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Chair

The Honourable Robert Nault

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● (1545)

[*English*]

The Chair (Hon. Robert Nault (Kenora, Lib.)): I call the meeting to order.

I apologize to our witnesses for the late start. There were lots of votes today

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), we are studying the Canadian government's countries of focus for bilateral development assistance.

Colleagues, today we have World Vision Canada, CARE Canada, and UNICEF Canada.

For the record, give your name and title, and then we'll start with the presentations.

We'll start with Carleen.

Ms. Carleen McGuinty (Deputy Director, International Policy and Programs, UNICEF Canada): Good afternoon. My name is Carleen McGuinty. I'm with UNICEF Canada. I'm deputy director of international policy and programs.

Mr. Santiago Alba-Corral (Senior Director, International Development, CARE Canada): Good afternoon. My name is Santiago Alba. I am with CARE Canada. I'm the senior director of international development.

Mr. Shaughn McArthur (Advocacy and Government Relations Advisor, International Programs, CARE Canada): Good afternoon. I am Shaughn McArthur, with CARE Canada, advocacy and government relations adviser.

Mr. Jamie McIntosh (Vice-President, Programs and Policy, World Vision Canada): Good afternoon. I am Jamie McIntosh, vice-president of programs and policy, World Vision Canada.

Ms. Rachel Logel Carmichael (Team Leader, Programs and Policy, World Vision Canada): Good afternoon. I am Rachel Logel Carmichael. I'm a team leader for the international programs team.

The Chair: Thank you.

I understand that World Vision Canada will start first.

Mr. Jamie McIntosh: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Good afternoon, everyone.

[*Translation*]

I would like to thank the committee for inviting us to appear before you today.

World Vision is a child-focused, Christian relief, development and advocacy organization, working in nearly 100 countries around the world.

[*English*]

We work in the world's toughest places, actively supporting and empowering communities to take control of their own futures by overcoming poverty, injustice, and fragility.

We're pleased to share our thoughts on the committee's study on countries of focus for Canada's bilateral development assistance. We understand that the committee is looking to address a number of issues during the course of this study. For our time this afternoon, we'd like to focus on how Canada's international assistance framework can effectively address the circumstances facing the least developed countries.

Let me start with an evident acknowledgement: the world is rapidly changing. Conflict, violence, inequalities, climate change, and the mass displacement of people have changed the way we look at poverty and development and challenge us to find new ways of working.

The UN refugee agency states that globally, one in every 122 humans is now either a refugee, internally displaced, or seeking asylum. If this were the population of a country, it would be the world's 24th largest. It's realities like this that strengthen our resolve to collectively envision and work with urgency toward a new reality, one in which poverty, hunger, and preventable deaths are eradicated, a world in which no one is left behind.

What will it take to get there? We must adapt our approaches and make them fit for purpose. World Vision itself is in the process of evolving its own efforts and its own approaches. We are increasingly working in fragile contexts—building resilience and sustainability, empowering citizens to hold their governments accountable, and investing in innovative partnerships. We know that there is immense opportunity before us.

In order to take advantage of these opportunities, we believe Canada can review its international assistance and design a framework that is focused on the poorest and most vulnerable in the world's toughest places, one that responds to evolving context by defining adaptable approaches. These principles have implications regarding both where and how we must focus our efforts, which I would like to unpack for you this afternoon.

Canada is a country known for upholding human rights and empowering the most disadvantaged around the world. While we've seen tremendous progress with the millennium development goals, the impact has been uneven among countries, and even within them. We need, then, to ask, who has been left behind, where they are, and how we reach them.

Let's start first with who has been left behind. They are the unregistered—children who are not officially acknowledged at birth; the missed—mothers and newborns who die in childbirth; the isolated—indigenous children and ethnic minorities living in remote rural areas and urban slums. They are the untraced—child labourers and trafficked children; the neglected—orphaned and homeless ones; the unclaimed—refugees, the stateless, and the internally displaced. Most fundamentally, they are women and girls. It is critical that we identify these individuals and keep them front and centre as we walk through these specific considerations.

Now that we've identified who these individuals are, let's focus on where we might find them.

The majority of these individuals are in places where the burden of instability, poverty, hunger and mortality are the highest, yet where the biggest gains are to be made: in fragile contexts and where pockets of fragility exist. These are the places where there is conflict and violence, widespread violations of human rights, limited access to justice and rule of law, where there is economic instability and a lower capacity to adapt to shocks and stress, and where the government may be unwilling or unable to meet the needs of all or some of its residents.

In the next decade, some of the world's most acutely vulnerable people will be living in fragile and conflict-afflicted cities and states. While we may think of traditional places like Afghanistan, South Sudan, and Somalia, they also include places like Mali, Honduras, and Nepal. For example, while Honduras and El Salvador are not traditionally known as fragile, violence in urban settings has had an adverse affect on society and its development, including things such as youth employment.

● (1550)

In World Vision's community development program, we're addressing the root causes of violence through investing in rehabilitation, diversion, and skills training initiatives with youth in or affected by gang violence.

Our experience in such a fragile context has shown us that significant progress is possible, so our focus should be where the risks are higher but the potential gains greater.

This brings us to recommendations about how Canada's international assistance should be designed to best reach the regions of the poorest and most vulnerable in these contexts.

In order to effectively undertake the exercise of country prioritization, we recommend that Canada not only look at countries as a whole but also recognize that pockets of vulnerability exist within countries and across regions. This should be done in coordination, of course, with the international donor community.

Let's illustrate with the examples of Jordan and Lebanon.

Jordan has been prioritized for development and humanitarian support largely as a result of its alignment to donor values, legitimacy of government, and relative stability as compared with others in the region. Canada's bilateral support to Jordan has been highly influential in ensuring effective policy development to support the growing number of refugees, including supporting refugees' ability to enter the labour market and the education sector's ability to accommodate Syrian children.

Lebanon, on the other hand, is potentially on the brink of significant escalation of conflict that will destabilize the entire region even further. In part because of poor governance and limited bilateral investment, Lebanon has been unable to effectively manage the significant influx of refugees.

While priority countries have allowed for predictability of support and reduced aid fragmentation, there needs to be a mechanism in place that allows for the nimble shifting of resources regionally, as the burden of other countries can often overwhelm priority countries.

Additionally, we recommend that once the country prioritization has been determined, an adaptive approach to bilateral development assistance be put in place. This is to ensure that country strategies and programs are responsive to who the most vulnerable populations are, wherever they may be, recognizing the kaleidoscopic, evolving context that we've described here today.

