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Chair

The Honourable Robert Nault

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● (1530)

[*English*]

The Chair (Hon. Robert Nault (Kenora, Lib.)): First of all, I want to welcome all of you back.

This is the beginning of one of our studies. It's on the countries of focus for our bilateral development assistance. This will be our very first of a number of meetings to have a very solid look at those countries of focus, the partnerships, and the development of that policy over the next number of years.

In front of us today are officials from the Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development. We have Deirdre Kent, the director general of development policy, and Isabelle Bérard, the director general of the Americas programming bureau. I want to welcome both of you here.

As usual, the objective of the exercise is to hear from our witnesses and then to get into a comprehensive discussion about the policy matters. I want to turn it right over to Ms. Kent to get started, and we'll run our way right through this for the first hour.

As you know, in the second hour we'll have the International Development Research Centre.

I'll turn the floor over to you, Madam Kent.

Ms. Deirdre Kent (Director General, Development Policy, Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Chair, ladies and gentlemen members of the committee, I am very pleased to be here with you today to talk about Canada's countries of focus for bilateral development assistance.

As the chair just said, my name is Deirdre Kent and I am the Director General of Development Policy at Global Affairs Canada. I am accompanied by my colleague Isabelle Bérard, Director General of the Americas Programming Bureau.

Today I will first explain the reasons why we choose certain countries for bilateral development assistance. Then we will discuss the measures taken to direct our assistance, as well as the sectors that benefit from it.

Before that, however, let me briefly explain the current context.

The Minister of International Development and La Francophonie, Ms. Bibeau, recently addressed the committee. As the minister explained to you, we have been conducting a review of our international development assistance policies and our funding framework. Our objective is to refocus Canada's international aid on the poorest and most vulnerable populations, and to support fragile states. This is one of the minister's main priorities. As Minister Bibeau stated, we must ensure that Canada's international aid responds to the needs of a new global context, which means that we must both overcome the obstacles and seize the opportunities.

[*English*]

We need to ensure that Canada's international assistance is aligned to support the new global development agenda, including the 2030 agenda for sustainable development, which has set the ambitious target of eradicating poverty globally in the next 15 years. This will require renewing Canada's approach and building on Canada's strengths and comparative advantages, including our existing relationships.

Canada has a tradition of broad global development, and advances its development priorities by working closely with a range of partners. As a result, Canada's international development and humanitarian assistance programming is delivered through multilateral organizations like the UN, Canadian and international civil society organizations, and public institutions in developing countries. Today, other actors—foundations, cultural community organizations, emerging donors, and private sector actors—are all growing in importance.

In terms of volume, roughly one-third of Global Affairs' international assistance in 2014-15 was bilateral—$1.25 billion out of $3.74 billion in total from Global Affairs. It is this bilateral funding that is subject to geographic focus.

Canada does retain a global reach through multilateral security and democratic development programming, and through our work with Canadian organizations and local developing country partners around the world. Furthermore, Canada's international humanitarian assistance is provided on a needs basis, guided by the humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality, and independence. It is not limited to specific countries or regions.

To be very clear, two-thirds of Global Affairs Canada's international assistance—multilateral funding, partnerships with civil society organizations and institutions, and our peace and security programming—is not subject to geographic focus. Therefore, my presentation today will focus specifically on bilateral development assistance.

Like other donor countries, Canada has strengthened the geographic focus of its bilateral assistance over the last 15 years in order to achieve greater results in reducing poverty. Geographic focus has been an important component of Canada's development effectiveness agenda.

● (1535)

The 2007 OECD Development Assistance Committee's peer review of Canada concluded that Canada was engaged in too many bilateral programs. They observed that this dispersed approach was limiting Canada's potential to achieve significant results. We were spread too thin. Our voice was diminished in countries where we were not a major donor, and our ability to have a measurable impact on the ground was limited.

By concentrating financial and human resources in fewer, larger bilateral programs, Canada has aimed to improve its ability to have a real impact through stronger relations and a more credible voice with local partners, including partner governments and other donors; and a better ability to respond to local needs and conditions, and align with local priorities in order to reduce poverty.

A focus on a limited number of countries is recognized as reducing the administrative burden on recipient countries through division of labour among a few larger donors. It has helped Canada to reduce administrative overhead, as fewer transactions are required, delivering more aid per dollar spent.

Focus also helps to position Canada among the major donors in a country, providing greater influence and an ability to program in a wider range of sectors to increase our field presence and to have more active in-country engagement. In addition, developing countries have identified focus as important for aid predictability and transparency where commitments over time are required for sustainable development results.

How do we focus?

Canada's bilateral development programming greatly increased its focus from 2000 to 2015, moving from 89 to 37 bilateral country programs. Canada currently has 25 countries of focus and 12 partner countries for its bilateral development assistance. In June 2014, Canada increased the number of countries of focus for Canada's bilateral development assistance from 20 to 25.

The 25 countries were chosen based on their needs, namely the extent of poverty, vulnerability, and underdevelopment in the country; their capacity to benefit from development assistance, and the potential for aid to translate into concrete results; and their alignment with Canadian policy priorities. These same criteria were also used in 2008-09 to make decisions based on Canada's initial list of 20 countries of focus.

Canada increased the number of countries of focus in 2014 due to an increased emphasis on bilateral programming, and 90% of bilateral development assistance spending takes place in countries of focus compared to 80% previously. The remaining bilateral spending is primarily in Canada's 12 development partner countries formally called countries of modest presence, as well as a small number of regional programs, such as the pan-Africa regional program.

Our bilateral programming is targeted toward the priorities of our partner countries and is in line with five thematic priorities for international assistance, namely, increasing food security, stimulating sustainable economic growth, securing the future of children and youth, advancing democracy, and promoting stability and security.

Canada's bilateral development assistance involves broad global engagement in Africa, the Americas, Asia, Eastern Europe, and the Middle East. Thirteen of Canada's 25 countries of focus are least developed countries where poverty rates are highest, but we are also working in lower-middle income countries, some of which are fragile states where important pockets of poverty remain. Africa is the most important region with 10 countries of focus.

There are a range of approaches used internationally for determining geographic focus. As part of the evidence base for our international assistance review, we are looking to learn from other donor countries. Some donors, such as the Netherlands, Sweden, and France, use a tiered approach based on country type or income group. The focus of their cooperation differs by group. For example, they may focus on stabilization and peace building in fragile states, on economic growth, or on triangular cooperation with middle-income countries.

● (1540)

Some donors such as Australia have a geographic focus on their immediate region. The United Kingdom devotes a set proportion of 50% of its bilateral assistance to fragile states.

[*Translation*]

In conclusion, one of the central objectives of the international assistance review is to refocus Canada's aid in order to support the poorest and most vulnerable populations, as well as fragile states. The study will among other things look at the best way to refocus efforts on the poorest and most vulnerable, as well as ways of improving our effectiveness and bolstering innovation.

This gives us an opportunity to reassess our current approaches in light of the information we collect, especially through consultations. We look forward to hearing your committee comments in the context of the information-gathering aspect of our review.

Ms. Bérard and I will be happy to answer your questions.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Kent.

[*English*]

I will now go to Mr. Allison.

Mr. Dean Allison (Niagara West, CPC): Thanks to our guests from Global Affairs for being here today. I also want to thank the government for its increased contribution to the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria this past week. I think it's an important initiative, and we need to give credit where credit is due. There have been 20% increases all along. I think this is absolutely critical.

There have been some issues with Mozambique, which is a country of focus, in recent weeks. Canada has frozen aid to the government. When we have bad actors, that's a challenge, right? We have some bad actors in certain vulnerable countries. The story said that money to NGOs would continue as best it could. Is there a thought process to try to reallocate that money? Is this something that over time would be of interest as we look at countries of focus?

I realize that we want economic and political stability. In a situation where governments are behaving badly, is there an opportunity to redistribute funds to NGOs on the ground?

Ms. Isabelle Bérard (Director General, Americas Programming Bureau, Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development): I'm the DG of the Americas bureau, so I don't specialize in Mozambique. That said, I have been working in the business of development for 30 years, and I've touched on a number of programs, including some in Africa. So I am somewhat familiar with situations such as the one you just described.

