraception. That will lead to 8,000 maternal deaths and over 4 million unplanned pregnancies. The shorter-term impacts for those women and girls are that they are not able to make those choices around their own reproductive health and their lives. The long-term knock-on impacts for them, their families and the wider societies are huge.

We also saw significant cuts to violence against women and girls work, which I mentioned before. It is hard to give a figure, because we have not had a full overview of all the cuts—a full assessment, sector by sector. Katherine has already outlined the information that we can gather—those huge figures of around 700,000 not accessing education and 2 million not getting assistance in humanitarian emergencies. It is fair to say that there were wide cuts across the board. With women and girls often being some of the most left behind and a lot of these programmes seeking to tackle those most affected by poverty and those most left behind, women and girls are being disproportionately affected by the cuts.

Q221 **Mrs Latham:** Is there any particular sector where you would say women and girls are most likely to suffer adverse impacts because of these cuts?

Kathleen Spencer-Chapman: I would not want to pick and choose. With gender equality, you need a holistic approach. If you want to educate a girl, you need to make sure that she can access education, but you also need to make sure that she can get to school not being at risk of violence, that she can access information, contraception and other things to make sure that she is able to continue to go to school as well. It is hard to say that one thing has a greater impact than another—it all has an important impact—but we would point in particular to just how drastic the cuts to sexual and reproductive health are. The ability of women and girls to make those choices about their lives underpins everything.

Q222 **Nigel Mills:** We cut roughly a third of the Department's budget. Are you saying that it could have been done better—that we just picked the wrong priorities to reduce and we should have done something else—or are you saying, "Yes, you did the right thing, you picked the least bad ones, but they have still hurt quite a lot"? Which one of those is it?

Katherine Nightingale: The UK had enshrined in law that there was a commitment to 0.7%. If you are trying to plan over multiple years, it is really important to have steady income and a steady vision of what your income is. At that stage we are talking about the FCDO managing not all ODA but a huge majority of ODA. You need to be able to plan, in order to be able to give assurances about long-term commitments. That is what the 0.7% commitment really does. It says, "You can plan and budget well. You can have a clear understanding of what you are looking at, at least for the next few years."

There is a three-year window in which you have to hit 0.7%, so even if you go under one year, you can make it up a following year, so that you can even out and there is not a need to waste money by trying to hit an ineffective target. You are creating a clear budgetary guideline. The other thing that is really important about 0.7% is that it is not a ceiling. If anything, it is a floor. It says, "To give good, steady income, this is what we have committed to." That was enshrined in law in 2015.

I talked about two sets of cuts. That first set of cuts were the cuts where, in line with that commitment to 0.7%, we all got round the table and, to a certain extent, had a slightly clearer conversation: "We know there is a contraction in the economy. We know, therefore, that 0.7% is going to reduce, because it is pegged to the economy. That gives you the reduction that is necessary in line with our legislation, to a certain extent."

You also do not have to do it immediately. You could, for example, protect vulnerable programmes for vulnerable populations. You could say, "Okay, we'll suspend our funding to the World Bank or we'll delay that. We'll hit our targets, but we'll manage the insecurity with different multilateral levers," but they did not. Not only did they not do that with the first cuts in line with 0.7%; they then specifically chose to cut another 0.2% of GNI. They did that without consulting on where those cuts

should be and without asking how we could make them as painless as possible.

It is up to the law to denote how we should fund our international development in this instance. There was an agreement made. It is only 70p in every £100, but it is a really important contribution. More than that, it is really important, steady, well-considered budgetary guidance that enables people to make careful choices. DFID's was some of the highest-quality ODA in the world. The standard for transparency at DFID before the merger was one of the highest. It had the second-highest quality of transparency and accountability for ODA.

Unfortunately, we have seen, since the merger and in this particular instance, that we have lost that. It is not for me to say whether those cuts should happen. In line with the legislation, there were significant cuts made, and that would be in line with the guidance that the legislation was denoting. It is then any kind of cuts, what would happen and where you go from there.

Kathleen Spencer-Chapman: There is a question around how the decision was made and implemented. There is a question mark about whether it was strictly necessary to scale back to 0.5% at that point. The UK was the only G7 country to do that in the middle of the pandemic, so that is questionable.

It could also have just been a bit more thoughtful, having made that decision, about how that was done; it could have, for example, phased that in over a number of years to allow some of these programmes to phase out in a responsible manner to avoid the harm. At the more micro level, more time could be spent thinking, consulting and discussing, "Out of all these programmes and multilateral spend that we have, how can we do this in a way that is the least damaging?" It is that conversation that seems not to have happened. It certainly did not happen with external partners. From what we could see from the outside, it was not clear that that was happening in any real depth or with real thought on the inside either. There are different ways that it could have had less impact than it did.

Q223 **Nigel Mills:** Naomi, is there anything you want to say from your experience?

