

FCDO Memorandum on the International Development Committee Inquiry on the FCDO's Approach to Sexual and Reproductive Health

1. FCDO's approach to sexual and reproductive health and rights.

Sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) save and transform lives for individuals, families, and society. The UK has long been proud to defend and promote universal and comprehensive SRHR globally. SRHR is a central commitment in the UK's International Development Strategy, the International Women and Girls Strategy, and the Government's manifesto commitment to end the preventable deaths of mothers, newborns, and children by 2030 (EPD).

The FCDO supports an evidence-based, comprehensive approach to SRHR and the integrated definition of SRHR employed by the Guttmacher-Lancet Commission¹. Core to SRHR is the principle that all people have the right to make their own informed decisions about sex and childbearing, in order to have healthy sex lives, avoid unwanted sexual contact, decide whether, when and how many children to have and to face fewer risks in the course of pregnancy and childbirth. The UK's international efforts on SRHR include family planning, maternal and newborn health, HIV/AIDS, safe abortion, ending female genital mutilation, and relationships and sex education. We champion SRHR for all – this includes adolescents, people with disabilities, LGBT+, older people, people living with HIV and all who face stigma, discrimination and exclusion regarding their SRHR.

Cuts to UK ODA budgets have affected our international work on SRHR and we acknowledge the impact of those reductions. We have worked closely with partners to mitigate those impacts, to maximise the effectiveness and impact of our funding, and to complement our investments with strong political leadership.

Despite these cuts, the UK remains a major donor to SRHR. Key investments include the Global Financing Facility (GFF), the Reproductive Health Supplies programme, the Global Fund to fight AIDS, TB and Malaria, UNFPA, UNAIDS, the Women's Integrated Sexual Health (WISH) programme, FP2030, the Partnership for Maternal, Newborn and Child Health (PMNCH) and our support to the Africa-led Movement to end FGM. We support grassroots organisations working on safe abortion (including in crisis settings), and the Robert Carr Fund, working with marginalised communities. SRHR is also integrated into wider health and multilateral investments.

The UK also uses its political and diplomatic weight in support of comprehensive SRHR, and to coordinate international efforts to counter the anti-SRHR movement. For instance, at the 2022 UN General Assembly Third Committee on Human Rights, the UK co-led on a landmark joint statement, with 71 signatory countries, committing to protect and promote SRHR and bodily autonomy, within a human rights lens. This is linked to a broader UK strategy to confront the global rollback on gender equality and SRHR. As part of this effort, the UK is hosting a 2023 Wilton Park Conference Series titled *Women and Girls, Her Freedom: Her Power*, including an SRHR event.

¹ [https://www.thelancet.com/pdfs/journals/lancet/PIIS0140-6736\(18\)30293-9.pdf](https://www.thelancet.com/pdfs/journals/lancet/PIIS0140-6736(18)30293-9.pdf)

2. *Is the FCDO's approach to sexual and reproductive health programming in lower-income countries sufficiently responsive to the needs of communities in lower-income countries, including in its new Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights programme?*

The FCDO strives to ensure that our SRHR policy and programming is responsive to the needs of communities, particularly under-served and marginalised populations. We use research and data about those needs – such as the What Women Want campaigns and WHO guidelines – to inform our design and delivery; we challenge our partners to actively listen to needs and priorities of those they work with; and we channel funding to grassroots organisations and activists supporting change in their own communities.

Alongside investments in services and supplies, we support efforts to address stigma, discrimination and the social taboos and norms that can prevent the most vulnerable from accessing the SRH information, services and commodities they need. We also seek to ensure that SRHR is considered in needs assessments in fragile and conflict affected regions and during humanitarian response.

The recently announced Women's Integrated Sexual Health (WISH) Dividend programme (£200m, 2023-29), for example, is designed to support women and adolescents, particularly the poor and most marginalised, to have greater voice, choice and control over their SRHR.

During the peak of the Covid pandemic, all our programmes pivoted to meet priority needs and advocate for the maintenance of focus on essential services. For example, PMNCH issued a Call to Action defining key needs during the pandemic. The Global Financing Facility helped to address short term financing gaps for frontline care for 36 low-income countries. UK provided an additional £10 million to UNFPA's COVID-19 response. WISH expanded remote care, and worked to ensure SRHR was part of national COVID plans for essential service delivery. The Safe Abortion Action Fund flexed funding to ensure partners could continue advocating for and supporting safe abortion services during the pandemic.