One of the challenges with the current approach to funding of the government's bilateral development programs is that it does not enable partners to use funding to adapt to changes in rapidly evolving contexts. For example, the way World Vision's own community development program model addresses this challenge is to immediately allocate 20% of private development funding to prevention and response. Repurposing such funds allows us to address emerging situations, as was the case with an unfolding food crisis in the Sahel in 2012, or currently in southern Africa with the impact of El Niño.

What would be most effective at an institutional level is an approach that sees improved cross-departmental collaboration and analysis, working together with national governments, regional bodies, and Canadian civil society to effectively respond to and prioritize these changing situations, ombined with multi-year strategic efforts, such as block grants that allow for community-led response to fluid contexts.

Such measures allow us to protect development gains, bridge the relief development divide, and transition emergency responses to recovery as soon as appropriate and possible.

In closing, we see a clear opportunity for the government to direct its focus, based on these principles, towards ensuring that we reach the unregistered, the missed, the isolated, the untraced, the neglected, the unclaimed, especially women and girls—those who are the poorest and most vulnerable in the world's toughest places.

Thank you for inviting us to be here today and for including our field-informed perspective in this important study. We look forward to your questions.

● (1555)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. McIntosh.

Now we'll go to Mr. McArthur and Mr. Alba-Corral.

Mr. Santiago Alba-Corral: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CARE Canada is pleased to appear before this committee for its study on countries of focus and thematic priorities for Canada's bilateral development assistance. It's timely for a number of reasons.

Seven years have passed since the Government of Canada selected its first 20 countries in 2009, and the list has undergone a number of changes.

In 2014 it was expanded to include 25 countries.

In 2015 the Sendai framework for disaster risk reduction articulated a new plan to help communities recover from disasters.

Months later, a new global framework for international development was adopted in the form of Agenda 2030 and the sustainable development goals. Last December, the Paris agreement promised to help developing countries adapt to the effects of climate change.

Amid these changes, the geography of poverty has continued to shift. Inequality within nations has risen, erratic weather patterns have grown more frequent and severe, and crises have grown more numerous and protracted.

Today, as Canada sets out to review the framework of its international development policy on funding, the time is right to re-evaluate the “countries of focus” approach. Prompted by some of the trends just listed, CARE itself recently undertook a review of our own strategy for eliminating poverty and social injustice around the world. Much like the Government of Canada, we were motivated to focus our resources, capacities, and experience for maximum impact.

For CARE, the process began with an understanding that poverty is caused by unequal power relations. Today, 1.2 billion people live in extreme poverty, and the majority of them are women and girls. Addressing gender inequality is therefore critical for making significant impacts on poverty.

We also see one of the greatest inequalities of our times reflected in the causes and consequences of climate change. The world's poorest and most vulnerable are the least responsible for causing climate change, yet they continue to bear the brunt of its impact.

Building on this analysis, CARE provides three ways of addressing the underlying causes of poverty and social injustice: strengthening gender equality and women's voices; promoting inclusive government; and increasing resilience to climate change, conflict, and disasters.

We committed to four specific outcomes by 2020: that 20 million people affected by the humanitarian crisis will receive life-saving humanitarian assistance; that 100 million women and girls will exercise their rights to sexual, reproductive, and maternal health and a life free from violence; that 50 million poor and vulnerable people will increase their food and nutrition security and their resilience to climate change; and that 30 million women will have greater access to and control over economic resources.

These outcome areas share many similarities with the thematic priorities that have guided the Government of Canada's international development efforts in the last years. We are pleased that the themes being prioritized by the present government largely build upon Canada's strengths in these areas.

Determining where to concentrate one's efforts to achieve the greatest impact is another exercise that CARE has recently experienced.

In 2015 we undertook to generate an index for development and humanitarian needs. This required us to develop a set of criteria to determine where needs were greatest with respect to each of our thematic priorities: the percentage and the overall number of people living under the poverty line, the prevalence of maternal mortality and of women's economic inclusion, and so on. Our analysis also took key global indexes and reports into account, such as the Gini inequality index, the global climate change adaptation index, the gender development index, and the index for risk management.

Finally, we considered future needs and risks, including the vulnerability of a country or a region to climate change, the projected conflicts risk, the projected number of people below the poverty line by 2030, etc.

● (1600)

The end result was a tabulation of countries with the greatest needs, categorized under each of the thematic priorities defined in our own program strategy. For instance, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Zambia, and Madagascar topped the list under overall poverty and inequality, while Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Yemen topped the list of countries in need of assistance in areas such as women's economic empowerment.

Many countries, of course, were found in need in several areas. However, critically, our analysis showed that not all development needs are created equal in all countries. Some communities are best assisted through a combination of civil society and institutional capacity-building. Others stand to benefit most from measures to strengthen women's access to safe or dignified jobs. Yet others are better suited to receive support targeting women's access to nutritious food.

The Government of Canada today faces a unique opportunity to undertake a similar analysis to ensure its international assistance is tailored to address the right issues in the right communities for the greatest possible impact. CARE Canada is pleased to present five recommendations to help guide this process:

First, the government should undertake an evaluation of Canada's country-of-focus approach. This should include an assessment of what has worked or not worked since the approach was first adopted in 2009. Has the focus on selected countries truly enhanced the impact and efficiency of Canada's development assistance? Has it improved development outcomes for women and girls in those communities?

Second, the government should ensure that its focus on helping the poorest and most vulnerable people defines how, where, and what type of assistance is delivered. Need, in other words, should not be defined by a country's status as a least developed country. According to the World Bank, 73% of the world's poor live in middle-income countries. People, not countries, should be the targets of Canadian assistance. In CARE's experience, inequality is the lens through which these people are best identified and assisted.

Third, if a country-of-focus approach is retained, the government should be held to account for those commitments. This means developing long-term, 10-year to 15-year strategies for each country in consultation with implementing partners. This should be linked to broader regional strategies and attached to transparent and predictable funding envelopes. They should also be underpinned by robust monitoring and evaluation systems and subject to regular reviews. They should be flexible enough to accommodate changing conditions but rigid enough to follow through on complex change. They should include mechanisms to support emergency preparedness in countries prone to natural disasters or conflict and to redirect resources when disaster strikes.