Naomi Gokwat: I want to add to what Kathleen just said about how it was done. I want to give an example from the field of how we deal with the women we serve. We wanted to have a programme that would last for a week with women in a community that is predominantly Muslim. It was going to be within the Ramadan period. We thought, "We can take a decision to hold that programme," but we felt that it was important to have a discussion with them and ask what it would mean to them.

We went to the women and shared our thoughts: "We want to have this programme with you." The women said, "No. The Ramadan period is a

time when we do not want to hold programmes or such that will keep us five days from morning until afternoon. Please can you shift the programme or have it before the Ramadan period so that we can pay attention and have maximum understanding of what you are coming to offer?" After that discussion, we considered that it was important, because it was about their faith and we needed their full attention, to reschedule the programme. We planned to hold it before the Ramadan period.

This is an example of what Kathleen just shared. There are ways that things can be done to reduce the impact and risk; if it is put on the table and discussed together, probably other options will come. Since the funding was to last for two or three years, over the three years there would have been programmes that we could adjust and programmes that we could do in a different way. That discussion would have made the impact less. It would have reduced the risk that the cut has generated.

Q224 **Nigel Mills:** Katherine or Kathleen, have you seen the impact of these cuts on women and girls in humanitarian situations? Of all the differing views there are around aid spending, I do not think anybody really doubts that we should be spending money on people in those situations. You would hope that we have protected them.

Katherine Nightingale: I would have hoped so too. We have seen cuts to programming in humanitarian settings. I can share with the Committee quite a useful graph that looks at cuts to all the humanitarian contexts. It shows 2019 funding and then 2021 funding, and it basically goes down in every instance—except now Ukraine, but every other instance goes down.

We ourselves experienced and had to manage funding cuts to the north-east of Syria, to our programming in Yemen with women and girls, to programming in Afghanistan and across the board. To be honest, I do not know of programmes in any humanitarian context that have not been cut. I am trying to think now, but there is nothing; there is no one place.

To use Syria as an example, without trying to belabour the point, we had to wind down the programme in the time that we were having discussions about whether the programme was going to stay open. We hit a point at which we could not safely wind down the programme without starting at that point. We found out a bit later on that we would have a continuation of some funding, but by then we had had to let some staff go. You cannot responsibly pull out with very little notice.

I am sorry to say that I do not think that there were humanitarian programmes that were protected. Elements programming were protected—pieces—but I do not know of any particular sector, country, region or crisis that did not experience cuts. I want to check with Kathleen, but I think that is probably the case.

Kathleen Spencer-Chapman: Absolutely. In terms of the scale of some of the cuts that we saw, look at Yemen, which is one of the worst

humanitarian crises in the world, with women and girls hugely affected by that, experiencing 60% cuts. There are the cuts to the east Africa region, where we now have 20 million people on the brink of famine, with the Ukraine crisis only set to make that worse due to rising food prices. The scale of some of these cuts is extremely shocking if you look at what the reality is on the ground there for women and girls and the wider populations.

Q225 **Dr Poulter:** Touching on your previous answers, Kathleen and Katherine, you mentioned that the 0.7% commitment had provided a level of certainty to future budgets. Clearly the drop in GDP in this country as a result of the covid pandemic and the widespread economic shock shattered that certainty about 0.7%, or the steady income associated with 0.7%, because of the drop in GDP. Many organisations, be they businesses or charities, at that time will have taken stock of changes in economic circumstances and recognised that this was probably going to have a long-term impact on income. As an organisation, what did you do then, regardless of the further reduction to 0.5%, to say, "We are living in very different times"?

Katherine Nightingale: I do not think that it is a secret that all organisations and all INGOs in the UK have had to deal with, manage and look at the reality of working in development from the UK and what the UK funding for development will look like.

In a way, it is not that the contraction of the economy shattered the illusion of stability. The contraction of the economy just tells you what the budget is going to be; it does not tell you how it is going to be delivered. There is flexibility in the legislation that allows—with the contraction of the economy, for example—three years to play out and allows the Government to manage the continuation of commitment to a three or four-year programme. Let's face it: covid-19's contraction of the economy was pretty overwhelming and had a real impact. It really did contract. We did a whole series of cuts in that first phase that we had to manage.

Q226 **Dr Poulter:** A lot of organisations and businesses at that time would have said, "This is likely to have a long-standing impact on our budgets." I wondered what specifically you did as an organisation to recognise that.

Katherine Nightingale: Sorry—I was coming to that, but I appreciate your keeping me to the point. Quite honestly, we have reviewed our business plan at every stage of this. I cannot speak for the CEO, but I know from being in the leadership team that we have had to get a lot more agile. Our structure has changed twice in the last three years to think about our position in relation to business flows and predictability.

This is not the inquiry that you are having here, but there has been a real lack of clarity about what funding will come through. We have not just been having to manage reductions in budget—which we did. We closed parts of programmes—we closed parts of programmes in Syria—and

reduced staffing in relation to some of the programmes that had large budgets. We have had to reduce staff and lay off staff. But we have had to do that partly in relation to what you were saying about what the long-term future looks like. We are in discussions now about what that means for how our structure needs to be and where we need to be looking and thinking about our work.