3. *How effective is the FCDO's work on sexual and reproductive health in support for the provision and delivery of:*

- a. *contraceptive supplies and healthcare services*
- b. *family planning education and information programmes to communities*
- c. *information programmes to tackle practices that damage the sexual and reproductive health of women and girls, such as FGM.*
- d. *maternity services and support for new-borns, including ending preventable deaths.*

The effectiveness of the FCDO's work on SRHR stems from our visible political leadership on comprehensive SRHR (including abortion), our deep technical expertise and strong partnerships, use of evidence, and our strategic portfolio of programmes.

a & b: *Family Planning, Reproductive Health Supplies and Health Services*

On family planning, our policy leadership and portfolio of programmes are designed to tackle the bottlenecks to access, through i) evidence and advocacy, ii) building systems for service delivery and iii) supplies. Voluntary family planning, as part of a package of sexual and reproductive health services, is one of the best investments for improving health, economic and development outcomes for people around the world. It is estimated that every \$1 invested in meeting the unmet need for contraceptives yields \$120 in long term accrued annual benefits.

UK funding to the global family partnership FP2030 (£6m, 2022-25), and its predecessor FP2020 (£15.89m, 2013-22) supports evidence and advocacy. From 2012-2021, 60 million more women are voluntarily using modern contraceptives in low and middle income countries – 30% above historic trendlines, with progress fastest in FP2020 commitment-making countries. This has since increased to 87 million more women and girls under the new and expanded partnership.

The FCDO's Women's Integrated Sexual Health (WISH) programme (£292.5m, 2018-2024) supports women to safely plan their pregnancies and improve their sexual and reproductive health. It delivers voluntary family planning and comprehensive SRHR services, with a strong focus on sustainability, and on reaching those most in need - young people, women living in extreme poverty and people with disabilities. Since its inception in 2018, it has supported over 9.5 million women and girls to use modern methods of contraception. Its successor, the WISH Dividend programme, will continue to build on this success, with greater emphasis on systems strengthening and sustainability.

The UK's Reproductive Health Supplies Programme (£295m 2019-25) is designed to focus on high impact interventions and to build sustainable markets and systems for reproductive health commodities, including procuring contraceptives and medicines for 52 countries. In 2022, our £60m investment in UNFPA Supplies Partnership contributed to averting an estimated 63,000 maternal and child deaths and had the potential to avert 814,000 unsafe abortions and 2.9 million unintended pregnancies. UK supported the programme to implement a new co-financing model that will see governments sharing the cost of reproductive health commodities, including contraceptives, maternal health medicines and medical abortion supplies from 2023 onwards. In 2022, 25 governments signed 'Compact' agreements with UNFPA, committing to spend over \$14m on quality-assured contraceptives and maternal health medicines in 2023 – an important step towards long-term domestic financing and sustainability.

Due to the economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, in 2021 FCDO made the difficult decision to cut our annual contribution to UNFPA supplies partnership by 85%, causing widespread disruption to the commodity sector. We have worked closely with the UNFPA team and other partners to mitigate these impacts, increasing the focus on domestic resource mobilisation, and encouraging other donors to the programme. In 2022, we increased our contribution to £60m and remain the programme's largest donor.

c. information programmes to tackle practices that damage the sexual and reproductive health of women and girls, such as FGM

The UK has supported the Africa-led Movement to end FGM since 2013, it remains a core priority. In that time, UK aid programmes have helped over 10,000 communities, representing over 27 million people, pledge to abandon FGM.

The current phase of the programme (£35m, 2019 - 2025) works with activists, communities, grassroots organisations and harnesses evidence-based solutions to take end-FGM efforts to scale, with a focus on Kenya, Ethiopia, Somalia and Senegal. The UK also funds the United Nations Joint Programme (UNJP) to end FGM, and, since 2013, has worked with the UN to support the Government of Sudan and many committed women and men to end the practice of FGM.

In addition to ODA spend, FCDO engages in consular and diplomatic activity on FGM. FCDO leads the UK's negotiations on international resolutions relating to FGM including at the Human Rights Council. The FCDO Forced Marriage Unit provides assistance and advice to British and dual nationals who require consular assistance relating to forced marriages, and FGM.

d. Maternal and Newborn Health (MNH) and Ending Preventable Deaths

In 2021, the UK published its Ending Preventable Deaths of Mothers, Babies and Children approach paper. The approach recognises the multi-faceted causes of maternal and child deaths and works across four pillars of action: (1) building strong health systems; (2) championing sexual and reproductive health and rights, including access to safe abortion, and gender equality; (3) ensuring good nutrition and clean and safe environments that are resilient to climate change; and (4) supporting research and innovation. The approach promotes integration, quality and equity. It is particularly focused on system strengthening, joining up the UK's global and country work and joining across sectors to maximise sustainable impact. The UK will measure the success of the ending preventable deaths campaign by tracking national indicators in 11 flagship countries as well as tracking the success of our individual programmes and our policy and influencing efforts.

Our programming portfolio on MNH addresses gaps in both global policy making and in ensuring financing (through strong health systems) at national and local levels. The UK is co-chair of and funds the Partnership for Maternal, Newborn and Child Health (PMNCH; £6m, 2021-25). PMNCH advocates to change the global discourse and influence senior policy makers – to reduce preventable maternal, newborn and child morbidity and mortality; ensure progress on financing and equitable access to comprehensive SRHR; and advance the health and well-being of adolescents.