We do intervene in a number of countries where there are issues, governance issues, and we do need some time to make decisions on how we deliver our support. We sometimes have to redirect our support from the government or institutions related to the government. We sometimes support other institutions or other organizations such as NGOs.

The thought process to get there is very specific. It's done on a case-by-case basis. It very much depends on the tools we're using in a country. Of course, Deirdre did talk about different categories of countries. We work in middle- and low-income countries, and so the toolbox that we use when intervening in these countries varies. We don't work in a middle-income country like we do in a low-income country such as Mozambique.

One example that comes to mind is Ethiopia. I was once closely associated with that country. In 2005, we were offering budgetary support to Ethiopia directly, and then there was civil unrest. We decided that the donor community should stop providing support directly to the government. At the same time, we didn't want to leave the population, the most vulnerable ones, out in the cold. So we redirected the support.

So there are ways and means to do that. Yes, there is a thought process on this that we are engaging in internally. We have to work within the department and with the Canadian government to establish the next steps. We also work with the international community in an example such as Ethiopia, which I know better than Mozambique.

● (1545)

Mr. Dean Allison: I'm just going to ask another question and then I'll turn it over to my colleague.

I was recently in Vietnam and one of the concerns they had, of course, was that they're developing and then get taken off the list. I know, once again, there are middle-income countries. I understand those things. One of the things they said, which I'd like you to expand on, is that although their income is rising, they still have huge deficits in the civil service and in a number of capacity-building items.

Would you just talk a bit about that. With the country focus, I have read the criteria and know that it could be the poorest of the poor, but you also talked about middle-income countries in terms of some of the capacity building efforts, because we have a tonne of great tools as Canadians that we can offer them.

Ms. Deirdre Kent: You raise an important point about determining where the poorest and most vulnerable are. The least developed countries have a certain population, but then there are also pockets within middle income and lower middle-income countries. That is one of the challenges, and it's one of the objectives of the international assistance review to determine how we do focus on the poorest and most vulnerable.

Speaking generically, not about the Vietnam specifically, that is a challenge for the international community. As Isabelle was pointing to, we're doing different types of programming within different countries. As my statement pointed out, in a middle-income country, you may be doing more technical cooperation related to the security sector, for example, or in the health sector, versus what you would be doing in countries where there are larger populations who require assistance with basic needs.

Ms. Isabelle Bérard: If I may just complement what Deirdre said, we now know that 70% of the poor in the world do live in middle-income countries. We do have to pay attention to that factor, though I understand that the trend is that by 2030 most of the poorest will be living in the fragile states. Nonetheless, if we look at middle-income countries, we are very much preoccupied with the most vulnerable within those middle-income countries and we use various tools to identify them. So, definitely, we are not leaving aside the middle-income countries.

In the Americas, most of the countries I'm working with are middle-income countries, except for Haiti, which is a low-income country. We do have all sorts of tools—technical assistance mostly—but they differ quite a lot from what we do in a low-income country. In Vietnam, I assume that this is something that we could certainly offer. In low-income countries we tend to provide more significant amounts of money to respond to basic needs essentially.

● (1550)

The Chair: Now we'll go to Mr. Fragiskatos.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos (London North Centre, Lib.): I have a question as far as the criteria go. What factors are applied when adding and removing states from the list of countries of focus? What's privileged, for example? If I look at the list, Afghanistan is at the top of the list of states that received the most amount of aid. Obviously, Afghanistan has serious needs, and I know that issues around poverty are very important too in our criteria. In fact, in 2008, as you know, legislation was passed that stated that the fundamental goal of foreign aid is “poverty reduction”.

When we look at the list of the poorest states in the world, Afghanistan is not at the top of the list, poor as it is. Yes, there are certainly those challenges and lists vary, with states like the Congo making it to the top of the list.

I'm just wondering if you could shed light on that because I have some concerns about it and think there's a need for greater clarity.

Ms. Deirdre Kent: You pointed to the Official Development Assistance Accountability Act, and that is an important element that I didn't mention in the statement. In fact, all of Canada's official development assistance is compliant with the ODAA Act, which means that all of Canada's ODA goes to combatting poverty. That is a fundamental principle, whether it's in Afghanistan or in DRC.

With respect to how countries are chosen, need is one of the pillars, including the poverty levels and the degrees of vulnerability of the population, both pockets of the population and the country as a whole. We look at an evidence basis for that.

There's a capacity to benefit from development assistance, and that gets at questions of governance, and performance, and capacity to make best use of international development assistance and alignment with Canadian priorities. That looks at the intersection of trade, foreign policy, security, and development assistance in determining the countries of focus and the partner countries.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: It's the latter point that critics have pointed to and talked about in terms of aid being linked to Canadian policy priorities. I have some examples.

Colombia and Peru were added in 2009. Mongolia, Myanmar, and the Congo were added in 2014. The argument is that the decision to look at those states and to make them part of our policy was done entirely as a result of a decision of the government in power at the time to align aid with particular strategic priorities and economic priorities.

The result was what? The result was that states like Cameroon, Malawi, and Niger were dropped off the list to make room for those particular states.

I'm trying to follow this out and tease out exactly which criteria are given privilege. That's the substance of the question.

Ms. Deirdre Kent: All three criteria are given privilege if you like. Sorry, that's the wrong word. All three play equally into the consideration, so you have the need, the effectiveness, and the ability to use the funding effectively, plus the suite of Canadian international interests.

Perhaps I can ask Isabelle, with her expertise in the Americas, to shed some light on the merits of having bilateral programming in Colombia and Peru, which, as she pointed out, are middle-income countries, but where we can see the.... It is about results, and it is about addressing poverty, and I think there are good stories to tell.

● (1555)

Ms. Isabelle Bérard: Actually, as I said earlier, I've been working in this area for 30 years, and I've actually gone through four different concentration exercises. If I look at the Americas, 10 years ago our top 10 recipients were exactly the same as the top 10 recipients we have today, except for Brazil, which we've dropped for obvious reasons.

The only program we've added is what we call the inter-American program, which allows us to provide support to a greater number of countries, those countries where we do not necessarily have a presence, or where there is limited interest, but where we still want to be in a position to provide some support.

From that perspective, Peru and Colombia have always received some funding from the bilateral program.

Of course, the concentration exercise has allowed these countries to get a little more money because the budget was increasing and because there was a strategy for the Americas that was put forward in 2007. As part of this strategy to re-engage in the Americas, it became clear that Peru and Colombia were going to get a little more funding.

Given some issues that are there in terms of education in Latin America, Peru is the country where the education system is the weakest, and where people are essentially left out, where kids are left out of the system. So it was a good opportunity for us to re-engage with Peru in the Americas, to increase our support and then get involved in the education sector, which we did. We are providing support to quite a number of schooling initiatives in Peru.

As for Colombia, the peace process.... There are lots of people affected by the crisis and the guerrilla war. So getting involved in Colombia was a good way for us to be at the table, to in some sense be in a position to have greater proximity with the government to be able to have a conversation on the peace process, and be able to further our involvement in this process.

In Colombia, the poorest and the most vulnerable are the indigenous population and the Afro-Colombian people, so we wanted, as well, to be able to provide some support there.

The Chair: We'll now go to Mr. Aubin.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for being here with us, Ms. Kent and Ms. Bérard. There are three broad questions of principle I hope to have time to discuss with you.

If we look back at what has happened, historically, from the Paris Declaration until the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, we see that the underlying concept remains the same: international aid is aligned on the needs and potential of the countries we help. I get the impression that over the years, the understanding or definition of that alignment has deviated somewhat so that it now applies to countries that share common interests with Canada, or could, in terms of foreign affairs policies.

In the context of our study, and when the time comes to choose countries, should we not get back to the essence of that alignment? That is my first question.

Ms. Isabelle Bérard: In terms of geographic focus, which is my field of expertise, we have always paid close attention to aligning with the priorities of the governments in question. It is impossible to achieve results if we we are not aligned with the priorities of the countries where we intervene. If that is not the case, we are headed for failure.

With that in mind, in the Americas, the objective has always been to address, as a matter of priority, the needs of the countries as they express them. Of course, the priorities in general are always more numerous than our capacity to respond.

● (1600)

Mr. Robert Aubin: Yes, no doubt.

Ms. Isabelle Bérard: Choices can be made. In the conversations we have with the countries where we intervene, choices are made. According to what comes out of our discussions, we can choose priority A, B, or C. Canada has immense expertise, and we can respond to many priorities.