Every NGO will be doing that, so it is no secret. Sadly, we have had to let staff go. I do not want to say this to the staff that were let go—if you are watching, I feel for you—but that was not my biggest concern, in that—

Q227 **Chair:** You are saying the cuts came on top of the mitigating work you had already done to reduce your overheads on the assumption that money was going to drop because of covid.

Katherine Nightingale: Yes. It is also that the cuts were coming very thick and fast. Could we lay people off before we knew that programmes were going to close? No. And could we predict what the structure was going to look like around going down to 0.5% from 0.7%?

The other thing to say—if my CEO is out there, please tweet some clear answers, because I am not going to have as much information as he is—

Chair: Or write to us, if you don't know.

Katherine Nightingale: We might follow up in writing to clarify anything, because I am aware that he will be getting annoyed at me right now.

The other thing that is quite important to be able to work is to know what the consistent investment level is going to be going forward. For example, do we predict that there will be another contraction? Potentially, so every year's strategy, including my strategies, has said, "We have to have plans in place for political and economic volatility." We have included short-term contracts. We have seen a lot of turnover in staff because we cannot give long-term contracts. We are then having to manage high turnover of staff in a very practical business sense. We lose talented staff to programmes that have committed funding. We just lost an amazing woman to our CARE USA office, who I love, but they have steady, long-term USAID funding, so we have let her go. She is a fantastic woman from Syria who can really lead that work. It is really important and it affects how we do business, but it is almost the better end of this, compared with what colleagues are doing in the Syrian camps and some of these other places.

Q228 **Dr Poulter:** As the Chair indicated, it would be helpful to have a note of clarification. Undoubtedly, if we look at the history of the pandemic, the initial optimism that this was going to be a temporary, short-term reduction in GDP was rapidly tempered by new mutations coming forward. Most businesses and organisations would have been looking at that and thinking that the reduction in GDP, and therefore the reduction

in their funding, was probably going to be longer term. Specifically, what measures were put in place and what was done internally to look at that? Understanding how the reduction in addition to that, from 0.7% to 0.5%, further interplayed would be quite helpful.

Katherine Nightingale: I will write—thank you.

Q229 **Dr Poulter:** Kathleen, do you have anything to add?

Kathleen Spencer-Chapman: In terms of staff cuts, it was very much at the country level that the impacts were really felt. That is where long-standing staff had to be let go at short notice due to, particularly, the abrupt nature of the cuts. As Katherine said, for any organisation, with the pandemic, it was not just to do with the cuts but our ability to raise public funds. There was a full review of all income sources and attempts to look at future income and all the diverse sources where that can come from in order to continue running programmes.

Q230 **Chair:** In terms of the projects you were delivering in-country, did people understand that it was a cut in funding by the UK Government, or was it seen as Plan cutting a project? What was the long-term impact of that on your organisation in-country?

Kathleen Spencer-Chapman: The conversations had to be very sensitively handled. It damaged trust with partners. We have been working with some of these partners long term. We explained that it was a decision by the British Government and this was why we were having to not follow through on the commitments that we had with these partners and communities. That does not necessarily mean that, in reality, it does not damage trust built. It was a mixture. You cannot walk away from something like that completely scot-free.

At the international level, in some of the partnerships, such as with the UNFPA, the Government have been a very trusted, long-standing partner, with very reliable funding, and then suddenly pulled out at that notice. That loss of reputation as a reliable partner will have been felt at all levels in the system.

Q231 **Dr Poulter:** I am going to come to Naomi with this question first and then we will open it up to Katherine and Kathleen. Naomi, how open and transparent do you feel that the UK Government or the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office are about what they spend on gender equality? Do you believe that they place enough emphasis on gender equality in how they choose to allocate aid funding?

Naomi Gokwat: Talking about transparency, the way the budget cuts came was not transparent enough. If there was transparency, just like we mentioned earlier, there should have been consultation. In our programme, before we commence any implementation, we go to the communities, engage with the stakeholders and tell them everything we are bringing to the table, everything we are going to commit to the community. The stakeholders, our women, are aware of what to expect.

In terms of transparency, FCDO was not transparent enough in the budget cuts.

Talking about the support on gender equality—I think you mentioned the cuts on gender equality. The allocation for gender equality will have a great impact, because you are talking about working with people in conflict communities. There are lots of issues of gender-based violence. As it is here where I am based in Nigeria, gender-based violence has a lot of factors that surround it. Poverty is one. Insecurity is one. A lot of attention needs to be paid to that if we want to support the eradication of gender-based violence.

The cut to the allocation for gender-based violence needs to be reconsidered, because it is all-encompassing. You know that during a crisis women are the most affected. There are issues of rape and assault situations, issues of hunger. Both women and girls are taken advantage of in situations like that. A lot of attention needs to be given in order to support women in crisis.