The Global Financing Facility for Women, Children and Adolescents (GFF; £95m, 2018-25) is a multi-donor World Bank trust fund which brings health stakeholders together under national government leadership, to accelerate the ending of preventable maternal, newborn, child and adolescent deaths. The GFF provides on budget support to countries, using grant money to leverage World Bank loans and encourage governments to assign a greater proportion of these loans to Reproductive, Maternal, Newborn, Child and Adolescent Health and Nutrition (RMNCAH-N). From 2015 to 2020, the GFF helped increase the share of World

Bank loans going to RMNCAH-N by \$1.7bn or 71%. 71% of countries that have partnered with the GFF for more than five years have shown progress across the majority of the most essential care services -assisted deliveries, family planning, pregnancy and newborn care, and childhood immunization. 38% of those that have been supported by GFF for fewer than three years showed similar progress.

4. How could the FCDO target the use of funding for sexual and reproductive health programmes more effectively?

All FCDO programmes go through a rigorous design process that seeks to ensure our funds are used effectively and in line with our strategic priorities. This includes rooting our designs in evidence and data (on what people need and 'what works'), consultation with diverse stakeholders, and strategic assessments of options to maximise impact and value for money. A portfolio wide approach allows us to target resources where they can have most impact. We seek to build inclusion, resilience and sustainability into our investments – often taking a systems-strengthening approach - to ensure impacts are far-reaching and long lasting.

The FCDO also targets SRHR funding according to UK strengths and comparative advantage. We invest in comprehensive SRHR – including safe abortion - which many other donors do not fund – this underpins our political leadership on these issues. We make the most of the UK's leading academic institutions, science and research expertise, and experience as a leader on international development, to support countries with their domestic policy agenda and resource mobilisation for SRHR. For example, leading global efforts to strengthen SRH commodity markets.

We also understand the importance of predictability in our funding. The pressures on the Overseas Development Assistance budgets of recent years have undoubtedly had an impact on programmes. The UK remains a major donor and has worked closely with partners and other donors to mitigate the impact of those reductions and to understand where the UK is best placed to act.

Finally, to ensure efficiency in the context of ODA pressures, the FCDO relies strongly on its new-combined diplomatic and development networks. The UK exercises its diplomatic levers as a well-respected and influential global leader on SRHR to defend and champion fundamental rights and to influence both the global policy agenda and wider global investments.

5. *Is the FCDO's work in this area sufficiently integrated with other areas of programming, such as national health systems strengthening, nutrition and girls' education?*

The UK promotes integration of SRHR into health, education and wider rights efforts through political and policy leadership, diplomacy and investments.

The Ending Preventable Deaths (EPD) Approach Paper in particular highlights the integrated nature of the challenge and commits the FCDO to an integrated approach in response. It highlights the critical importance of strong health systems, nutrition, water, sanitation and hygiene to SRHR. The new International Women and Girls Strategy explicitly highlights the central role of SRHR and comprehensive sexuality education in breaking down the barriers to girls' attendance at school.

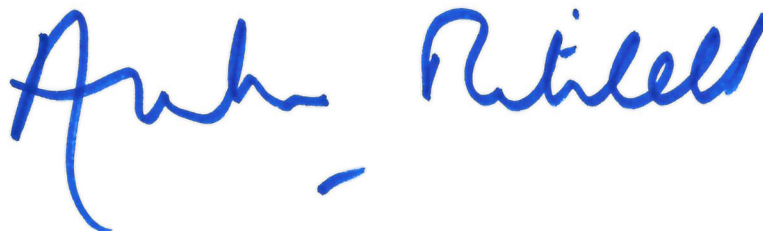
Our programming portfolio also promotes an integrated approach, particularly in embedding SRHR in wider health system strengthening. The GFF, for example, supports 37 countries, and is centred on improving the core building blocks of a health system that keep mothers, babies, children and teenagers healthy and reduce preventable deaths. Many bilateral country health programmes deliver SRHR outcomes but achieve these through an integrated, health system strengthening approach.

6. *Does the FCDO's new global Women and Girls Strategy sufficiently address sexual and reproductive health?*

Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights features prominently in the new UK International Women and Girls Strategy under the second 'E': 'Empowering women and girls and championing their health and rights.' The strategy places reproductive health and rights, family planning, adolescent health, maternal and newborn health and FGM at the heart of the UK's development and foreign policy ambitions.

The women and girls' strategy further highlights wider issues relevant to the sector including comprehensive sexuality education and early marriage; the anti-gender movement and implications for women's and girls' rights; gender-based violence; and nutrition.

The women and girls' strategy, alongside our EPD approach and international development strategy, sets a strong framework which reflects high political ambition, and will continue to drive strategic and effective FCDO delivery on SRHR.



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