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Sarah Champion MP
Chair, International Development Select
Committee
House of Commons
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8th April 2023

Dear Sarah.

Thank you for your letter and the committee's questions about the FCDO's work on Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) following your oral evidence session on the 28th of February related to preparations for this year's UN Conference on Water. I am happy to report that the conference was a success, culminating in a Water Action Agenda and over 700 voluntary commitments, including our own, were tabled to help accelerate progress against water SDG targets. Your committee will be pleased to hear that we were able to find an additional £18,500,000 from our ODA budget to add to what we are already doing on WASH more widely, we announced this at the recent UN conference. More work is however needed to ensure that all these commitments are translated into action, and here the UK has a role to play alongside like-minded governments and development partners. With regards to your specific points, I can offer a response to each question in turn.

The UK's approach to WASH

1. Why did the FCDO not prioritise WASH in its Development Strategy published in 2022? What is the FCDO's approach to WASH in its aid programming?

The UK remains committed to WASH. The UK's International Development Strategy sets out the UK's Strategic priorities, including on women and girls, humanitarian work, climate change, nature and global health. WASH investments contribute to all these areas and are fundamental to ensuring better health outcomes for women and girls.

Environmental health, including WASH, is one of four pillars of the UK's Ending Preventable Deaths of Mothers, Babies and Children (EPD) approach, itself a priority of the International Development Strategy and the Health Strategic Framework. The approach puts women and girls at the heart of interventions, and brings together wider efforts to promote comprehensive SRHR, gender equality and improved nutrition, WASH and climate resilience. It recognises the fundamental role of WASH services, in

communities, schools, and in health facilities, and the contribution it makes to health, education, food security, climate resilience and economic growth.

The FCDO's approach to WASH in aid programming includes dedicated WASH programmes and programmes with broader objectives which include WASH components.

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the importance of handwashing with soap to reduce the spread of COVID-19. We responded rapidly and effectively, establishing the innovative Hygiene and Behaviour Change Coalition, a partnership with Unilever, the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine and 21 UN and NGO partners. By the end of 2021, this programme had reached over 1.2 billion people with messaging and other advice on the importance of hand hygiene.

Building on the strong results and learning of previous programming, WASH in FCDO-funded aid programming is shifting away from the direct delivery of WASH services at household or community level, to supporting governments to establish inclusive, sustainable and climate resilient services. Our focus is on making sure that all of our work in this area is efficient, effective and equitable, maximising better outcomes for women and girls, bringing together our development and diplomatic expertise, research and ODA investments to do so.

2. How does the UK ensure that infrastructure for access to WASH is sustainable after programmes have officially closed?

Sustainability is considered from the outset of all programmes. In recent years, programmes have included more emphasis on strengthening local government capacity, enabling private sector participation and the policies and processes that foster their sustainability and the lifetime benefits of improved WASH.

In 2016, the Independent Commission for Aid Impact's (ICAI's) 2016 report raised a concern that past investments in basic WASH facilities delivered on a project basis were not always sustainable. As a result, a review of sustainability across the portfolio was commissioned, covering nine WASH programmes in seven countries. The FCDO commissioned DT Global to deliver this, and its report 'Assessment of the Sustainability and Targeting of UK-Supported WASH Programming report' of September 2022 has been shared with sector partners and will be published. The report recommends a stronger focus on strengthening systems to enable long-term sustainability WASH services.

In 2018 we announced a new approach to WASH programming. By focusing UK investments on institutions, processes, capacities that deliver the WASH services supporting strong government leadership, accountability and monitoring to ensure services are safe, climate-resilient and gender inclusive.

UK aid spending on WASH

3. Why has WASH seen a 56% reduction in bilateral UK aid funding since 2019, considering that the UK's bilateral aid budget has dropped by 31% over the same period?

We focus our ODA spend on the priorities outlined in the International Development strategy, while maximising the best value for money and our flexibility to respond to new or emerging priority issues.