Q232 **Dr Poulter:** We covered the transparency point in your previous contributions about how the reductions and cuts were made. Kathleen, do you want to go first in terms of the emphasis in how aid spending is allocated? Do you think that the emphasis is right in respect of gender equality?

Kathleen Spencer-Chapman: We are hearing lots of positive statements from the FCDO at the moment about the prioritisation of women and girls. The Foreign Secretary has committed to reinstating the budget for women and girls. It is not clear what the FCDO sees as the baseline for that budget. CARE has done an estimate of £1.9 billion, so we would be keen to understand what that means in practice. The proof will be in the pudding on how much money that is in practice but also what it is spent on.

Gender equality takes a very holistic, multi-sectoral approach, with targeted programming towards woman and girls. In terms of what was in the DFID strategic vision for gender equality—the five pillars of gender equality—we would want to see those retained and carried forward into what we will see in the international development strategy some time in the next month and, we understand, a refreshed women and girls strategy or gender equality strategy as well. We want to see a recommitment to those five pillars. That is absolutely fundamental. They are all very important, so you cannot pick and choose. We would want to see that commitment, that rhetoric, turning into reality.

We recognise that it is also about mainstreaming and integrating inter-gender equality and a focus on women and girls across the FCDO budget. The global health budget is absolutely essential for women and girls and making sure that those investments are being made in strong health systems, which are vitally important, or tackling climate change. Women

and girls are on the frontline of the impacts of climate change. We will really be looking very closely at what comes out next.

To go back again to the point of consultation, if we see an international development strategy, there has been very little consultation, and there has been pretty much none on the women and girls strategy either. The other question to the FCDO would be: "How are you going to make sure that this commitment to women and girls delivers if you're not actually speaking to women and girls, women's rights organisations and implementing partners to make sure that this is delivering maximum impact?" I would say that there are a lot of unknowns.

Q233 **Mr Bacon:** You both mentioned Ukraine. That only adds to the pressure. Some organisations have highlighted the risk of people trafficking. Of course that has happened in other contexts as well, such as Syria. With so many millions of people leaving Ukraine at such high speed, what is your assessment of the risks in this area?

Kathleen Spencer-Chapman: It is very high risk. We have teams in the countries neighbouring Ukraine and they are seeing a lot of women and children who are at high risk of trafficking and other forms of exploitation. At the moment, there are very insufficient services to support them to register to really mitigate those risks.

As we see in other crises, those risks of gender-based violence and other risks to women and girls are playing out in the way that is all too sadly familiar. Making sure that, in the response to Ukraine, tackling gender-based violence and other risks to women and girls in particular is really high on the priority list is essential. We should also make sure that that is not forgotten in other crises that are happening. We should make sure that we do not see a diversion of budgets from other key crises to support women and girls in Ukraine. Both are essential.

Katherine Nightingale: I can share with the Committee that we have a rapid gender analysis from our team on the ground, working together, I am sure, with Plan and others. Key considerations are things like at the Polish border currently, for understandable reasons, they are dealing with a lot of women and girls, a lot of older people and a lot of LGBTQ people, because men between 18 and 60 are staying in Ukraine. They are not collating disaggregated data, so we know this from anecdotal evidence. There is not that clarity of a gendered approach to the response.

There are also concerns about accommodation and child protection. There was already in Ukraine quite a high level of GBV statistically. We know that those issues are exacerbated in crisis contexts, so we want to make sure that the environment receiving these vulnerable populations is supported, as Kathleen said, with really good guidance. We should also look to understand how we can best support, in this instance, Poland and its systems for dealing with this, but also Romania, Moldova or elsewhere—and also when we receive refugees. I am happy to share more detail on this.

Q234 **Mr Bacon:** Please do. This is an environment where a large number of women and girls—not men, because they are staying behind to fight and are legally unable to leave—are arriving where, presumably, organised criminal gangs see a target-rich environment and are offering, at least ostensibly, sanctuary when in fact they have entirely different ideas. To what extent do you feel the Government are sufficiently across this? What do you think the UK Government should be doing?

Katherine Nightingale: It would be good to have that kind of conversation. We need to get around a table and check if the Government feel that they have all the data and evidence. I have to say that it is not just on aid cuts that we do not get good consultation with the UK Government or the FCDO. We have lost that good consultation. In a context like Ukraine, where we could get around the table and have some more detailed conversations—

Q235 **Chair:** You are contrasting that with what it would have been with DFID.

Katherine Nightingale: Yes, under DFID in that context we just had a much more consultative, engaged approach to shared goals. We are not getting that here. My honest answer is I do not know if the UK Government have a good sense of it. I would hope that they would be listening, hearing and getting this data. We have not yet been able to share this in more detail with them.

Chair: Katherine, we hope that too. Ladies, thank you so much for your time. I am just deeply sorry that we are in the situation that we are, but the information that you have given us is incredibly helpful in trying to prevent a similar calamitous approach going forward. I will ask the next panel to come forward now. If the first witnesses want to stay, they are most welcome to. Thank you very much for your time and thank you for agreeing to follow up on various points.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Hannah Loryman and George Graham.