Fourth, Canada's new international assistance framework should include a mechanism for regular impact monitoring. The broad range of indicators attached to the sustainable development goals provide a ready means to help Canada measure their impact while ensuring alignment with global objectives.

Finally, international development assistance must always be motivated by the interests of the people it aims to serve. The amalgamation of Canada's foreign affairs, international trade, and international development departments creates the conditions for more coherent and efficient engagement in the world. Trade and diplomacy can do much to leverage Canadian advantage and support international development objectives. However, international development itself is undermined if it is seen to support trade and diplomatic outcomes.

With that, I thank you for your attention. I look forward to answering your questions.

● (1605)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Alba-Corral.

Now we'll go to Carleen McGuinty.

Ms. Carleen McGuinty: Honourable members of the committee, thank you so much for having me here today.

As I mentioned before, I'm Carleen McGuinty, the deputy director of international policy and programs at UNICEF Canada.

[*Translation*]

Thank you for inviting UNICEF Canada to speak this afternoon. I will be speaking to you about our perspective on bilateral aid from the government of Canada and about our recommendations regarding your study. I will be focusing on the development of the government's new strategy.

I will be pleased to answer your questions in French, but I will be giving my presentation in English.

[*English*]

Very briefly, UNICEF is the United Nations' children's agency. We're active in 190 countries around the world. UNICEF Canada was established 60 years ago. We work tirelessly in the areas of health, education, protection, emergencies, clean water, nutrition, and the list goes on. We've benefited from a very good and strong partnership with the Government of Canada, and I'm delighted to be here today to share our perspective with you.

I've just returned from Chad. I returned on Friday afternoon. I spent a week there. I want to give you a little bit of a perspective on what I saw. It will inform some of our discussion.

Chad is a fragile state. It is not a country of focus for Canada. It is a member of La Francophonie. It is almost at the very bottom of the human development index. It's at number 184 out of 187. It is completely surrounded by fragile states. It's surrounded by Libya, Sudan, Central African Republic, and Nigeria, to name a few.

It is in a very precarious situation. It also has one of the highest mortality rates for children under five in the world, the third-highest. It has low immunization rates. Child marriage is an issue. The list goes on and on. This is one of the toughest places in the world to be a child or a woman.

I went there to see a vaccination campaign against tetanus. This is a program that the Government of Canada is funding UNICEF Canada to do. We're there with partners. Despite there being very little infrastructure, we've been able to immunize thousands of women against tetanus, which is a killer of their children. It actually kills newborns within a few days of birth if the umbilical cords were cut with unclean instruments.

We are able to vaccinate all these women. The reason we were able to do that is, first, because of the support of the national government. The government has committed to purchasing all vaccine for all immunizations. Second, we were working with a number of partners, including Gavi, the World Health Organization, and local partners on the ground.

What was apparent was that they are also using local innovation. They are using solar-powered energy to make sure these vaccines are cold, so although they don't have a lot of resources, they are using what they have, and that's the sun.

I met some women who were being vaccinated in a very remote area of the country, thousands of kilometres away from the capital. What was apparent was that, yes, they were happy to be vaccinated, happy for the protection, but they kept telling me, “We have no water here”, “We have no schools here”, “Our children have to leave school so they can help me fetch the water”, and “The water we have isn't clean.”

This is just to give you a sense that there are still a lot of very fundamental aspects that have not yet been addressed. We need to continue working in some of these most underserved places and continue to reach the children who are living in these hardest-to-reach places. I think Canada is well positioned to do that.

I want to start by saying that this is an exciting time for Canada to be reviewing its international development assistance. We're in 2016. It's the new era of international development. We have the 2030 agenda for sustainable development. We are now looking at a global agenda for the world. We have progress. We know where we want to go. We have 17 goals and we can work together to achieve them.

I think Canada needs to use the sustainable development goals and this agenda to drive our work and to measure progress. There are 169 targets. We don't have to measure ourselves against all of them, but we can select those where we'll have the most impact and use them to drive Canada's international development assistance and to show progress.

I have to say that Canada really has to be commended for the work that the government did ahead of signing the 2030 agenda for sustainable development to ensure that children were part of these goals. Canada played a leadership role there, and I think we should be very proud of that.

I want to make sure children and youth are at the heart of Canada's international development assistance. They have to be at the heart of delivering the 2030 agenda for sustainable development, and they are the litmus test for the health and future well-being of all our societies.

Currently, securing the future of children and youth is part of Canada's development strategy. That focus needs to continue. Children still suffer disproportionately from poverty.

● (1610)

There is a very strong economic argument to invest in children; there are very strong economic and social returns. Children and young people are not passive recipients of aid; when we invest in their rights, they grow into the people who will change our world for the better.

Also, what UNICEF has realized through our own research is that if we reach the most disadvantaged children first, if we invest in the most disadvantaged children first, this has two key advantages: it allows us to be faster at making progress, and it is more cost-effective than focusing on the easiest-to-reach children.

Canada can't do it all, so how can we make Canada's aid work harder and smarter?

The way we can do that is by focusing on the most underfunded areas of the sustainable development goals. Those are the areas of health and nutrition for children, child protection, quality education, and early childhood development. This isn't just the right thing to do; this is what economists are saying is the right things to do. This is where you get the biggest bang for your buck.

There is the Copenhagen Consensus, which is over 100 peer-reviewed analyses from the world's top economists and sector experts. They have identified 19 of the 169 targets of the SDGs as being the most effective investments, and 13 of those 19 are targets that are focused on children. I would encourage Canada to focus its efforts on these 13 targets.

Furthermore, as I said, Canada can't do it all. Where can we do it?

The number one priority is to focus on the most vulnerable people. Those are children and youth who are living in hard-to-reach areas, and they need our help. They include children who are living in humanitarian emergencies and in fragile settings. We know that cycles of poverty are intergenerational, and they are perpetuated because of the repeated and cumulative effects of crises. If we want to stop these, we need to invest in resilient development. Resilient development means providing children and communities with what they need to better prepare for shocks in the future, to better manage crises, and to recover from these more rapidly. Canada is already investing in some of these areas, and it should continue down that path.

The second priority is to make sure that we are supporting the gains that have been achieved. Between 2015 and 2030, a number of countries are going to move from a low-income to a middle-income status. That doesn't necessarily mean that the government has the capacity to make that transition. We need to continue investing in these countries, making sure we can help them sustain the gains they have made.