As reported in the ICAI Information Note on WASH (April 2022), annual UK expenditure on WASH peaked in 2018 at £206.5m. This was associated with the government's

commitment to provide access to safe water and sanitation services for 60 million people by 2020. Whilst the commitment was achieved (62.6m people had gained access by the end of 2020), no new WASH target was set. As a result, many large WASH programmes were not renewed. Expenditure on WASH therefore declined from 2019 onwards – well before the government's decision to reduce aid spend from 0.7 to 0.5% GNI.

The decline in UK WASH spend also reflects a major shift in our approach to WASH, also highlighted in the ICAI Information Note. Reflecting growing concerns about the sustainability of our work described in paragraph 2, FCDO is moving away from large scale projects that delivered safe water supplies and sanitation at community level, to programmes that strengthen the underlying systems that enable governments to provide WASH services – services which are reliable and resilient to the growing impacts of climate change.

This approach is designed to benefit whole populations, rather than a limited number of communities. It includes a major focus on ensuring the sustainability of existing services, and it is designed to help attract new finance to the sector, including private and climate finance, further extending its impact.

Whilst ongoing projects in Ethiopia and Mozambique demonstrate many of these characteristics, the first programme designed from the start to strengthen WASH systems was launched by Minister Goldsmith at the UN Water Conference on 22 March 2023.

4. Please list all aid projects involving WASH that were impacted by the aid cuts, including through cancellation, or through a reduced budget.

In 2020, the UK Government spent £94,552,613 of ODA on 151 projects which included WASH components across the world. In 2021, £63,688,202 of ODA was spent on 130 projects which include WASH components.

The UK Government does not hold a central record of which projects were impacted by aid cuts, including through cancellation or through a reduced budget. Between 2020 and 2021 a number of ODA programmes will have come to a natural end whilst others will have operated with a reduced budget. We cannot confirm if the reduction of 21 projects between 2020 and 2021 was due to ODA budget restrictions or a different approach to supporting the WASH sector.

5. What assessment has the FCDO made of the impact of the cancellation of aid programmes focused on WASH, including on women and girls?

Given the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the reduction to spending 0.5% of GNI on ODA, it is not possible for FCDO to fully mitigate against all the impacts of reduced ODA spend. The Equalities Assessment makes this clear, but also sets out how seriously we take our equalities obligations and the ways in which we will maximise the impact of ODA, along with other mechanisms, to support the lives of vulnerable people from groups with protected characteristics.

We are confident that funding decisions reflect the priorities in the International Development Strategy, including putting women and girls at the heart of what we do.

Our ODA impacts women and girls in a variety of ways including through our WASH programmes. Bilateral programmes in Mozambique, Ethiopia and Nepal continue to prioritise women and girls, including by supporting menstrual hygiene through safe WASH facilities in schools. Funding through the Accelerating Water and Sanitation Programme

with UNICEF in Niger included embedding menstrual hygiene management modules for teachers and pupils reaching entire districts.

6. Bearing in mind the FCDO's papers on 'Ending Preventable Deaths' and 'Health Systems Strengthening', how have reductions in aid spending impacted the FCDO's work on ending preventable deaths and strengthening health systems?

The UK Approach to Ending Preventable Deaths (EPD) aims to use our technical expertise and our voice to elevate EPD globally, utilising networks and convening power to strengthen international coordination and coherence. We have also recently announced a new £15m EPD programme, which will provide technical and strategic support to a set of flagship countries who want to partner with us and where the need for UK support is greatest.

We remain committed to taking a health systems strengthening approach through our core contribution to WHO and health investments through multilaterals, including in our work to improve mother and child health. Through our Core Voluntary Contribution to the WHO of £340m between 2020-2024, we are advocating for a reorientation of health systems to strengthen primary health care services, which are the first port of call when a child becomes sick. Recognising immunisation as one of the most effective public health interventions, we have committed £1.65 billion to support GAVI's core mission over 2021-2025; the biggest contribution by any donor, and we pledged a further £1 billion to the Global Fund which will prevent over 28 million new infections of HIV, TB and malaria, and help countries increase their resilience to future pandemic threats.