Mr. Robert Aubin: Thank you.

Ms. Isabelle Bérard: We work with middle-income countries. These countries are quite directive as to what they hope to obtain. Generally we respond to their needs, but that is a situation—

Mr. Robert Aubin: If I may, I will interrupt you because time is passing very quickly.

Let's stay with the historical perspective that allows us to look at the future. We have gone from an abundance of somewhat dispersed bilateral aid to the concept of countries of focus, and geographic focus. Has the effectiveness of this focus been proven?

Ms. Isabelle Bérard: Absolutely, beyond a doubt.

From a programming perspective, my impact is different when I have significant resources to contribute. To be clear, I am not referring to volume; it's not the amount of money that is important. Geographic focus is important. To be sure, financial needs are probably more circumscribed in the Americas than in Africa. That said, in order to intervene in the area of maternal and child health, if you have access to more significant resources, clearly you can accomplish more. This has been demonstrated in the area of maternal and child health, especially in Haiti, where we have made good progress. We have also worked in Honduras and Bolivia, where we have had very good results.

Also, with geographic focus, it is much easier to interact with the government. The scope of our presence generates credibility, which allows us to develop a number of things.

Mr. Robert Aubin: Once we've concluded our study, we will probably have to realign certain things.

Do you have some ideas to express about the transition we should put in place? The idea is not to leave the countries we are working in overnight, but to go in a new direction. How are we going to bring about that transition in the countries of focus where we have been engaged for a number of years?

Ms. Deirdre Kent: Development has to take place over the long term; it's is a fundamental aspect. The partners demand transparency and predictability. It's fundamental.

I'd like to add something in reference to your last question.

You spoke about sustainable development objectives in connection with the 2030 Agenda. There are 17 global objectives, but we have to remember that it is the least developed countries that have to be at the centre of our efforts. A global approach is not the way to look at objectives 1, 6 and 16. Rather, we have to think of the priority needs of each country. We also have to take into account the changes that are occurring in the countries.

● (1605)

Mr. Robert Aubin: Thank you.

Do I have some time left?

The Chair: No. Thank you, Mr. Aubin.

[*English*]

Mr. Levitt.

Mr. Michael Levitt (York Centre, Lib.): Thank you for coming in and speaking with us today.

My question is a little bit broader. I want to ask about the efficacy of the bilateral nature of the countries of focus model, particularly in relation to dealing with the impact of regional issues, for example in the Americas and Africa. Does a bilateral focus limit our opportunity for success? Would including multilaterals in the process of directing development aid be an option that might be able to achieve greater levels of success?

Ms. Deirdre Kent: It is something that we will need to be looking at through our international assistance review. As I was saying in my statement, there are different models of geographic focus, so it can be countries, or a mix of countries and regions, and we've had regions within our bilateral programs as well.

Similarly, we have what we call “multi-buy”. That is using multilateral organizations in order to deliver in a specific country. The global fund, for example, would be funded in a global approach, but there may be a specific sector, such as education, where the best implementer and the most effective would be to use UNICEF, for example, in a specific country.

It's that mix of tools, using local NGOs or Canadian NGOs. Of course, Global Affairs is not an implementer. Everything we do is implemented through partners of some kind, whether it's multilateral development banks, which we haven't touched on here at all but are an important part of our international assistance....

It is absolutely a question to look at. Where do you have the impact? How are you reaching the poorest and most vulnerable through these different channels? Where does Canada have an impact?

Mr. Michael Levitt: I was going to ask specifically with regard to the Americas whether you may be....

Ms. Isabelle Bérard: I was going to say that we do have a very clear example in the Americas of our ability to be able to be flexible and meet all sorts of needs. We do have what we call a “region of concentration”. It's the Caribbean region. Actually we're covering 14 countries, but it is considered a region of focus.

I'm managing nine programs plus the Caribbean program, which covers 13 or 14 countries, and I also have an inter-American program, which allows me to work with the Inter-American Development Bank and the OAS, the Organization of the American States. I'm so used to using the acronym that I've lost track.... This allows us to have a good combination of direct intervention with the government using Canadian partners, and working through multilateral organizations as well, to reach those in need in areas where we might not be at present. It's actually a combination.

Mr. Michael Levitt: Because it's an issue that's coming up in our Subcommittee on International Human Rights next week and your specialty is the Americas, tell me, where Honduras is concerned, how you reconcile some of the human rights challenges that have taken place there and grown lately with how you deal with your developing countries?

Ms. Isabelle Bérard: The human rights challenges in Honduras specifically?

● (1610)

Mr. Michael Levitt: Yes.

Ms. Isabelle Bérard: Definitely, it's at the heart of our preoccupations. The ODAAA, the Official Development Assistance Accountability Act, commits us to work to address poverty reduction, but also to make sure that our interventions are compliant with human rights laws. Whenever we identify an initiative that we want to put forward for approval, we do take this into consideration, for sure.

In Honduras, we are quite aware that there are issues, and we are definitely addressing those as part of our planning and thought process for identifying initiatives.

I must say that in Central America, we are thinking more and more in terms of the region as a whole, because the issues are not only in Honduras. For example, we are looking very much at the example of CICIG, in Guatemala, where there was that commission on impunity. Also, there is the OAS, which intends to establish a similar initiative in Honduras. We're following this very, very closely to make sure that these human rights issues are addressed properly.

The Chair: Colleagues, that's the end of the first round.

We'll go to the second round, and start with Mr. Mendicino, please.

Mr. Marco Mendicino (Eglinton—Lawrence, Lib.): I want to thank both of the witnesses for their testimony today as well as for the work they do in the field. It's obviously of tremendous importance to Canada's values, as well as to those countries who are in most need of assistance.

I've taken some time to read through some of the criteria that I believe apply to the "countries of focus approach", if I could put it that way. To summarize, the three criteria, as I understand them, are as follows: one, countries are selected based on their need; two, on their capacity to manage development programs; and three, on their alignment with Canadian foreign policy priorities.

My first question is whether you think there is any paradox between the first and the second of those two priorities. What I mean by that is that if a country is in greater need, whether in terms of poverty, infrastructure, education, youth, or security—that is, in terms of any of the priorities you've identified—is it possible or likely that the more in need they are the less capacity they have to effectively manage the aid and the assistance we aim to provide them?

Ms. Deirdre Kent: I would say yes, that's fundamentally a challenge. The countries that can be the most in need—and I'll speak to fragile states, for example—may have the greatest difficulty in being able to take advantage of, and to see tangible results from, development assistance in the way that you would see in a more stable middle-income country. There's the question of what countries you want to go into in order to see the results, but it's also what type of programming you are then going to offer in that country.

Mr. Marco Mendicino: How do you reconcile that? How do you reconcile Canada's desire to help those countries that are in most need with the apparent obvious inverse relationship of their perhaps having reduced capacity to effectively manage the assistance we wish to provide them?

I ask the question because I think that part of this conversation, as we move into a consultation phase, which is part of the responsible minister's mandate, will no doubt include the public's desire to see accountability, transparency, and openness around the investment and the aid we want to provide to these countries. How do you close that gap?

Ms. Deirdre Kent: Perhaps I'll speak generally, and then Isabelle can speak to examples in her region.

It is that question of looking at what your interventions are, and the partners with whom you are working.

We spoke earlier about countries that may have transitioned to where it's more difficult to work, and where you may therefore choose not to work with the government but with civil society. In environments where it's challenging to work directly as a bilateral donor, you would work through multilateral organizations that may have the security footprint that makes it more possible to have an impact, versus our working directly in that environment. Therefore, it's the types of programming, the thematic focus you might have in a country, and the channels you are using. You need to balance that against, as you say, the very real needs, and then target it to specific populations.

As Isabelle was saying, you might target women and girls. You might be targeting refugee populations that you can access more easily, or indigenous populations, for example, as a vulnerable population.

Isabelle, do you wish to add to that?

● (1615)

Ms. Isabelle Bérard: Yes, it is difficult to reconcile those considerations. We have to make choices. When you have finite resources, you do have to make tough choices. Yes, there are lots of conversations about reconciling all those criteria and making sure that we address the needs of the poorest.