Q236 **Chair:** We are very fortunate to be joined by Hannah from Sightsavers and George from Humanity & Inclusion UK. I wonder if you could both introduce yourselves properly and tell us a little bit about your organisations.

Hannah Loryman: Hello. I am Hannah Loryman. I am the head of policy at Sightsavers. Sightsavers is an international development organisation, which works in around 30 countries, mainly in Africa and Asia. We focus on disability, inclusion, health—mainly eye health and neglected tropical diseases—and education. George and I have spoken to a number of organisations from the Bond Disability and Development Group, and across the sector we are working with other minority groups, so we will try to reflect some of those views too.

George Graham: Thank you for having me. I am George Graham. I am the chief executive of Humanity & Inclusion UK. Humanity & Inclusion is a global humanitarian and development organisation working in situations of poverty and exclusion, and also conflict and humanitarian contexts, around the world in over 50 countries, working alongside people with disabilities and vulnerable people, doing a broad range of different activities—health, education, mine action and so forth.

Q237 **Chair:** Today we are looking at the equalities impact assessment that the civil service did for Ministers before they made the cuts to the FCDO funding for ODA spend. We heard from the first panel about the impact of that on women and girls, but the assessment also highlighted significant threats to those with protected characteristics if the cuts went ahead. Have either of you seen that played out in reality? Have people with protected characteristics been adversely affected by the cuts?

George Graham: Yes.

Q238 **Chair:** Can you give us some examples?

George Graham: We have between us very long lists of examples of programmes either primarily working with people with disabilities, or primarily trying to mainstream inclusion across broader programmes, being cut. The list is long, but to give some examples, our colleagues at CBM have told us about the forced closure of a programme that was just two years into its three-year cycle in Bangladesh. It had been graded A by the FCDO for the quality of what it was doing, improving the health of some of the most disadvantaged people. It was a £2 million project reaching huge numbers of people, including 140,000 people with disabilities. It was closed. I appreciate that you have just had evidence from people who will have given you lots of long lists of cuts. My list is pages long.

Q239 **Chair:** I do not know if the information is sensitive, but if it is something that you could submit to us as written evidence, we could then publish it.

George Graham: Yes. Hannah, maybe you want to add an example that feels pertinent.

Hannah Loryman: Yes, absolutely. As George says, there are a number of examples. Some of the themes that keep coming up, to add to what was said earlier, are around the issue of uncertainty that has happened around the cuts. One of Sightsavers' programmes is still uncertain about its next quarter's budget, in the final quarter of the programme. That uncertainty around what we will be able to deliver was not just a year ago but continues to be an issue today.

Another theme that we have seen across the different programmes that have affected people with disabilities is a real impact on the ability to fund things like learning and evidence gathering. When we think about disability inclusion and the fact that it has been under-invested in for a really significant amount of time, it is these learning elements that look

at what works in terms of disability inclusion, so that small pilot programmes can be scaled and taken on by the Governments in the countries where they are working. That is really significant, because we are not looking just at what was the ideal amount of money pre-cut and how it was cut.

Prior to the cuts, only 2% of the UK's overseas development assistance was targeted programmes on disability. To be honest, that is probably quite an overstatement, but that is using the DAC marker. We have to consider that the amount was small. When we are hearing that organisations have had to cut anything that looks at what works, that looks at innovation and that looks at how we can design thing that Governments can then take on, that is of real concern.

The other element, which obviously comes up in the equalities assessment, is the mainstreaming point; it is so much more difficult to measure and understand what is actually happening. Mainstreaming disability is not just a tick-box exercise that can happen very quickly. The Government have made massive progress on mainstreaming disability over the last 10 years. If cuts happen to those programmes where they are managing to embed mainstreaming and managing to make progress in that area, that potentially undoes a lot of that progress and really undermines the goals around disability inclusion that the Government have been quite ambitious on.

Q240 **Chair:** We are doing a parallel inquiry into extreme poverty. The stats show that people with disabilities are disproportionately likely to be the poorest on the planet. Do you think that because of that, the Government's cuts disproportionately hit people with disabilities, or do you think that it was that they did not ringfence the small amount of money that was going to people with disabilities?

Hannah Loryman: It is both. There is an element of those targeted programmes and that ringfencing that is really needed because of the level of poverty that you mentioned, because of the systematic exclusion over time, but people with disabilities absolutely are disproportionately living in poverty. There is a cycle between disability and poverty. People who are living in poverty are more likely to become disabled and people who are disabled are more likely to live in poverty, so it self-perpetuates.

When you look at where the aid budget has shifted, while it is very difficult to see where the budgets are now going, as the Committee has highlighted many times, you do see that some of the allocations in the year after the cuts were to areas like trade and investment. Because of the exclusion of people with disabilities, they are very unlikely to have benefited from those kinds of programmes, whereas they are much more likely to benefit from efforts to strengthen health systems or to improve social protection or education, even if we would also identify that there are issues that mean they are not currently included by some of those programmes.