We need to leave room for innovation. Canada's aid needs to remain flexible and nimble so that we can invest in those game-changing initiatives for children—for example, clean energy. We know that if kids can have access to safe lighting at home and clean cookstoves, this will change their family's life. They will be healthier, they will be able to do their homework safely, and girls won't be forced to go out to collect firewood and be exposed to exploitation.

Lastly, Canada needs to play to its strengths. We have a comparative advantage in certain areas, including maternal, newborn, and child health; sexual and reproductive health; and climate change.

In the area of maternal, newborn, and child health, we know that Canada is a leader. We need Canada to continue to invest in sustaining these gains. There are still eleven children under the age of five who die every minute. We need Canada to remain focused there.

We also need to make sure that children are healthy and protected from violence. We can't exclude the issue of violence. This is a new area in the sustainable development goals, and Canada has been a leader. If Canada pulls out of this area, we risk losing the gains that were made. In fact, this committee conducted a study in June on the issue of protection of children against violence. I would encourage the committee to look at the recommendations that came out of that study.

Canada has invested heavily in addressing climate change. It is an exciting opportunity and it has a lot of benefits for children. We know that children are the ones who suffer disproportionately from climate change. Investments in clean energy will go a long way, and we are very encouraged by Canada's investments in this area.

That is where I leave it with you. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

Thank you.

● (1615)

The Chair: Thank you very much to UNICEF, CARE Canada, and World Vision.

Colleagues, we will try to make up a little bit of time, but as you know, I am not very good at that. We will probably end up being here a little longer than we normally are. That is probably a good thing, because we have a very good group of people before us.

I will start right off the bat with Mr. Allison.

Mr. Dean Allison (Niagara West, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

To our witnesses, thank you once again for being back before us today.

Ms. McGuinty, I liked the comments you made in terms of targeting our competitive advantage where we've done well, and how we've done that. I noticed you did talk about maternal and child health.

When we look at this study in terms of where we focus, do we expand the list or shorten it? I agree that we should be looking at where we've done well or where Canada can offer its competitive advantage. Do you have any thoughts in terms of whether we should be looking at a more thematic scheme? Should we be looking at areas versus countries?

Obviously, we talk about countries that.... I raised this question with the officials when they were here. You think of Vietnam; it is now a middle-income country, but that doesn't mean they need less help. Could I have your thoughts in terms of whether this is an opportunity for us to expand the list, in realizing that we don't have unlimited resources?

You talked about Gavi and the Global Fund, which are obviously great organizations that do other things in some of these very poor countries as well. I'd like your thoughts on how we focus. What would be your suggestion to us?

Ms. Carleen McGuinty: Thank you for the question, Mr. Allison.

First, at UNICEF we're not advocating for a country-focused approach. We would support a thematic focus.

I think, as I mentioned, areas where Canada already has a competitive advantage would go a long way in making Canada's aid work smarter for our beneficiaries and also for Canadians.

In terms of the thematic focus areas, I would encourage you all to look at the Copenhagen Consensus, which identifies 19 targets that present the biggest impact for a small investment. I think that can really help guide your work.

Also, as we've heard from everyone here on the panel, I think the lesson learned from the millennium development goals is that we left a number of people behind. Therefore, the vision and lens to use is in reaching those who are the hardest to reach, the poorest of the poor. They can be found everywhere. They're not just in low-income or middle-income countries.

You can use different approaches to that. Perhaps Canada's aid will be required more heavily in a low-income country where you can rely on other partners or in building local capacity in other areas. It's not a one-size-fits-all approach. UNICEF certainly uses different approaches. For example, in looking at the capacity of a government, is the government low capacity or high capacity? You work with them accordingly.

You have a formidable challenge ahead of you all. Those are some of my thoughts.

Mr. Dean Allison: Thank you.

I'm going to ask one other question, and then I want to pass it over to Mr. Kent.

Mr. McIntosh, I think you also talked a bit about looking at more regional areas. Do you want to flesh that out a bit? Are you suggesting that maybe it's not countries of focus, per se, but as Ms. McGuinty said, maybe it's a regional focus and we need to look at those issues? I know you were talking about migration and some of these other issues you guys have been working on. Would you just expand on that briefly?

Mr. Jamie McIntosh: Yes.

I think the issue is really to look at the volatile nature of these situations. It really is the case that whether one chooses to do a country prioritization or a thematic or sectoral one, we need to have the highly adaptive ability to say, “Let's be more nimble.” In that, what we were advising is that there could be some regional reallocation as the context changes.

You could look at Ebola. In the Ebola response, if we were prioritizing one country but Ebola broke out in a different country and we didn't rapidly respond, then the cost, the social consequences, and the cost in terms of lives saved or lives lost would certainly compound.

Likewise, we might focus somewhere in Central America and then see what we saw, with Honduras having the highest homicide rate per capita in the region. Now that's being outstripped by the situation in El Salvador.

Having the ability to regionally reallocate is really what we're talking about. Even if we choose some sector, there might be an unknown risk that leaps upon us. We should have the ability to be adaptive midstream.

● (1620)

Hon. Peter Kent (Thornhill, CPC): Thank you very much.

I was impressed by the suggestion of five recommendations with regard to the re-evaluation of countries of focus. My question bears on number two, focusing on need and not least-developed-country ranking, and number four, impact monitoring.

I was taken by the update on your visit to Chad.

Also, I've asked previous witnesses. It's six years after the Haiti earthquake, and billions of dollars were contributed by many countries, with Canada as a lead among the stabilization countries. There is very little to show, in part because of the government's inability to govern.

I'm wondering if this comes to a point of reallocation. What should Canadians be thinking about the development funds we have been spending in Haiti and not spending in Chad? How do we rationalize potential reallocation?

Mr. Santiago Alba-Corral: I think when we talk about evaluation, it's not only to say what we have done but also to see what we have learned from what we have done. I think this is going to be the critical point, because I don't think we can say.... Even before the earthquake, Haiti was already not in a good situation. The reality today is that infant mortality is much lower than it was before the earthquake. There are a lot of things that we have done, and I think the way we can explain this to Canadians is to also understand we are not always going to have the same results in every place we intervene. There will be many aspects that will change the way we measure that level of success.

On the other hand, if we want to be the innovation agency that Canada has been since the beginning of development, innovations sometimes are going to mean that we learn from mistakes. I think we see that from the private sector. Innovation comes from places where you invest, and you can get a major result.