Again, in the Americas—I'll use exactly the same example I used earlier—the top 10 countries we were involved in 10 years ago are exactly the same that we are now involved with, except Brazil. But we've added the inter-American program, which allows us to have a broader reach and be in a position to meet some of the needs in areas where we had to make tough choices.

Deirdre did mention that two-thirds of our aid budget is spent through other channels, but one thing we forgot to say is that we do take into consideration, as well, what is going through other channels when we make a decision on the choice of countries. Some countries benefit from multilateral organizations, and the organizations are quite effective at meeting their needs. In some instances, you might make the choice to be involved in one country, where there is a little more support, rather than another one.

From one region to the next, it's very different. In the Americas-specific region, we do have tools to, in a nutshell, be able reconcile those issues.

Mr. Marco Mendicino: Am I right in extracting from your answer, which was very helpful, you, that in large measure it will depend on the strength of the relationship between our government, our state actors, and the countries we wish to help?

Ms. Deirdre Kent: Can you extract that? I think we were describing one of the reasons to focus, which is to enable that strengthened relationship. In order to have effective international assistance, you do want to have a strong relationship with that government. It goes both ways. If you have a strong relationship, then you'll be able to have more impact. If you have a focused program with an alignment with the priorities of the government, and where you can play an important role at the donor coordination table with the country and with other multilateral organizations, then you can have an impact. I think it's a positive circle that you get into.

Of course, we state that need and capacity are two of the three criteria. The third, with respect to alignment with Canadian priorities, includes our values. So it does include the countries that are respecting human rights and good governance, but also where we have a Canadian footprint—a country like Colombia, for example, where we have programming through our stabilization and reconstruction task force, or where there are Canadian peacekeepers or Canadian police deployed. It's that whole Canadian presence and engagement in a country that allows us to take a comprehensive approach, and that would argue for Afghanistan also.

The Chair: I'll go to Mr. Kent, please.

Hon. Peter Kent (Thornhill, CPC): Thanks to both of you for your dedicated work over the years and working in various departmental incarnations in recent years.

I'd like to ask about Haiti. Six years after the earthquake, many of the major donor countries, and Canada is one of those, have become increasingly frustrated. The initial response to the disaster was very good. It was very effective, with a whole-of-government response from Canada and other places, with a lot of coordination on the ground. However, six years later, there is no political government in place for you to align with and relate to. That's part of the problem. Moreover, there are still terrible hilltop mock housing situations—slums, if you will—and the education recovery has not achieved nearly what the original targets were.

Given the buzz on the Hill that Canada will very likely, or is positioning now to, take over MINUSTAH, the stabilization force, with peacekeepers in the fall, I'm wondering whether Canada is asking, as other countries are, whether the military administration model should be phased out and a more classic development model phased in to achieve what hasn't really been achieved in the last six years.

● (1620)

Ms. Isabelle Bérard: I was the director responsible for Haiti when the earthquake happened, so I was closely involved in the follow-ups to the earthquake.

In the initial response, the Canadian engagement was massive. We supported the government and the Haitian population. We've achieved quite a lot, and I know people have been, in some instances, quite critical of the time it has taken to get to a good space, where we have actually cleared out all the rubble. We've relocated everybody. Almost 85% of the people were living in tents. They have been relocated now. The school system has been re-established, hospitals have been built, etc., so a lot has been done.

Are there issues on the political front? That's for sure, we can't deny that and the fact that there haven't been elections for four years. They tried last fall, and it didn't work out. We are very clearly pushing the government to keep their promise of holding those elections, and our ambassador in Port-au-Prince is quite involved in this and is pushing very hard with the international community on this. We issued a statement, I believe it was last week, calling on the Haitians to hold elections and make sure that things move along quickly, because we are getting impatient. This is a message that we are delivering.

Of course, we resumed our support to Haiti in 2015 after a review, but we were clear then that we were in a transition period and that we would wait until a government was in place before we would move forward with more significant support. We're still in that transition period, essentially, and are waiting for this government. That said, we're hoping that there will be a government soon. So there is work being done behind the scenes to make sure that things are moving forward.

As for the MINUSTAH, I just want to clarify that there is this rumour that we will take on MINUSTAH. Minister Dion has been very clear about that: we are not going to take command of the MINUSTAH.

Hon. Peter Kent: That's an absolute? In his answers to us, he said no decisions had been made.

Ms. Isabelle Bérard: Well....

Hon. Peter Kent: If I could come back to Honduras, in those post-coup years, Canada did work fairly diligently in a variety of ways to bolster the justice system, encouraging successive governments to respond to human rights issues. Is there any leverage at all in the way that countries of focus receive their aid for us to redirect, in mid-course, our aid from areas that are proving to be less effective? Do the predictability and the commitment to longer term development handcuff you for a period of time before you can respond, for example, to the human rights problems we see today?

● (1625)

Ms. Isabelle Bérard: Within a country such as Honduras....?

Hon. Peter Kent: Yes.

Ms. Isabelle Bérard: First, in terms of leverage, I must say that because Honduras is a country of focus and we are recognized as an important actor, we are a member of what we call the "G-16", the 16 donors that are involved there. We are actually chairing the committee. We do have leverage and influence on what's going on within the international community. It allows us to strengthen our policy dialogue with the government, because we can come up with a line of consistent messaging. We are pushing very much in that direction to deal with human rights issues.

In terms of our ability to redirect our aid, it varies from one country to the next. It all depends on the space we have in our budget. If we do have some space, we can shift and start transitioning to a different sector. In some other instances, it might be a little more difficult. That said, if you know there is a strong desire to shift from one very specific area to the next, there are always options to say, "Well, we'll review our portfolio and see if there's room to do different things."

The Chair: We'll now go to Mr. Saini, please.

Mr. Raj Saini (Kitchener Centre, Lib.): I have one question. I understand that Canada wants to focus on specific countries, but are we collaborating with any international partners to make sure that the aid is used effectively? The reason I ask is that rather than creating countries that become aid darlings or aid orphans, do we have some collaborative approach to make sure that the money we're investing has some objective without reducing, or diminishing, or over-spending in certain countries?

Ms. Deirdre Kent: That is central for all donors. There's a high expectation of taxpayers in donor countries that the aid is effective and that works for the recipient countries as well as the contributing countries. There are mechanisms in place. Isabelle mentioned donor coordination groups, for example, at the country level, so if there are issues, you have mechanisms to deal with them. There are rigorous mechanisms in place in Global Affairs through our evaluations, but also at the multilateral level, where we are a part of the boards of directors of multilateral organizations to ensure the effective use of funds at that level. There are also organizations like the OECD Development Assistance Committee, where you're looking at the broad approaches, and the Paris principles of what makes aid effective, where it's country led, where there's predictability, and where there's transparency. Those are some of the principles and evidence that we'll want to be using as we're looking at renewing and reshaping Canada's international assistance.

Mr. Raj Saini: I have a second question. You mentioned the sustainable development goals. Some of those goals emerge from the millennium development goals, one of which was that poverty should be halved by 2015. Now we have a more ambitious target that poverty should be eradicated by 2030. I'm wondering what metric are we are going to use, or what criteria are we going to have to make sure that we contribute to the eradication of poverty by 2030? My only scepticism is that we couldn't cut it in half by 2015, yet in the next 14 years we want to eradicate it totally. What metric and programming do we have to achieve that objective?

Ms. Deirdre Kent: The 2030 agenda for sustainable development goals is an incredibly ambitious target in aiming for the complete eradication of poverty. One of the interesting aspects is that, like the millennium development goals, there are specific targets and specific indicators behind all of the goals. We will be able to measure if we are meeting those goals. There will a tracking and a reporting system that is now being developed through the UN. So there will be regular progress reports and reporting back from all countries in that context. There was real progress made under the millennium development goals, and some of those goals were met, but as you pointed out, they weren't all met.

In terms of Canada's approach to implementing the sustainable development goals, that will be central to the review. The review of international assistance will allow us to look at how should we be implementing the goals by speaking to other donors, hearing from Canadians, and hearing from civil society organizations and donor countries about what is the right way to implement the goals by playing to Canada's value-added.

● (1630)

Mr. Raj Saini: The second part of that question, and the reason I asked it, was about our Canadian bilateral aid to those countries of focus that was supposed to be 80%, but in 2010 it was 47%, and in 2011 it was 39%. It actually went down. I'm wondering if you can you give us an idea why we were unable to achieve the 80% mark of the money that we were going to spend in those countries of focus.