Q241 **Theo Clarke:** We heard from the previous panel about the types of programmes that are being cut. In relation to your organisations, which programmes are most affected by the cuts, and what impact has that had on your programming?

George Graham: As you know, part of the problem with this whole analysis is the lack of robust data across the sector. Everything we tell you is our observations and our best analysis of the situation. The cuts seem to have fallen particularly hard on bilateral spending and in particular on NGO-led programming. Just to build on the point that Hannah was making, the impact of that is that it cuts certain types of work—the sort of work that is often working with local civil society organisations and the work we are talking about here, working with people with disabilities or minority groups. That is the sort of work for which locally embedded organisations are critical. The sorts of cuts that cut support to local civil society organisations have a disproportionate impact.

What we also saw as an inevitable consequence of scaling back the amount of money available was people defaulting to low-hanging fruit, if you like. By definition, when you are going for the biggest bang for your buck, you end up not going for the hardest to reach or the furthest behind, despite all the rhetoric that we are all very familiar with, from the sustainable development goals and before, around that being the primary objective of British and global development action.

I hope that partly answers your question. I feel the smaller programmes were cut, NGO-led programmes were cut and programmes that were supporting local civil society were cut. For the larger-scale programmes, which were not 100% cut but maybe 40% or 60%, we saw a retrenchment and a focus on the low-hanging fruit, to use that phrase again, which meant less focus on the hardest to reach and the people who needed the most support.

Hannah Loryman: I agree with George. It is really difficult to see the extent of where the cuts are falling, but it does feel like, as the previous panel highlighted, it is across areas.

One thing that is really important to consider from a disability perspective is that people with disabilities are not a specific, isolated group. They are also women and girls. They are also religious minorities. They are also people living in rural areas. That intersectional discrimination that they face means that, when we are talking about the really significant cut to the budget around women and girls, we are also talking about disability within that, because one in five women has a disability. That cross-cutting nature of disability is often forgotten and means that across the cuts, it is really significant.

One area where Sightsavers has seen a lot of cuts is our neglected tropical diseases programmes. We know that poorer, vulnerable, marginalised people are more likely to be affected by neglected tropical

diseases. We have also seen that, in trying to fill the gaps in funding that have existed because of the FCDO's closures, the actual treatment is easier to fill but the heath system strengthening, the behaviour change and the communication in communities is much more difficult to fill with other funding. Those are the things that will really impact on people with disabilities. I imagine that there would be a similar trend across other organisations' funding.

Q242 **Mrs Latham:** This is specifically for George. The equalities assessment says the social protection programmes are likely to face significant budget cuts. Normally, which groups of people are most likely to benefit from these programmes?

George Graham: It is precisely the people we are talking about here today. The social protection programmes typically exist to reach either people living in extreme poverty or people with particular needs, which would include people with disabilities. It can include people who are minorities for other reasons, religious, linguistic or ethnic. We do not have really good data to tell us exactly how it has played out. We know in the equalities assessment there was an estimation that there would be a 60% reduction, but we do not have visibility of exactly what that looks like.

I can give you an example from our experience. We have been working with BRAC, who I am sure you know, who have a strong focus on extreme poverty and have a model of poverty graduation. We have been working with them in Bangladesh and in Uganda to test the extent to which that social protection model works for people with disabilities. To the point that Hannah was making earlier about evidence, randomised controlled trials and top-quality evidence were going to really tell us how you do social protection in ways that promote the best interests and the welfare and wellbeing of people with disabilities in those two countries.

Of course, those programmes were cut, so now we will not know the answer to that question. A huge amount of work had been put into it that had to be closed down within 90 days. That is the micro take of how this looks on the ground. I wish I could give you the macro answer and say, "This number of millions of people have not benefited," but we do not have that data, unfortunately.

Q243 **Chair:** You had 90 days to close that down.

George Graham: Yes.

Q244 **Nigel Mills:** Hannah, can I just go back to the impact of the cuts on disability inclusion programmes? Do you think that the FCDO's disability inclusion and rights strategy, published only a month ago, goes some way to fixing this and sorting it out, at least for the medium term, or is that a sticking plaster that has been a bit undermined now?

Hannah Loryman: It is a really strong strategy. It builds on previous strategies and it recommits the UK to being a global leader on disability

inclusion, which we really welcome. The challenge now is of course implementation. There are two aspects to that.

There is the upwards enabling environment that will allow that strategy to be successful. What comes out of the international development strategy, whether that is poverty-focused or focused on implementing the SDGs, provides a framework for the Department within which the disability inclusion strategy can be implemented. Then it is also about having a really clear delivery plan for that strategy. It does commit in the strategy to developing a delivery plan. We would like that to be public. We understand that it probably will not be. We feel that it being public would really help in terms of implementation and NGOs being able to talk to FCDO offices about how it should be implemented.