In conclusion, it's both messages, not just in how development works. I think that's a message we have to send to Canadians. Development has worked and keeps working. We are learning to do it better. I think Haiti will be a good example. We must also understand that we cannot spread our very thin resources to every single country. We also need to be able to collaborate with other governments and other donors in how we respond to some needs.

One of the main issues in Haiti was that there was not always strong coordination in how aid was delivered, and maybe that's a lesson. What is the role that Canada wants to play in bringing actors together and reinforcing some of the spaces where those decisions were taken with other donors?

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll go to Mr. Sidhu. We'll get back to this question.

Mr. Jati Sidhu (Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you, panellists. You're doing the best job you can around the world where the help is needed. I thank you for that.

With my background, I need to know how to get the best mileage our of our dollars, so the question is, what are Canada's comparative advantages in relation to international development assistance? In which countries and what sectors is Canada most likely to be able to achieve the best results from its development spending?

Ms. Carleen McGuinty: In terms of Canada's comparative advantage, we have a lot of strengths.

Canada is a Commonwealth country. Canada is a country of the francophonie. Canada is a Pacific nation. We're a member of the UN. There are a number of alliances and relationships we have to draw upon. That's one thing.

Second, I believe Canada has a comparative advantage in the areas of child health, maternal health, newborn health, and now sexual and reproductive health. I think that's something to note.

Third is the area of climate change. I think with the significant investments that Canada has made, we are leading in this area, particularly with the commitment to supporting low-income countries with mitigation and adaptation, and investment to support clean energy.

The fourth area I want to highlight is the protection of children from violence. Canada's officials have spent a lot of time providing technical assistance, creating a draft strategy, and investing in building a child protection system. In the same way that we have a health system, Canada's been investing in creating a protection system to make sure there are focal points for children if they are affected by violence, abuse, or neglect. If Canada pulls out of this area, we risk losing that. Canada is a leader in this area, and I'd love to see Canada continue to invest in that.

● (1625)

Mr. Jati Sidhu: One more question. I'm sure this goes to Mr. McIntosh.

When it comes down to administration costs, there are times Canadians have questions. How do you compare yourselves with other comparable entities when it comes down to administration costs? Where do you sit? If you don't have the numbers, you don't have to answer, but I'm curious.

Mr. Jamie McIntosh: In terms of World Vision Canada's administrative costs, we endeavour to be at about an 80:20 ratio. That's 80% of our resources going toward the program activities and 20% being utilized to ensure we can reach Canadians with the message of need that's out there and advocate about our activities and the effective intervention strategies that we have.

I would say that when we're independently audited, we get significantly high ratings in terms of independent folks who would rank us as well on those sorts of things. As a child-focused organization, we want to ensure we're delivering good value for dollar to these children and we want to optimize the dollars for programs that will impact child well-being, both in terms of actual on-the-ground community development activities and in terms of advocacy efforts that will help leverage national actors to do their duty-bearer responsibilities to ensure child well-being outcomes.

Essentially, we've been tracking over the last five years at about an 80:20 ratio.

Mr. Jati Sidhu: If I have time left, I will share my time.

Mr. Raj Saini (Kitchener Centre, Lib.): Thank you very much for coming here, all of you. Thank you for your commentary.

Ms. McGuinty, I have a quick question for you, since you brought up Chad.

I found it very intriguing that on the 2014 list of countries we're helping, Mali is on the list and South Sudan is on the list, but Chad is not on the list. Then you brought up the millennium development goals, which have now been changed into sustainable development goals.

The MDG goals were that in 2015 poverty would be halved. The sustainable development goal is that by 2030 poverty should be eliminated. If we focus on two countries that are beside a third country, how is that going to resolve itself? What do you suggest?

Ms. Carleen McGuinty: Well, Canada can't be everywhere. It can't be in every country, there's no doubt. We have limited resources.

I think it's about making Canada's limited resources work harder and go farther. What we've learned from the millennium development goals and what UNICEF has learned from our own experience is that if you reach the hardest-to-reach children, the most vulnerable children—those who are living in slums, those who are living in remote rural areas—you can actually reach your targets faster, and it is more cost-effective.

When I presented the example of Chad, I wanted to paint a picture showing that progress is possible with few resources. Chad is not a country of focus for Canada, but with support from Global Affairs Canada—a small amount of money—and with Canadians and with global partners such as the World Health Organization and Gavi, we were still able to roll out a massive vaccination campaign, so progress is possible.

It's about using your money smartly and about capitalizing on local capacity, national government capacity, and these multi-stakeholder partnerships. It's not about one country doing it all or one agency doing it all; it's about a number of partners at the table—the private sector, UN agencies, academics, NGO partners. You need everyone at the table working together in a concerted effort, and that's what the sustainable development goals are all about.

● (1630)

Mr. Raj Saini: Do I have more time?

The Chair: Yes, you have time.

Mr. Raj Saini: Mr. McIntosh, I have a question for you.

Mr. Alba-Corral highlighted some of the criteria that his organization uses to determine which countries of focus they will focus on. Can you kindly give us a highlight or some commentary on what kind of criteria you use, just to give us an informed opinion on what we should perhaps be looking for also?

Mr. Jamie McIntosh: Yes. I'm going to ask my colleague, Rachel, to enumerate a little bit of what we do there and illustrate a little bit our approach that way.

Ms. Rachel Logel Carmichael: At World Vision, we support almost a hundred countries globally, and it is important for us to look at a constant profiling of these countries to understand better the vulnerabilities and what types of challenges they're experiencing.

Within that profiling, then, when we look at a range of countries, from the most fragile to countries that are regarded as emerging markets, we're also looking at a fragility index to see how we would rate fragility for the countries that have particular indicators.

To speak to your question, then, when we're looking at some of these countries in which we want to find out about issues of mortality, malnutrition, access to health care, and prevalence of infectious diseases, we're looking, if these exist within the country, at higher levels of fragility and vulnerability that we need to address.

The Chair: Thank you.

Monsieur Aubin, *s'il vous plaît*.

[*Translation*]

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

Thank you to each and every one of you for being here today. Thank you for sharing your expertise and, above all, for allowing us to truly understand what's happening on the ground. I have six short minutes to speak with you. So, I'm going to provide you with a picture of what I took from your presentations, and then I will ask a few questions. You will decide among yourselves how to allocate the time for your answers.