Ms. Deirdre Kent: I'd need to get back to you. I'm not sure about those statistics; they're not familiar to me.

Mr. Raj Saini: That's okay.

The Chair: This is the last question.

Mr. Raj Saini: In terms of aid programming and developmental focus, there were certain instances where certain countries were on a list, then they were taken off a list, and then they were put back on a list. I can give you two examples. Benin and Burkina Faso were put on a list in 2005. They were taken of the list, and they were put on the list again.

I'm just wondering if there is any way we can have some consistency going forward. Do you think that's important in certain fragile states, to have the programming stabilized so that going forward, those countries can have a certain ability to achieve the objectives we want to help them achieve?

Ms. Deirdre Kent: Yes. As you say, a degree of predictability and sustained presence is important. I'll also say that our bilateral development assistance is one of our tools in some of these countries. In our conversations with the governments of those countries we can actually point to significant Canadian programming through Canadian NGOs, international NGOs, multilateral banks, and UN organizations.

Perhaps I'll do a little plug here for the report that comes from the ODAAA, the official development assistance report. It's a statistical report. It actually shows the full footprint of Canada's international assistance by country. You'll see there are countries that are not countries of focus or partner countries where we can actually have a significant impact and investment through these other channels. You can't look at the one channel in isolation.

The Chair: I'm going to have to leave it there, colleagues.

I want to take this opportunity to thank the officials from Foreign Affairs.

Just to remind colleagues, these are the first witnesses of our study. I'm sure we'll have an opportunity to talk to some of the officials again as we work our way through this. I just want to give the officials the understanding that we may be writing you to ask some questions that we will be looking for some answers to.

On behalf of the committee, I want to thank you for your presentation.

There were very good questions.

We'll take a two-minute break—and I mean two minutes—and then we'll go straight to our next witnesses.

● (1630)

(Pause)

● (1635)

The Chair: Colleagues, we'll bring this meeting back to order.

In our second hour we're going to hear from Mr. Jean Lebel, the president of the International Development Research Centre. Due to our usual struggle with time, we're going to go right to Mr. Lebel, ask him to make his presentation, and go straight to questions from there.

Mr. Lebel, welcome to the committee. We look forward to your presentation.

Mr. Jean Lebel (President, International Development Research Centre (IDRC)): Mr. Chair, thank you very much.

[*Translation*]

Ladies and gentlemen members of the committee, good afternoon.

It is my pleasure to appear before you today on behalf of Canada's International Development Research Centre, better known by its acronym, IDRC. IDRC welcomes the opportunity to participate in the committee's study on countries of focus for Canada's bilateral development assistance, as well as the priority sectoral themes.

[*English*]

Today I will address three main points. The first is focus—both how it and flexibility are important. Second is the impact of our work research that often goes beyond only one country. Third is the power of working thematically across a number of countries.

Before I get into these remarks, however, I thought it might be helpful for me to share some background information about IDRC that is relevant to today's discussion.

[*Translation*]

IDRC was founded as a crown corporation in 1970 through the International Development Research Centre Act. This legislation directs IDRC “to initiate, encourage, support and conduct research into the problems of the development regions of the world and into the means for applying and adapting scientific, technical and other knowledge to the economic and social advancement of those regions.”

● (1640)

[*English*]

IDRC's value proposition, when it comes to Canada's international development mandate, is multi-faceted and is founded on the knowledge and networks of our expert staff, achieving impacts of scale, and building the self-reliance of countries. It is also founded on our accountability to Parliament, to our board, and to our donor partners. We have been an asset for Canada's broader foreign affairs family through our 46 years of supporting innovative research, and through our engagement with a large global network of actors that helps Canada deliver on its international development priority at the same time as it builds important relationships for Canada.

What do we do? Very simply, we provide funds to research institutions driving global change. Our grantees are problem-solvers. Our model of working with them is a theme-based approach. In particular, we focus on three problematic areas: agriculture and environment, inclusive economies, and technology and innovation. Within these three areas we have a number of programs, all of which are aligned with Canadian government priorities, as well as the needs of developing countries.

[*Translation*]

In short, IDRC invests in knowledge, innovation, and solutions to improve lives and livelihoods in the developing world.

[*English*]

Let me now turn to the three points I introduced a moment ago.

First is the question of the focus of our work and where to work. Let's take the Ebola crisis as an example. West Africa experienced, as we all know, the largest-ever Ebola outbreak in 2014-15, mainly in Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Guinea. Canadian partners, including IDRC, were at the forefront of developing and running trials of the Canadian Ebola vaccine that saved lives and helped stop the spread of the disease. That is a major success story.

However, the less-told story is the extent to which weak health systems are at the core of why these outbreaks become crises in the first place. We see this through our approach to working on topics collaboratively and across countries. In the late nineties we funded research and capacity-building at the Lacor Hospital in northern Uganda in the region of Gulu, when an Ebola outbreak happened in 2000. These investments meant that health care workers knew exactly what to do when an outbreak of unknown origin happened. The response was driven by local teams and was extremely effective, limiting the outbreak to barely more than 400 persons.

It is important to be in the right place at the right time. But it is also important to take into consideration the long-term investment in research that doesn't deliver instantaneously. We cannot only answer crises; we also need to prevent them through long-term investment.

Second, the result of science and research extends beyond the borders of a country. When Canada, the United States, and Mexico agreed to eliminate DDT, a toxic chemical insecticide used to combat malaria, that was in the context of the ratification of the parallel agreement of the North American Free Trade Agreement. It was very easy for Canada and the U.S. since we had not used the toxic chemical for years, but Mexico was still using it to control malaria, so they faced the greatest challenge.

We worked with the Mexican government at that time to develop a new approach that could be used to control malaria without DDT. The approach was so effective in Mexico, limiting the cases to almost zero, that it was and is now being applied in many other countries in Central America. This example is an illustration of how a solution developed in one place can be replicated across many countries.

Third, I would like to share with you the power of working on a theme across a number of countries simultaneously.

● (1645)

[*Translation*]

For example, the Canadian International Food Security Research Fund is an initiative launched in 2009 by IDRC and the department that has now become Global Affairs Canada. The fund has so far supported 39 projects between Canada and developing country institutions in 24 countries to improve food security. That initiative does not target any particular country, but recognizes the importance of flexibility in research.

[*English*]

So far, the research projects supported by this fund have benefited more than 383,000 farmers in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Caribbean. Examples of the more than 130 innovations that have been tested include a five-disease-in-one vaccine for livestock that allows farmers to protect their livestock affordably without vaccines that need a cold chain and booster shots. It was very effective.

This program is also supporting researchers who are improving the resilience and nutritional content of pulse crops that include lentils, beans, and chickpeas, which are affordable, nutritious, and a high source of protein for populations across the developing world.

These three points that I made demonstrate IDRC's systematic approach providing the opportunity for a research-focused organization to focus its efforts and also to remain flexible within the mandate on which we are delivering.

I would like to conclude with three brief points about metrics, time, and partnerships.

Metrics allow you to measure performance through the life of a project when initiatives produce not only an outcome but also early and intermediate outcomes. It's important that when we give money, we don't wait a decade before a result happens, even when it's researched and takes time. We have a duty to measure ourselves to keep the work on track and also learn how to do course corrections and adjust.

Second, it takes time for long-term investment to pay off. Research can take up to 10 or 15 years. The Ebola vaccine that was developed by our researcher, Gary Kobinger, at the Public Health Agency of Canada in Winnipeg, started about 15 years ago. The success was present in 2015 because this investment was made and was followed through on.

We see the benefit of time in each of the examples I've provided today. DDT is the same. It took 10 years of investment before we came to have Central America free from it.

Food security is an ongoing behaviour. Our model at the IDRC has been proven successful and has attracted many partnerships, which is my third point.

One of the single most powerful demonstrations of this success is that other Canadian and international partners are joining us and empowering our work with funds to deliver on programs that carry with them Canadian values and priorities.

[*Translation*]

In fact, between 2010 and 2015, IDRC supplemented our parliamentary appropriation with more than $350 million from donors including the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, and governments in the U. K., Australia and Norway.