Our approach is to bring together our central, multilateral, policy and diplomatic work to achieve clear health outcomes, including for women and girls. We continue to work closely with like-minded partners on this agenda including the UN, Global Health Institutions and US to maximise our investments to ensure they reach the poorest and most marginalised and to contribute to reducing maternal, newborn and under 5 deaths.

7. Does the UK plan to make a further contribution to the UN appeal to tackle the cholera epidemic in Malawi?

On 30 January 2023, the UK announced £500,000 of funding in support of the Government of Malawi's response to the cholera epidemic, alongside direct support in leading the coordination of the emergency response and the UN flash appeal. Technical support to the WHO was deployed through an existing humanitarian surge mechanism, the Standby Partnership Network, to deploy a water and sanitation expert to Malawi for 3 months from January 2023. In the last week, the UK in Malawi has extended this support for a further 3 months, given the impact of Cyclone Freddy over the last two weeks.

The official UK Emergency Medical Team (EMT) was also deployed to provide clinical support in cholera hotspots, including disease surveillance, case management, and infection prevention and control. This team has been extended to the end of April, and will work with the Ministry of Health and partners to consider whether to redeploy to southern districts to support the cholera response in Cyclone-hit districts.

A further £390,000 support to help stop transmission was provided to UNICEF in March 2023, through the Hygiene and Behaviour Change Programme, to increase community-based interventions providing water treatment, and hygiene products.

In response to Cyclone Freddy, the UK has committed £1 million of additional humanitarian funds which – as well as the extension of the WASH expert embedded with

WHO and the UK EMT for cholera outlined above – has been used to deploy the UK International Search and Rescue Team who have rescued more than 335 stranded people and provided essential food supplies to more than 61,000 displaced individuals. Search and rescue equipment including specialist boats has been donated to the Government of Malawi and other kit to the Malawi Red Cross Society, to support them in their role as first responders for future emergencies.

These funds are in addition to the UK's ongoing bilateral health and social protection programmes in Malawi. For instance, the Umoyo Wathu (Our Health) health systems strengthening programme includes a 'WASH in health facilities' component as part of quality improvement work in 6 districts, including two of those affected by the Cyclone.

Financing gap

8. What conversations is the UK having with international partners about financing WASH?

The UK is a member of the Sanitation and Water Partnership, which reinforces national sector leadership, accountability and collaboration in over 70 countries. It also brings together financiers, private sector, civil society organisations, an important platform for discussing finance for the WASH sector. The partnership develops tools for decision-makers, to help develop national WASH finance strategies. Workshops bringing together regional development banks, climate finance experts and national governments and stakeholders help build bridges and action for sustainable WASH financing strategies.

The private sector

9. Does the UK impose any requirements on companies which operate in the UK to use water sustainably in other countries, particularly in lower-income countries?

The UK does not impose any requirements on companies which operate in the UK to use water sustainably in other countries. However, DEFRA have been working with Waste and Resources Action Programme (WRAP) and approximately 60 food and drink companies who have signed up to the Water Roadmap. The aim of this is to reduce unsustainable water use in their supply chains and work has just started on this in Kenya.

In addition to this, Minister Lord Goldsmith led the Glasgow Fair Water Footprint Declaration at COP26, a new partnership which is exploring regulatory and other options to reduce the unsustainable water footprint of the UK. We are working with Finland, Austria, the Netherlands, Malawi, Madagascar, Peru and Panama, and 20 other businesses, investors, civil society organisations and service delivery partners. The Declaration includes targets on pollution, abstraction, WASH, nature and adaptation. The UK has drafted a delivery plan and is developing a business case to implement the plan and support lower-income countries with their water management.

Women and girls

10. How will the UK's new global strategy on Women and Girls incorporate WASH to achieve progress towards gender equality in lower-income countries?

The FCDO Women and Girls Strategy reaffirms the UK's commitment to put women and girls at the centre of our operations and investments. WASH has profound gender impacts

and are related to all three priorities: Educating girls, Empowering women and girls and championing their health, and Ending violence.