Our study deals with Canada's approach with respect to countries of focus. None of you criticized the approach vis-à-vis countries of focus, although in a very subtle and diplomatic way, you showed us its shortcomings. The people from World Vision Canada told us about pockets of extreme poverty that they could not help because these were not in a country of focus. There is also a thematic approach that is favoured by UNICEF Canada, for example.

Unfortunately, we learned from our minister, and based on the Prime Minister's approach, that the 0.7% target was too ambitious. It looks as though, in the next few years, we will continue with the same budget envelope, which is the one for international development, of which 90% is committed to countries of focus.

If this approach is not the right one or if it has to be complemented by using new thematic or more regional approaches, how are we going to make the transition? Each of your organizations has also stressed the need for long-term objectives, meaning, that we can't set up in a country for six months and then leave. How would we go about transitioning toward the objectives that you'd like to see Canada achieve based on the list of countries of focus we already have? How would we make that transition, if we need to?

Mr. Santiago Alba-Corral: I will answer in English.

[*English*]

I think you're right. We have not enough resources to go to every country, and we know for a fact that focusing resources normally has a bigger long-term impact.

I think the critical element is how the Canadian agencies are going to balance both. We need to focus in order to not be changing priorities but to be able to invest in long-term plans—those I mentioned, of 10 years or 15 years, because the kinds of changes we want to have are in many cases behavioural changes, changes in capacity of government, of infrastructure, and we cannot do these things in a four-year plan. That's going to be one way.

On the other side, we want to be able to create funding mechanisms with governments and agencies that are also flexible in responding to change.

As an example, CARE is working with the Government of Canada in many areas in Ethiopia. We have a long-term plan in Ethiopia around food security, nutrition, maternal health, microfinance. It's a very comprehensive approach, responding on a five-, six-, seven-year basis in different areas.

We've had El Niño. We've had several droughts, one after the other. We have to have mechanisms such that certain elements of the funding that was planned in a very specific plan can also be allocated for some specific needs in a more humanitarian action that actually is going to build capacity and is going to build the resilience of those communities to continue on their development path.

It is not going to be an easy journey, but it's going to be a journey of balance.

The other piece—I think World Vision was very clear—is the regional approach. Most of the issues that we are facing today are regional. Most of the strategies that most of the agencies are developing are regional—southern Africa, the Sahel, Central America—because the issues are regional. Focusing on one country is not always going to be the best way.

The other piece is going to be how we engage as Canadians with other donors and other governments in our plans and how we have that discussion, which is actually already happening in many places today, on countries and how we talk with the other development agencies to be sure that where the Canadians cannot go, the French, say, can go.

I think these are the three elements that we have to have under consideration to achieve the goals that we want.

● (1635)

Mr. Jamie McIntosh: I think looking at the ecosystem of what different nations within the international development community have to offer and trading off with one another to ensure that we have good coverage are important considerations, .

Some of it is about the kinds of interventions, the kinds of development assistance that you transition to. Even with World Vision's own work, we're looking at certain contexts in which we may have started off with the humanitarian provision of emergency supplies and transitioned over to longer-term development.

Some of those countries that are now nascent or emerging economies were actually able to transition. Instead of doing programmatic things, we've done some system strengthening, and now we're moving to a monitoring and advocacy approach whereby local community actors are able to capture the gains to ensure that children's rights are protected, upheld, and enforced. It may be a light approach rather than a complete divestment—staging this over time, but following that “heat map of need” and looking at the needs of individual human beings caught in these situations wherever they may reside. I think Carleen mentioned it best.

That transition is going to be difficult. It's going to take learning and it's going to take a lot of dialogue and getting some of it wrong while having the courage to say that we have to do things differently, we have to adapt, and we have to do it more rapidly than we have been able to in times past.

Ms. Carleen McGuinty: Do I have a moment?

The one thing I would add to comments that have been made concerns the focus on resilient development.

If Canada moves out of a particular country, it will be important to ensure that the country has the capacity to withstand future shocks. We know that there are climate change disasters, that there is increasing political conflict, and that crises are more protracted, so we need to make sure that they have the capacity to withstand these shocks and rebuild themselves more quickly.

The way that Canada has already been doing this and should continue to do it is to invest in system strengthening. That means investing in the health system and investing in the protection system. If that system is in place, if it can go from the capital and have some sort of outpost that reaches the most remote areas, then we can ensure that communities have a chance and have a system they can count on, and that means that the government is working.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Miller, go ahead, please.

Mr. Marc Miller (Ville-Marie—Le Sud-Ouest—Île-des-Soeurs, Lib.): A number of you spoke directly or indirectly about climate change and how that is making your jobs more challenging and difficult, and you alluded just a few seconds ago to to a requirement for more flexibility. You think of the immediate impact that the droughts have on immigration, conflict, and access to food.

I would like you to touch on that at some length. Develop that theme and describe how Canada can best leverage its assets. Obviously there is some cross-pollination between the Ministry of the Environment, the foreign affairs department, and international aid and some of the challenges you see in your specific jobs in the near future.

Thank you.

● (1640)

Ms. Carleen McGuinty: I'll take the first crack.

What UNICEF has seen is that children are the ones who are most affected by climate change, particularly marginalized children. Their families don't have the capacity to withstand these shocks. Children who are already food-insecure now no longer have access to food. It is too expensive, or the crops have been wiped out. They might be displaced from their families. There are a number of issues that present themselves. We have more communicable diseases, more malaria, and more diarrhea. The impact on children is tremendous.

What we have seen work well is to invest in disaster risk reduction —for example, building disaster-resilient schools. In Bangladesh, for example, with very low cost and local materials, we are investing in an aquifer recharge system, which makes sure that in the coastal area, where they are hit by cyclones.... Now the cyclones are coming back more frequently, and these vulnerable communities didn't have access to potable water. The salt water kept contaminating it. Now we have this recharge system that enables them to keep that potable water despite the cyclones, and they now have access to it regardless of what is happening in the country.

What we want Canada to do with its significant climate change investment is, first, make sure it reaches children. If you are going to be doing some major infrastructure projects and clean energy projects, make sure that children's rights are taken into account. Make sure that these big infrastructure projects are clean energy projects. Make a difference in children's lives. Children are not all living in major urban centres. Perhaps they are living in the slums or perhaps they are living in remote areas. Make sure that they have access to clean energy and safe sources of energy.

Second, make sure you are taking into account the risks that children face with some of these infrastructure projects and clean energy projects. We can displace communities. Make sure that you take their rights into account.

Those are some of the things that Canada could do. I have a paper on that, which I would be happy to share.