In conclusion, I believe that IDRC's experience across program areas and priority countries positions it to be an effective tool for the Canadian government. Our model is both effective and adaptable, and we look forward to helping the Canadian government deliver on its international development mandate.

Honourable members of the committee, I hope you have found these remarks informative. We have made available copies of our Strategic Plan 2015-2020 for your reference.

[*English*]

This strategic plan is not a glossy brochure; it's not the short summary. It is the strategic plan of IDRC that talks about knowledge and innovation solutions that measure impact at scale, support leadership of youth and established researchers, and work in partnership on substance and on funding.

I thank you for your attention and for having given IDRC and myself the opportunity to speak today. I will be more than happy to answer your questions.

Thank you very much.

● (1650)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Lebel. It's much appreciated.

Now we'll go right to questions, and I understand Mr. Allison will start.

Mr. Dean Allison: In my experience with IDRC over the years, you guys are one of the best-kept secrets we have in Canada. I'm glad you're here today to tell us a bit more about what you do, as we look at development and the various issues. Your organization plays a very strategic role, from what I've heard over the years.

I only have a couple of questions for you.

You talk about partnerships and you talk about agriculture—all these things. I know you're at arm's length, that you're a crown corporation, but do you work with Global Affairs in any way in trying to figure out priorities and what countries you would look at in terms of countries?

Related to that, how do you go about picking your projects, as to where you go and whom you're going to work with, whether it's partnering with the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation or partnering with governments?

For my second question, I want to focus more on agriculture. You gave us a couple of examples. Tell us about some of the success you've had, in Africa or wherever it might be, and about some of the long-term effects of what you have done on the ground to make a difference in people's lives there. Pick a country, pick a particular story, anything that sticks out in your mind that's anecdotal in nature, for us.

Mr. Jean Lebel: In terms of your first point about working with Global Affairs Canada and our development priorities, this is an ongoing process. I would say that over the last five years, it has increased dramatically. I would qualify the relationship with Global Affairs as being at a peak in our history. Over the last four years, there has been a crescendo of collaboration. We also have a better common understanding of our role, which is a best-kept secret, and of our delivery to help the Canadian government, whichever one it is, to achieve its objectives.

It's an ongoing conversation. Our problem areas—agriculture is one—cover food security, climate change, and emerging and re-emerging disease. There is a very important relationship with the environment. With this flexible approach we can take on things that the government wants to do, while staying at the forefront of research in places where government might not be. For example, the Zika virus is something we are talking about a lot these days. We have made international investments in a number of research teams working on emerging and re-emerging disease.

Yesterday, Minister Bibeau and Minister Philpott announced a $5-million program on Zika research. What is it? We are calling on the best minds in developing regions and in Canada to work together to find solutions that can be applied, not only in one country but in one, two, or three regions. Zika is now a global problem.

As to our partnering priorities, our rationale is sound and easy to grasp. Is the partner like-minded with us? Are we going to distract ourselves and do ambulance chasing, or are we going to contribute to our core programming and our lawful mandate? If it is not a good fit, we don't do it. How do we test this? We don't do partnerships if we don't invest money allocated to us by Parliament. If a staff member has a great idea and wants a partner for it, and you ask that staff member how much money she is willing to put in from the budget, you get a strong signal about the value of the partnership.

If IDRC people are not interested in investing in the partnership, we don't do it. I can tell you, though, that in the last five years we have fundraised $350 million. That's a 1:3 or 1:4 ratio in the leveraging effect, based on the parliamentary allocation we receive on a yearly basis. In the next five years, we hope to reach $450 million. This we will use to promote Canadian values, while growing the pie to have a larger impact in the field.

Turning to agriculture, small millet in India is a hard-grained cereal. A simple dehulling machine has been developed to provide a better return on the sale of this grain. When it's purified, it gets four times the price of the unpurified grain. You need to dehull, take the hull out from the grain. A simple machine developed by a university in India, together with several Canadian universities—McGill, Mennonite University in Manitoba—has improved this process at low cost and has made it extremely powerful.

Not only that, small millet contains as much protein as wheat and maize together and is resistant to heat and flooding. It was forgotten in India, however, during the grain revolution and the concentration on major crops. Now, thanks to the research done by India and Canada, small millet has been reintroduced in India. In fact, the Indian government is putting money into research in order to expand this crop across the country. This is an illustration of our research work in an area that, years ago, was not seen as a priority, but now, after 10 years of research, is paying off.

● (1655)

The Chair: We'll go to Mr. Sidhu.

Mr. Jati Sidhu (Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Lebel, for being here. It's quite impressive, raising $350 million.

How many years did it take to raise that kind of money? Do you do this on an annual basis?

Mr. Jean Lebel: The $350 million was over the last five years, from 2010 to 2015.

Mr. Jati Sidhu: Still, that's a lot. I applaud that.

Mr. Jean Lebel: Thank you very much.

Mr. Jati Sidhu: You did mention in your statement that in your arena, it's a long-term investment. So I am wondering, did this announcement of the countries of focus for Canada's bilateral development assistance affect IDRC's international assistance programming? If it did, how?

Mr. Jean Lebel: Well, directly, it did not, because by our mandate, by our strategies, by the guidance of our board of governors, we have always remained thematically focused, because in research, as I demonstrated, one solution found somewhere can help another country somewhere else.

Research is really about solving problems, so we have to look at our approach as thematically driven, giving us the opportunity to work with countries where there is capacity, or with countries where we need to develop capacity. Through that networking, we can cross over with a focused approach, like the one that Global Affairs Canada has been developing.

Overall, I would say that IDRC programming overlaps with countries of focus for a third of its programming that is launched in a single country. But globally we have a huge amount of activity that covers multiple countries, and then we grow the pie. So it's not for us to say which country to work in or not to work in. Our approach is to say: is there a problem in your country? And if there is one, what would you like to do in order to solve it, and how can we help you to solve this problem? If the solution that is found in your country works, we will put you in a network with someone elsewhere in order to replicate or adjust this finding.

● (1700)

Mr. Jati Sidhu: I'm pretty sure you answered the next question I have.

Can Canada's bilateral international assistance be concentrated in a selected number of countries? You said a country has to come forward and ask for help, so how does Canada decide to focus on certain countries?

Mr. Jean Lebel: That's not a question that I can easily answer. Your previous witness could provide a better answer.

I think that when it comes to our approach, our decisions are made on what capacity is present, what is the fit of the requests with our thematic focus, and how the delivery of the research product will make a change in the country.

We don't have a country approach; we are driven thematically. Globally, I would say that historically and still, about 50% of our funding goes to sub-Saharan African countries; 20% goes to Asia; 20% goes to Latin America; and about 10% goes to the Middle East and North Africa. There is always a bit of fluctuation, but these are the broad parameters we have been following for numbers of years and they seem to be working.

The Chair: A short question by Mr. Levitt, please.

Mr. Michael Levitt: I think this is a short question, but maybe I'll ask you to keep it short.

What are Canada's comparative advantages in terms of international development assistance, and how can we best leverage those? Maybe, again, try to be short. It seemed short in my head.

Mr. Jean Lebel: I'll try to be short in my answer also, Mr. Levitt.

In the type of programming area we have, agriculture and the environment, inclusive economies, and technology and innovation are all illustrations of the Canadian know-how that has been present for a number of years.

For agriculture, we tend not to remember that Canada is a very strong agricultural country. The relationship we have internationally for research and development is huge. For this program that I was mentioning to you, there are Canadian institutions across the country with expertise that they are using with their colleagues in developing regions, and on an on par basis. It is not Canada dominating the other; it's really equal footing. Sometimes there might be a little tip of the balance. To go to the first point on your question, the Canadian presence on issues related to food security and environment matters is recognized worldwide in a number of agencies.

Second, the previous witness was mentioning maternal and newborn child health. Definitively, it was a massive investment that took place, but also, research on emerging threats and emerging diseases is an often-forgotten Canadian brand that is recognized worldwide. I was mentioning the work of Gary Kobinger. I can tell you that he is known across the world for having put this vaccine together.

Less known is the work of Canada that touches on economic policy development. In a number of situations, Canada has brought innovation to the forefront in terms of economic and financial mechanisms. We only have to think about the crisis of 2008 and our banking system. It's also an area of work where we have a number of think tanks. I think, for example, of CIGI in Waterloo, the Centre for International Governance Innovation. Over the years, it has developed a very strong capacity in financial aspects.