That delivery plan needs to be put in place quickly, to move from the excellent commitments—the broad-brush commitments—in the strategy into how those will be delivered, through country programmes and through cuts. There is a risk that cuts, and particularly cuts to mainstreaming, undermine the potential of the strategy to be delivered.

The Australian Government a number of years ago had an evaluation of their strategy. The implementation of one of their disability inclusion strategies was found to be very successful. One of the key features for that was the funding that existed for implementation of that strategy. Staff across the Australian Government were consistently explaining that the reason they were able to do it was because the funding existed that enabled them to adapt their programmes to take on new things. There is a real willingness across FCDO staff to work on the disability inclusion strategy. We have seen that increase over time, but it needs the senior leadership. People need to have space and they need to have resources to be able to do it, and they need that evidence. There needs to be funding of programmes that tell them how to do things and how to move from the nice words on paper into implementing in practice.

Q245 **Chair:** George, do you want to add anything?

George Graham: On a positive note, the UK has a really good story to tell about the work that it has done over the years on disability. In 2018, the UK hosted the global disability summit and really put this agenda on the agenda. The penny has dropped that one in seven people around the world has a disability, that disability is normal and that development is not worth the name unless it works for all people, and that very much includes people with disabilities. We have this fantastic strategy written by fantastic FCDO staffers. We have the support of Minister Ford, who is accessible and leading the work on it. There is lots to be positive about.

The point that Hannah made about the good will towards this work across the FCDO is also worth emphasising. One of the benefits of the merger of DFID and the Foreign Office is there are now many more posts, which means there is much more opportunity to do good work on disability in lots more different countries. We should be positive, but of course we are

already anxious, because there is less money and we do not quite know where the international development strategy is going to land. Anything that this Committee could do to celebrate the good work that has been done and to promote the disability inclusion strategy would be really helpful.

Hannah Loryman: Could I add one more thing, just because it came up in the last panel, on consultation? One of the real positives was the amount of consultation that happened on that disability inclusion strategy, from organisations in the UK but also from organisations and persons with disabilities across the FCDO's network. For the first time, that was funded by the FCDO and really taken seriously in terms of developing a strategy that reflects the views and perspectives of people with disabilities in the countries where they are working. There is now a real opportunity to use what has been done in terms of consultation and move that forward. Yes, there is quite a contrast to some of the other areas, which have not been consulted on.

Q246 **Chair:** Thinking of both the first and second rounds of cuts, was either of your organisations consulted at any level about what would be the best way or the least impactful way to make them?

Hannah Loryman: No.

Chair: That is quite shocking.

Q247 **Mr Bacon:** What geographic regions have been most affected by cuts to the aid budget?

Hannah Loryman: Again, it is quite difficult to tell. There is some analysis that lower-income countries have been disproportionately impacted, especially in real terms. When you take into account the fact that aid makes up a larger proportion of the income of a lower-income country than a middle-income country, that is particularly significant.

One thing that is worth considering in terms of disability is that, while geographically we would hope that the focus of UK aid would be in the places where there is highest need, more middle-income countries also have huge levels of inequality in terms of disability. What you actually see is that, as communities develop and generally welfare and different mechanisms improve, people with disabilities are often excluded from that progress. The gaps in education, for example, often increase. While we would support a focus on lower-income countries, where the FCDO is investing in middle-income countries there needs to be a really strong recognition of the disability inequality that exists in those contexts.

Q248 **Mr Bacon:** You are saying that where they are investing in middle-income countries, the gap grows.

Hannah Loryman: Potentially, yes. It depends on the context, but that is quite often what we see. For example, there has been a huge amount of work done in getting girls into school and getting the number of girls

that access school to increase, but girls with disabilities have benefited less from that progress, not just from the UK's work but globally. That gap between people with disabilities and their non-disabled peers grows.

Q249 **Mr Bacon:** George, do you want to add anything?

George Graham: I do not have much to add. We know from the headlines at the time that a lot of the smaller programmes were closed. We know there was a greater focus on Africa and parts of Asia or the Indo-Pacific and that a number of countries were closed out.

I am just thinking about our experience. We have seen closures in countries that continue to be aid recipient countries. I am thinking about places like Bangladesh, Ethiopia and Pakistan. We know that a large number of much smaller recipient countries are now getting zero. I do not want to start naming them all now in case I make mistakes in the countries that I name, but a lot of countries that hitherto had been recipients of small amounts of British aid are now getting zero. The point I was making there is that we are also seeing such sweeping cuts in some of the other countries that in our experience at HI it does not feel like we can sit back and say, "Look, south Asia has been hit the hardest" or "sub-Saharan Africa has been hit the hardest." It feels like it has been across the board.

Q250 **Mr Bacon:** What impact are the cuts having on people with protected characteristics in conflict-affected settings or in humanitarian emergency settings?