Mr. Santiago Alba-Corral: If I can also answer quickly, we had a similar conversation at CARE International, a high discussion, and we came to what we call SuPER food systems. SuPER food systems are sustainable, productive, equitable, and resilient. That is what we are trying to do with intervention.

One of the key elements, of course, is gender inequality. We know that the gender gap in agriculture and food production...we could produce almost 50% more food than we produce today.

We know that climate change is real for more farmers today. We also know that the small farmers are feeding almost 70% of the population of the planet, so any intervention, any support that we provide in that area has to target those elements of food.

The other element is how food is used, the utilization component. We really know, and I think it is clear, that any nutritional program has to target the first 1,000 days, the under-five. This is the area where we are going to have an impact that is going to go beyond the intervention and really cut the cycle of malnutrition and poverty.

Then, working with civil society, we need to strengthen the capacity of civil society to be able to engage with markets, to engage in training and education with their extension services. We cannot be supporting and strengthening the capacity of governments or the ministry of agriculture if we don't work at the same time to strengthen the capacity of the civil society, or we will have what we have in many African countries: a division between where the knowledge is and where the needs happen.

Those are some of the elements. We are happy to share with you some of our SuPER principles, which we have already shared with the Government of Canada.

Mr. Jamie McIntosh: One of the things that we endeavour to do at World Vision is to listen to the communities and see what ideas are being birthed in those contexts and then try to take them and replicate them elsewhere. There are some interesting things that could be considered for investment, things like looking at replacing coal stoves with cookstoves. We have different opportunities to increase the health and livelihood of individuals in their context, where you're addressing the adverse impact of the pollutants that are being released and finding new products in that way.

In one of our communities they've worked on reforestation. They had done reforestation in the past, and then people just came in and stole the trees or harvested them prematurely. What we've seen is that one community resorted to naming the trees after children in the community, and that's helped to create an enhanced sense of ownership and stewardship and has kept a focus on the benefit to future generations. There are some ways that the communities are adapting in their own local context, and we can try to help strengthen them.

Another aspect could be looking at financing so that communities are resilient with the crops that they harvest and are able to hold on to them for longer in order to get them to market in ways that will benefit them economically as well.

These are a few different aspects.

● (1645)

The Chair: Thank you.

That's the end of the first round, colleagues.

Now we'll go to the second round. We'll begin with Mr. Levitt.

Mr. Michael Levitt (York Centre, Lib.): Good afternoon. Thank you for your presentations.

The ultimate goal of Canadian international development is getting the money into the hands of the people or groups who need it most on the ground, but there are many obstacles that can get in the way of that goal, such as civil unrest and conflict in the countries of focus, state corruption, red tape at the NGO level, or a lack of strong local grassroots networks that can get the money into the right hands.

What other challenges are there, and how can we best design this program to overcome some of those challenges?

Mr. Santiago Alba-Corral: Thank you for the question. I think it's a critical question, actually, that we have to look at.

You were mentioning probably four pillars of the main challenge that we all face as agencies and governments. I think it's also an internal challenge to not always be able to clearly predict where the funding is being invested and how it is invested.

When we are talking about needing to have long-term plans and having to be clear about the envelope for funding, that really doesn't help to build the long-term development and sustainability that we want. If we keep moving to more of a project approach, where we fund a small thing here and small thing there, we are going to be excessively splitting up the level of accountability that we have to follow up on.

We have to be able to have a clear investment, a clear plan; that's why the focus has to be about where the investment has to be. It will be easier to minimize some of these issues because we will be able to identify those countries where we are going to focus on how to strengthen transparency and accountability within the government, those countries where we are going to work on strengthening the civil society, or those countries where we can really have a more honest conversation with partners about where their overhead is going, because right now the level of unpredictability that we have in funding mechanisms, I think, hasn't really helped us much.

I hope that answers your question.

Mr. Jamie McIntosh: I think you've enumerated a number of concerns that do soak up a lot of the aid investment dollars.

I think one of the aspects is counterbalances, or checks and balances, in having resources not just go to one level of government or to one NGO or to one multilateral. It helps with some of that. What we should have is a co-operative spirit. Some of those competitive metrics keep us all honest.

What we found is that we are able to work with local community actors. Whether it's at the national level, at a regional level, or a local level, we try to identify the power actors all along the strata who can be influenced to do what's right and to ensure best value for dollar in their community context. As we identify them, they're able to advocate for better impacts for their community.

One of the things we found helpful is something we call Citizen Voice and Action, which empowers local actors. They may say, for example, that they want to ensure better development outcomes in education in their community. The breakdown is that maybe they have teachers and they have books, but the calibre of teaching is not up to snuff or the teachers don't even show up, even though they're paid for.

They are able to band together and advocate with the local government, or even at the national government level, to say these things are not being upheld. It's like giving them a microphone or a megaphone they can use to advocate for those things.

We're trying to do that at different levels. We may identify at one level.... I remember that in China I was approached by a local official who said, “We weren't keen on working with you at first when you came to our community, but we saw your concern, your care, and the impact on children in these communities, and we realize as party officials that we wanted to replicate this in other areas.” That changed it from a combative relationship to a collaborative relationship.

I think stitching that together is one of the ways we can do this. Whether it's an NGO community, government actors, civil society, or faith-based actors, there are different capillaries that can get development into areas to address the real needs of men, women, and children.

● (1650)

Mr. Michael Levitt: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Go ahead, Mr. Genuis, please.

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to all the witnesses for being here.

I'd like to start with a question for the representatives of World Vision.

You talked about a fragility index you have, and within that an assessment of the relative vulnerability of countries.

I've asked a number of witnesses, and I'm curious for your thoughts on how human rights play into that, how that plays into your fragility index, and the situation of religious, ethnic, and linguistic minorities. How does that affect your assessment of the need for aid, and how does that inform the approach you think should be taken uniquely in those situations?

Mr. Jamie McIntosh: I think what is partly being pointed to is the need to be attentive to various aspects of vulnerability and poverty. This is multi-dimensional.

Anywhere there is a marginalization of a particular community—be it an ethnic or a political ideology, or a religious minority—we need to be attentive and sensitive to those fissures and fault lines. Entire communities can be segregated or left out of the development based on, for example, belonging to the wrong ethnic tribe. Those concerns certainly are embedded within the view we need to take.