Science and technology is the last aspect. I'll give you an example. A few years ago, through a state visit, I was accompanying the Governor General of Canada, the Honourable David Johnston. People started to ask me how IDRC could help them to create institutions that would provide funding in their country to their researchers on thematics that we would define. Originally, we started working with 26 countries in Africa to define the types of institutions that they would like. When I presented this to some colleagues at the international level, they thought we were crazy, and that in some contexts those countries don't have the capacity to do these types of things.

We now have a $15-million program that is reinforcing the capacity of these granting councils, like those we have in Canada, to meet the challenge of the 21st century, which is, how can a national country provide small funding in order to enhance the capacity of its students—for example, at the master's or Ph.D. levels—to deliver research results that will help policy, help academia, and help business?

We strongly believe that in the next 10 years this is going to be an area that will take on a lot of importance, because the growth in many of these countries is at 6%, 7%, and 8%, and there is a desire to participate worldwide in the development of research in order to meet the challenge of the 21st century nationally or internationally.

● (1705)

The Chair: Now we're going to Mr. Aubin, please.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Aubin: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Lebel, thank you for being here with us this afternoon and sharing not only your expertise, but especially your passion, which is very clear to us.

The study we are doing targets the countries of focus. Correct me if I am mistaken, but according to your presentation, you accept the prioritization of a certain number of countries, while stating that that is not the only way and opening the door to the importance of greater flexibility and a thematic approach.

Does your organization find it difficult to work on the ground in regions where Canada's funding is weaker, that is to say in the regions or countries that are not targeted? Does that make your work more difficult?

Mr. Jean Lebel: That is a very good question, Mr. Aubin. Thank you.

I also want to thank you for what you said about the passion I feel for my work. Sometimes people tell me that I have a bit too much. After 30 years at IDRC, I still feel the same passion as I did when I arrived there. I think it is important.

I will now answer your question.

I said in my introduction that it is necessary to have specific objectives, but that flexibility is also needed. I'll give you an example. During the democratic transition in South Africa, the Canadian government donated $10 million to IDRC to develop research that would make it possible to avoid a bloodbath during the first elections and the formation of a democratic government. We funded research on science, the reform of institutions, parliamentary processes and on participation in initiatives such as urban development and water management. It was a very focused approach. Aside from the development of policies and practices, this approach meant that when Nelson Mandela formed his first cabinet, more than half of the ministers received or had already received funds from IDRC, Canadian assistance. It was a focused approach that met a need at a specific moment in time, and it is important to maintain that way of doing things.

However, regarding flexibility, I want to go back to what I was saying about agricultural research. When we launched that program with the Canadian government, we had $124 million in total. We put out a call for proposals in 58 countries, I believe, and 24 of them now participate in the program. It is competitive and based on quality. It allows us to use a thematic research approach whereby tests conducted currently in South Africa, Canada and Kenya on cattle vaccination have allowed us not only to work on that solution, but also to attract the attention of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation as well as that of the Canadian government. We now have a dedicated $65-million cattle vaccination program which was announced a while ago.

On the ground...

Mr. Robert Aubin: Please conclude quickly, because I have other questions.

Mr. Jean Lebel: On the ground, our people stay in constant contact with the missions, whether it is a country of focus mission or not. Often, in the course of missions in non-priority countries, we are welcomed with open arms, because we offer an example of what Canada can do in these countries. So that is an added value.

Mr. Robert Aubin: Thank you.

I have a second question.

I am thinking of this old saying: “It is better to teach a hungry man to fish rather than to give him a fish”. It always concerns me to see that international development is perceived as something that takes place between the north and the south.

Will your flexible or thematic approach, once established, make it possible for south-south international development to take place, that is to say can the countries we provide assistance to in their turn become development leaders? Does a thematic approach make that more achievable than an approach that targets certain countries?

● (1710)

Mr. Jean Lebel: I can't really say if that can be made more achievable, but I can say that it has been done. Since I am before a Canadian audience, I spoke about relationships with the Canadian government, but the fact is that our work is also based on the development of research on south-south development work, as well as south-north projects. I did my doctoral work on mercury contamination in the Amazon. Sometimes we have mercury contamination problems right here, and my work is also useful to Canadians who are doing similar research.

I have another example. There is at this time an organization in Chile, known as the RIMISP, which does research on rural and territorial development. That organization is at the cutting edge of research, so much so that it works with the Columbian government to help plan future rural development in Columbia, in the context of the peace process that is going on there. Chileans are providing information to Columbians. They did the same thing in Mexico for the territorial development policy the Mexican government funded by providing $100 million recently.

Those are some examples of south-south development, and the IDRC was instrumental in this through initial investments it provided to a Chilean organization.

Mr. Robert Aubin: Thank you.

I think my time is up.

[*English*]

The Chair: A short one, if you like.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Aubin: No, that's fine.

[*English*]

The Chair: All right.

Mr. Fragiskatos.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos (London North Centre, Lib.): Mr. Lebel, I want your opinion on this. In development policy in Canada, not to mention most other democratic states for that matter, there's always been tension between, on the one hand, the promotion of what would normally be considered development goals, poverty alleviation and the like, and on the other hand the desire to promote Canadian interests. Could you talk about that tension and how you understand it, and about any advice you have to policy-makers on how to deal with that issue?

Mr. Jean Lebel: Development goals are evolving. I started working in the field of international development 25 years ago and we were talking about health for all and the decade of water. Then afterwards we went to the millennium development goals, and we are now talking about sustainable development goals. So development goals are evolving. I think what is important is to monitor and keep track of the commitment but also the delivery and to make sure we finish one agenda before we open another one.

Right now with the SDGs and 17 goals and 187 targets, I think we have a lot of work ahead of us. The challenge is how much money do we have in order to achieve those goals and how are we going to monitor ourselves against those goals? That's one question. It will always be an evolving story. Our thematic area represents cross-cuts that can take research and inform multiple aspects of those development goals.

The second dimension is the tension between the Canadian enterprise and development, if I am hearing you well.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: I think you are hearing me well, but just to underline it, it's this notion that if Canada is putting in *x* number of dollars, then Canada ought to benefit in some way economically and otherwise. What do you think about that whole discussion and dialogue?

Mr. Jean Lebel: I don't know. I can tell you about IDRC experience. The experience has often been that at the end of the day, IDRC investment without any Canadian involvement has paid off for Canada.

Let's take the example I gave to Mr. Aubin regarding our participation in South Africa's transition to a democratic regime. There was no Canadian technology involved in this; there was no manufacturing. For a very lay person, I think it makes a difference when half the cabinet has received funding throughout its career from Canadian sources in order to accomplish research work.

I think there are opportunities that we are working on to have Canadians with know-how, expertise, technical capacity, and even innovation that can get translated in a context. The Canadian vaccine for ebola is a perfect example. It's a vaccine that was created for the global greater good. It's very difficult to make money from these vaccines. I think for Canada it's remarkable that we have been supporting this for over 15 years and that we have done the trials and we, along with many others, have stopped the spread of the disease thanks to WHO, Médecins Sans Frontières, and others.

● (1715)

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Thank you very much for speaking about that. I think it's something that Canadian policy-makers, regardless of party stripe, have to deal with and look at. It's been an ongoing debate really since the 1960s in this country.

Chair, do I have a couple more minutes?

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: I'm interested in the example that you gave about DDT in Mexico. We've heard in this committee, and there is an ongoing discussion within the development community as well, that as far as health aid goes, failing to engage governments on the ground, governments in power in states where the health crisis happens to be taking place, can actually take away from their legitimacy. You understand the point. You follow the point. If you're not working with them, that can seriously undermine their legitimacy.

I want to hear this from you: when you encounter health crises, which your organization gets involved with, and the government in power happens to have corruption issues, accountability issues, or transparency issues, how do you navigate that terrain? Is it a matter of dealing specifically with the NGOs that are there? How do you overcome that issue?

Mr. Jean Lebel: That's a very interesting question.

First of all, I think you have to know that for IDRC, having staff on the ground for over 46 years and being in contact with people is the first line of defence.