George Graham: As you probably know, the headline cuts were 40% in humanitarian contexts, most of which are conflict contexts. The data shows that the biggest cut of all of the big emergencies or big conflicts was in Syria. That was a cut of more than 60% by the British Government. That shortfall was not filled by anybody else, so that is a straightforward loss of funding in that context. Yemen and Ethiopia were the other two. Ethiopia is obviously now conflict-affected fairly severely. The effects on the ground are humanitarian versions of what we have been describing here.

Again, there are two categories. There is the targeted work that is trying to reach people with disabilities, or indeed other minorities, with direct support. That funding is cut. There is less you can do. There are fewer people to whom you can provide rehabilitation support, for example.

We had programmes in three countries across the Middle East that were reaching thousands and thousands of people with rehabilitation, physical and also mental health and psychosocial support that were cut. These are people who, like many people with disabilities around the world, rely on a continuum of care who are now not getting that continuum of care. Obviously, they are refugees, so they are among the poorest of the poor, fleeing conflict with no alternative options, and they are suffering the

consequences: immobility, constant pain, inability to secure livelihoods, and so on.

I was talking about two categories. One category is the direct support and the other category, which we have talked about already, is inclusion. There is a big bit of work that has been done in recent years on inclusive humanitarian action. How do you get the people who go into the frontline of conflict zones to deliver aid to do it in ways that always and systematically include the hardest to reach, including people with disabilities? There has been some fantastic work on that, led by the UK Government, but that is the stuff that is not happening any more. There is no resource for it.

Q251 **Chair:** The one group that we have not covered that was highlighted in the equalities impact assessment was minorities, both religious and ethnic. I wonder if you have any information about how the cuts impacted them.

Hannah Loryman: We did speak to a couple of organisations that work in this area. One of the overarching points that they raised was actually very similar to what we are saying about disability—that the impact of the cuts, and the fact that people go for low-hanging fruit and try to reach larger numbers, means that it is not prioritised.

They also gave us some examples of programmes that directly impact conflict reduction. Not only have cuts to those programmes impacted the direct recipients of the programmes, but it has been recognised that they have had an impact in terms of conflict reduction in those contexts. There are lots of complex areas and the FCDO apparently recognises those challenges. The UK Aid Connect-funded coalition was also cut by 65%. That is quite a significant cut for something that was obviously seen as a big enough priority to have a UK Aid Connect programme.

George Graham: I have three further points on that. The first is perhaps not directly related to the cuts but more related to the merger. The upheaval that caused led to a lot of disruption in staffing and a lot of moving of stuff, and it caused a lot of people with expertise who had been in DFID to move on. This is the sort of work that really requires people who know what they are talking about—experts. With no disrespect to the people who work on these briefs now, there is a cohort of people who are not there any more who would have known the terrain well enough to know how best to provide meaningful support to people from ethnic, religious and linguistic minority groups.

The second point is that those groups and also LGBTQ groups face particular risks. This is not just about not providing support; it is actually about increasing dangers to people. If you ask generalist staff or staff who do not have as much experience to provide support in contexts that require real sensitivity and care, if they are not able to do that, then you potentially generate risks.

The third point is about the internal policy work on this stuff. For example, in terms of work to improve the FCDO's data capture of which groups it is reaching and which it is not, and the extent to which it is doing that, all that work has been paused or stopped, we think. It may not have been, but we are not seeing it.

Q252 **Chair:** George, all those points would seem to contradict the Government's ODA spend overarching principle of "do no harm". Would you agree with that?

George Graham: Certainly the point about risk is contradicting "do no harm". More significantly, my main thought on this is that it is contradicting the stated objective of reaching the furthest behind. That is the thing that is not happening. If that does not happen then the sustainable development goals are not achieved or, to put it into more normal language, you do not solve the problem of poverty and exclusion in the world; it persists.

Chair: On that point, and as a stark reminder of why we all do this, thank you very much for your time today. In summary, this session has been a one-off looking at the impact of both rounds of cuts on women and girls, the most marginalised and those with protected characteristics. From the evidence that we have heard today, it is very clear that there has been a lack of transparency and a lack of accountability, and we still do not know where those cuts have actually landed. From the witnesses, it seems that no time or care was given to managing the impact of the cuts, but they have had a devastating impact on your reputation and the UK Government's reputation on the ground. It is going to take a lot of time to rebuild that.

It seems as though the majority of the cuts went to bilateral NGO local organisations. They were the ones probably getting the smallest amounts of money and were probably the ones having the most impact, which makes it even more devastating that it happened through no fault of their own, because most of them were incredibly highly rated. We really welcome the Foreign Secretary's commitment to restoring the money specifically to women and girls, but unless there is a proper gender-impacted approach to all the projects that the FCDO is funding, I fear that just focusing on one group will not embed itself and will not make the significant change that we need to see.

Thank you very much and please be assured that this Committee will carry on scrutinising where FCDO is spending its money. I really hope the rumours around pulling out of conflict funding, pulling out of climate adaptation funding and pulling out of much of the healthcare funding are just that—rumours—because it would be devastating were it true. Thank you all very much.