As part of that, the Ending Preventable Deaths of Mothers, Babies and Children puts women and girls at the heart of a broader set of interventions linked to health systems gender equality, SHRH and the environments in which they live, including the WASH facilities they use. Bringing climate-resilient WASH facilities closer to home helps reduce the time taken by girls and women to fetch water and reduce the risk of gender-based violence. Ensuring all health care facilities have adequate WASH facilities to avoid unnecessary infection and resulting preventable deaths. Supporting WASH in schools, helps ensure girls can study with dignity and attend to their needs whilst at school.

11. Considering that many girls miss school due to a lack of menstrual hygiene and adequate sanitation facilities, how is the UK Government integrating WASH into its education programming for girls?

The UK remains a major donor to the Global Partnership for Education (GPE). In July 2021, an unprecedented \$4billion was raised at the summit co-hosted by the UK. The GPE grants include WASH needs where they are prioritised by governments. Particular attention to the sanitation needs of girls are considered.

12. How will the FCDO's new programme on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights programme incorporate access to WASH?

The FCDO's Women's Integrated Sexual Health Dividend (WISH Dividend) programme, that was announced on international women's day, does not have a specific WASH component. However, this programme fits into a comprehensive package of UK international assistance on global health and education.

The FCDO Women and Girls strategy sets the UK's holistic approach to improving gender equality through its official development assistance (ODA) and policy objectives. Comprehensive sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), girls' education, and women's empowerment are all central commitments in this strategy.

A key area of work where the UK's WASH, SRHR and education work overlap is on improving menstrual health management and eliminating period poverty. The UK has supported this agenda through the Global Education Challenge (GEC), the Reproductive Health Supplies Coalition (RHSC), the recent Sanitation and Water for the Rural Poor programme, and through a variety health and education focused country programmes.

Climate change

13. How is the UK integrating access to WASH into its work on climate change mitigation and adaptation?

FCDO is supporting climate resilient WASH through the Global Water Leadership Programme. At national level, FCDO is supporting UNICEF in eight countries facing extreme or high levels of water-vulnerability to strengthen the climate resilience of WASH services, developing capacity and mobilising climate finance. In addition, FCDO supports implementation of The Water Tracker through this programme. This is an innovative

approach designed to shape Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) and National adaptation plans with an increased focus on water.

The Resilient Water Accelerator is now being funded with Water Aid, the Sustainable Markets Initiative and other partners, to boost investment in resilient water including WASH. The approach is to improve the enabling conditions by fixing policy failures such as pricing, non-revenue water and weak enforcement, that weaken those conditions and deter investors.

The FCDO Programme Operating Framework (PrOF) provides the structure that Programme teams within FCDO adhere to when designing a programme. The Climate and Environment PrOF guide advises programme managers how to handle Water, sanitation and health risks.

Crises

14. What funding structures does the UK have in place currently to deal with international crises, such as a crisis reserve or crisis modifier? How much funding do these funds have for the calendar year 2022-23? How much funding have those funds received in each of the past five calendar years?

The FCDO ODA budget can be prioritised throughout the financial year to support responses to needs arising from peaks in protracted crises and new rapid onset events. The majority of humanitarian funding is through core and bilateral programmes with a range of delivery partners in particular the UN, Red Cross Movement and NGOs.

The Central Crisis Reserve (CCR) was established in 2015. This consisted of a £200m cash contingency and £300m 'redeployable reserve' of funding already programmed on FCDO's baseline but that FCDO or HMT could seek to reallocate to a major new crisis if required. The Crisis Reserve was reduced to £30m in 2021/22 and 22/23 to ensure that a greater proportion of the total ODA budget could be allocated at the start of the financial year to enable immediate responses to existing urgent humanitarian needs.

The FCDO's latest ODA spending for 2022-23 is £7,584m. FCDO's historical ODA budgets are captured in an annual report and accounts which are published on GOV.UK.

Research and development

15. What research and development projects is the UK funding to find innovative solutions to water shortages in lower-income countries? Please detail the projects, durations and funding.

Innovative solutions to water shortages require a holistic approach to broader water security challenges around water supplies, water safety (quality), sanitation and hygiene focussed on delivering health impacts and building resilience to climate change including droughts and floods. Current research and evidence programmes run up to 2027, with several planned to end in 2025. As above, ODA budgets are reported in the FCDO's annual report and accounts.