Second, we do institutionally, as many other institutions do, a very firm and thorough internal review before engaging with a partner in a country about their capacity to manage the funds. If they don't have it—not because of reasons of corruption, but it's weak—then we're going to reinforce that as part of the research process.

Thirdly, the moment we smell something that is wrong we can stop the funding. But in 46 years I think that it has been extremely rare that the IDRC has done this. We have also assessed our programming externally through the Office of the Auditor General, and in 46 years we have always had, and I touch wood, a clean slate vis-à-vis a special examination or our annual review of financials.

There is a strong accountability that comes with the expertise of the staff. It's not only about the money and giving the money, it's about following and tracking that the money is used for the purpose that it was established within the research context. That's how we have done it over the last 46 years.

The Chair: That's the end of the first round. We'll go to the second round.

Mr. Saini, please.

Mr. Raj Saini: Being a pharmacist I want to talk to you more about the Ebola vaccine, because it took 15 years to develop, like you said, and many medications take many years with a lot of investment to be developed.

I think that as Canadians we want to make sure that our policies are not changed every time there is a change in government. We want some longevity. I think we can all agree on that. So how do we do that? How do make sure that our policies are consistent over the long term? How do we support organizations and what should we be doing?

Mr. Jean Lebel: Invest more in the IDRC. No, I'm just joking.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Jean Lebel: It is important that we maintain continuity. That's definitive.

However, if you we were to look at the history of IDRC over the last 46 years, there are four common threads: agriculture, health, economy, and science.

If I look at the policy of the Canadian government over the last 15 years, food security and agriculture has been there and health in various forms has also been there. I think the thematic focus is not necessarily challenging, but what is more challenging is the continuity. In my business, if we are not working on long term we're dead.

We have to make the case all the time to our shareholders, to you in Parliament and other Canadians, and worldwide, that an investment in research may not pay now, but it might pay in a few years down the road and it may also have an impact that is not foreseen.

This Ebola vaccine, when it was tested in Guinea, the Guineans didn't want to be told by Canadians and westerners what to do. They brought in a team from Mali and by pure coincidence this team from Mali was trained by an IDRC grant, a Canadian government grant, on HIV vaccine trials. So the Malians were teaching the Guineans how to do it and the Guineans were successful in this ring vaccination process. That's an illustration of continuity.

● (1720)

Mr. Raj Saini: That leads to the second part of my question, because my colleague here mentioned government buy-in.

When you talk about states, especially in post-conflict states, say you go into a state that has emerged from civil war or some sort of conflict and you build a hospital, like you talked in your opening remarks. When you go there and you're going to build this hospital, you obviously need buy-in from the local population. We know that in the past sometimes when the good deeds of others.... When I talk about polio eradication, there was some hesitation in certain societies to allow people to come into to administer the polio vaccine.

So now if the Government of Canada were to invest in IDRC—let's just go with your theme—how would you do that?

You're going into, typically as a foreigner, a post-conflict state and you want to do something good in this regard. You want to build a hospital and to provide those essential services—not dramatic services but essential services. If you're in a small town, and maybe in a larger urban area you wouldn't have that problem, but in a small town or small village what kind of mechanism do you have?

You talked about Mali, but that can't always be the circumstance.

Mr. Jean Lebel: Mr. Saini, it's an excellent question and something I should bring to the forefront of the committee.

First, IDRC is providing support to researchers and institutions primarily in the countries where the problems are taking place. We are not on the ground putting our hands in the dirt; they are.

Second, if the environment is not conducive to research, we're sorry, but we don't do research. There are contexts where we are unable to send a researcher into the field, because it's too dangerous, and there are risks.

Third, when it comes with a roadblock that is not affecting security but is more the result of a mental mindset, like vaccination, then we can carry research that explains why we have those roadblocks. Then, with our research team supported by IDRC, we can find solutions to avoid this roadblock becoming a definitive roadblock to a vaccination problem, for example.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Lebel. You have my support for more resources.

Mr. Jean Lebel: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Saini, for that recommendation.

I'll go to Mr. Genuis, please.

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Lebel, I want to ask for your thoughts on an area of particular interest to me, and that's the relationship between aid and human rights, and especially the human rights of persecuted minorities in other countries.

I'll put a few questions out there, and you could share your thoughts on them. How much should we be thinking about human rights when we're allocating aid? What is the effect of Canadian aid on human rights situations in different countries? In particular, how can we make sure that aid gets to religious and ethnic minorities who may be persecuted in the country where they're in and may not be favoured in the allocation of different kinds of support?

Mr. Jean Lebel: I can talk to you about IDRC programming. I will not have the factual information from the Government of Canada. What I can tell you is that in our context, we are facing and have programming that covers topics like governance and justice.

Let's take a situation like Guatemala, where we are in a post-conflict situation, and there have been repercussions on a numbers of groups, such as indigenous communities. We have funded research to ensure that the voices of these people are heard and that a reconciliation process is driven forward. This is an illustration at the heart of our preoccupation with the values of the country, which are also transmitted with the type of work we are supporting.

Are we limited with whom we can work in terms of religious or ethnic groups? No, it's research. Often in the research, we are interested in what goes on at the margins, rather than what goes in the middle. In French, we say,

● (1725)

[*Translation*]

“the margin holds the page”.

[*English*]

Often in the margin, this is where you have the side notes, where you have the interesting idea and where you have the research. We need to look at these side notes and margins in order to change the core and make progress.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: You mentioned Guatemala, and our study, of course, is on Canada's countries of focus. Pakistan was a country that was on our countries of focus list, and then it was taken off that list. I wonder if you have done much work in Pakistan, and if you have thoughts on how our aid and the removal of Pakistan as a county of focus might impact positively or negatively the human rights situation, and how aid interacts with human rights considerations in Pakistan, in particular.

Mr. Jean Lebel: I cannot comment specifically on Pakistan, because it's a country that I have never visited. I know we have been doing programming there. The more fundamental point I think you're asking about, which is similar to the one that was asked earlier, is the continuity. That's where IDRC, because of its mandate, its status, and its way of operating, is a tool for the Canadian government to do things that could not be done in other circumstances.

The countries of focus list changes and it's normal, because there are operational conditions, and there is a political dimension. There are a bunch of things. Our small organization is able to carry on over the long term in one country, and in one region, work that goes beyond a short-term agenda. That's how we have built, over 46 years, networks that are deeply routed in the realities of the countries, and which are benefiting all of us over here when a problem arises.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Perhaps you can comment on the following as well. We heard in the last panel about the criteria for selecting countries. There's the interaction between need and capacity to benefit and, of course, there may be cases where there are countries with great need, but for whatever reason they don't have the capacity to benefit, or we don't have the ability to effectively address those situations. What are the factors that inform capacity to benefit? What are the things that might prevent a country from having the capacity to benefit from our aid, versus factors that might make them more likely to be able to benefit from our aid?

Mr. Jean Lebel: That's a big question. If I had an answer to capacity-building and resolution—again, from my experience at IDRC and the experience of my staff.... The importance of research is that the same time you're providing a research capacity, you are producing an outcome that will serve the development of the country. Often we are getting into a dichotomy: is this producing an impact, or is this building research capacity or capacity generally? For us, it's two faces of the same coin, because by tackling a problem, by giving the tools to people, by helping them to find a solution to the problem, you are building their capacity. Often if there is a particular witness, we're going to bring people who have lived similar situations and can inform the capacity-building. However, I'm not sure if I am answering your question.

● (1730)

Mr. Garnett Genuis: I think you made some great points, though, about what we can do to inform capacity-building. My question was a bit different in its emphasis on how we assess whether or not a country is well positioned to benefit from our aid or not.

Mr. Jean Lebel: That's difficult for me to answer because we are working thematically, so when we get a proposal from a country, we see already if they have the tools to do the research. If they don't, we are going to work with them to reach that point, but broadly speaking, at the national level, I don't have an answer for you. I don't know if my colleagues do. No.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: No problem. Thank you.

The Chair: I want to thank Mr. Lebel for his presentation and members for your great questions this afternoon.

This will conclude our meeting and our first go-around on the countries of focus. Next week stay tuned for more witnesses and the continuation of our very large initiative to try to get a sense of Canada's abilities to deal with poverty, climate change, and all of the issues that we spoke about today.

Mr. Lebel, thank you very much for your presentation.

This meeting is adjourned.