Addressing water lost through poorly managed and inefficient revenue collection reduces the efficiency with which scarce water resources should be used. To address this a mobile-based system that simplifies metering and billing by water utilities, reducing commercial

losses and fraud was developed with UK funds. This application has already been adopted by eight water utilities in Kenya serving close to four million consumers and empowering over 4,000 water utilities staff, with over 26 utilities looking to contract Wonderkid, its developer, to provide this service.

Sustainable development of groundwater resources in Africa is critical for future safe water supplies, economic growth, food security, and improving resilience to the increasingly unreliable surface water resources resulting from climate change. The UpGro programme (Unlocking the Potential of Groundwater for the Poor) has developed the Africa Groundwater Atlas, an open access online resource that brings together data on groundwater resources of 51 African countries.

UN Water Conference in 2023

16. How has the UK engaged with the UN 2023 Water Conference?

The UK, represented by the Right Honourable Lord Goldsmith, was honoured to co-chair, alongside the Dominican Republic, the Water and Health Interactive Dialogue on the first day of the conference. We used this event to highlight the importance of leadership, accountability and finance, whilst encouraging participants to focus on improving the reliability and resilience WASH services that reach whole populations. The UK used this opportunity to announce the new £18.5m WASH system for Health programme. We also announced seed funding for a new water security programme that is due to get underway early next year. Lord Goldsmith presented a summary of the Water for Health dialogue to the General assembly on the last day of the conference.

Lord Goldsmith also delivered a key-note address during a side event on hygiene, organised by UNICEF in collaboration with Unilever. He used this event to stress the importance of collaboration, using the Hygiene and Behaviour Change Coalition as an example of how partnerships that include governments, business, civil society and leading research organisations can achieve incredible results in a very short time frame. He also participated in an event on WASH finance and a new initiative, the Resilient Water Accelerator, that seeks to attract private finance (including climate finance) to the sector.

The UK also convened a side-event on the Fair Water Footprints initiative. Launched at COP 26 in Glasgow, this is designed to radically improve the sustainable use of fresh water resources, in particular by industry and agriculture. Signatories commit to eliminate water pollution and ensure the sustainable use of the fresh water they use.

A number of bilateral meetings were also held during the conference, including with Ministers from Ukraine and Malawi.

17. Which Ministers and officials are representing the UK Government at the UN Water Conference in 2023?

The UK was represented by Lord Goldsmith of Richmond Park, Minister of State for Overseas Territories, Commonwealth, Energy, Climate and Environment. The Minister co-chaired one of five official interactive dialogues and participated in several side events and bilateral discussions. He was supported by advisers from the UK and the UK Permanent Mission to the United Nations. The UK Ambassador to ECOSOC also participated in a side event that focused on the importance of sustainability, with a prominent speaking role.

18. What commitments does the UK plan to make at the UN Water Conference 2023 under the Water Action Agenda?

At the UN Water Conference, the UK announced a new 5-year programme to improve access to safe, reliable and affordable water supplies and sanitation services, benefitting millions in Asia and Africa.

This commitment of £18.5m is for a new initiative on WASH Systems for Health. This programme will work in up to five countries, supporting governments to strengthen the systems they need to provide reliable, resilience and inclusive WASH services. The five countries will be selected from a short-list of 15 countries, all in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, taking into account the willingness of host governments to drive reforms. The funding will also support improvements to water, sanitation and hygiene services in schools, including menstrual hygiene, and in health facilities where it will have a major impact on reducing infection and improving quality of care received by patients. It is a key part of the UK government's commitment to help end the preventable deaths of mothers, young children and infants.

I trust that the above answers provide you with an overview of the important work this department is doing on Water, Sanitation and Hygiene and provides more information about the leadership role that the UK took at the UN Water Conference.

With my apologies that this letter is later than requested but I hope you will feel it is a comprehensive response to the important questions and areas you have raised.
With every good wish to you and
Yours committed,
John Evers

Rt Hon Andrew Mitchell MP
Minister for Development and Africa

Andrew