We want to ensure development assistance is centred on human beings and is stripped away from all of those other trappings. It's about individuals in those communities, so we need to look at those practices that might prey upon someone's difference within those communities and ensure that it is part of the index.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Thank you.

I want to make sure I get at least one more question before my time is up. I'll ask if anybody else on the panel has a comment on how we can be attentive to human rights in general, and minority rights in particular, in the context of our development assistance?

Ms. Carleen McGuinty: I think I would add that those being marginalized are often those who are having their rights violated. Whether they're ethnic minorities, religious minorities, or linguistic minorities, they're often the ones who are at the fringes. They're the ones who require increased assistance.

If we do that, we're able to make gains for entire communities, whether that's here in Canada or elsewhere. It's a principle of working with marginalized communities.

Mr. Santiago Alba-Corral: The only last point will be, I think, that's it's a case of targeting inequality, because even in those cases in which we see injustice towards minorities, we also see that even within these minorities, women are disproportionately affected.

I think the element of inequality should be the one that we look at, because that way we can actually measure any inequality that is going to be measured against human rights.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Thank you very much.

We recently went through hearings for a study on women, peace, and security and heard a little bit about the funding challenges that grassroots organizations on the ground have. The point was made that there are many grassroots organizations located in other countries that are doing very effective work. In that context, it was on women's equality issues.

They had a harder time accessing international funding, especially funding for core activities, and some of the reasons were that there are issues around reporting and complying with accountability standards when you have relatively small organizations dealing with international partners.

I know that all of you represent fairly large international organizations, so I would like to hear your thoughts on working with small, on-the-ground, grassroots organizations and on how we can be more attentive to their funding needs and perhaps to their not being capable of being accountable in quite the same way that a large organization with a larger capacity would be.

Mr. Santiago Alba-Corral: I think I can even speak in the name of the other three organizations.

Even we at the bigger organizations work with the local organizations. The way we engage with partners, the way we work, is that the level of interventions whereby development agencies have been the front line with our own staff is minimal, because there's more capacity in the countries themselves.

The other piece is that part of our job is to build capacity in those organizations so that they can do the job, and not only along the lines of understanding better how to do the job, but to do it up to the standards that taxpayers or agencies are going to ask for.

Today I would say that almost any Canadian organization working overseas is really very engaged in partnerships with local organizations, and if they're not, they should be. Among the things we have to be sure of is that we are not doing it on our own anymore.

● (1655)

The Chair: Thank you.

I'm going to go to Mr. Fragiskatos as our last questioner.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos (London North Centre, Lib.): Thank you very much to all of you for appearing today.

My question builds on what Mr. Aubin asked about.

From you I've heard no clear opposition to the countries of focus approach. There was some concern around its perhaps being more appropriate to focus on a regional basis rather than take a country-specific approach, but even in the commentary on LDCs and middle-income states, the fact that 73% of the world's poor live in middle-income states—

I think 73% was the number that was quoted. Is that correct?

Mr. Santiago Alba-Corral: That's correct.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Okay.

From that, I don't hear, once again, clear opposition to the policy. I assume from this that perhaps you think Canada should continue with the countries of focus approach but that there could be points of reform we could focus on.

Question number one is whether my assumption is correct, and number two is whether each of you could point to—yes, in six minutes—one or two reforms that we could see within the countries of focus approach, since this is a study focusing specifically on that policy.

Ms. Carleen McGuinty: I can start.

UNICEF Canada is not advocating for countries of focus. I'll repeat that: we're not advocating for countries of focus. What we are advocating for is a focus on the most vulnerable people—a thematic focus.

Investing wisely, investing in children—we know that they are the best investment you can make—and investing in the underfunded areas of the sustainable development goals are areas in which I think Canada can look to modify its existing strategy. Canada has already focused on children and youth, so continue that.

Canada needs to be flexible. I think this has come up time and time again here from our colleagues: aid needs to be flexible. Canada needs to be nimble to be able to respond to things such as Ebola, such as the Zika virus, such as the Syrian crisis or the Nigeria-plus conflict, if that blows up.

We need to make sure we have that flexibility so that we can respond to the greatest need and do it in a way that is responsible and isn't just a Band-Aid solution.

Mr. Santiago Alba-Corral: First, I think we are not discussing how humanitarian assistance should be focused, because it shouldn't be focused. Humanitarian assistance is very clear in the way it responds to needs.

When we talk about needing to focus, it's on poor people and not on poor countries. That is going to be one of the elements. Our point is that there is going to be some kind of focus because we cannot go everywhere, but our suggestion is that the focus be around the criteria.

The way the criteria we identified are going to give us some focus is in targeting the inequality of the poorest of the poor and in the way these criteria are going to be aligned with the sustainable development goals we all have agreed to.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Could you touch on those key criteria, for you?

Mr. Santiago Alba-Corral: Well, I can talk about the ones that we are looking at as an agency.

Again, inequality will be one of the most important ones. Looking at an index that measures any kind of inequality will be critical, because we have seen that we are not getting to the level of development that we all envisioned with the millennium development goals. We also know that the more equal the country is, the more developed it's going to be. That will be one element.

Other indicators are going to be very specific or more technical, I think. For instance, looking at malnutrition and looking at maternal mortality provides two critical indicators that are going to tell us a lot about what is going on in a specific country beyond nutrition and the mortality rate.

Another one that I think is critical is climate change, because we are going to be looking now at the long-term plan, and climate change is having an impact in that long term. Looking at what countries, what regions are going to be more affected will be critical, because if we decide to have a plan, we cannot have a plan that is going to change in five years.

The other one has to be criteria that allow us to be flexible, because the reality of the communities we work with and serve is that things change. We cannot be very rigid on that one. I think that one is probably going to be more difficult on the policy side.

● (1700)

Mr. Jamie McIntosh: I'll hand this mostly to my colleague Rachel, but I think one of the realities of this particular piece is that those 73% may be residing in middle-income countries right now. The trend lines are what we need to watch out for, and the volatility is such that some of the things we're listening to right now—Zika or Ebola—are things we really didn't hear much about when the last priorities were set.

I don't want to dodge the question. In a sense we're a little agnostic on the country prioritization matter, as long as there's flexibility in the policy to meet the changing realities affecting human beings writ large in these contexts.

I think Rachel can speak to some of that.

Ms. Rachel Logel Carmichael: One thing we wanted to make clear today is that we should turn on its head the idea of fragility and see, whether in a middle-income or a low-income country, what addressing it means, and see that the way it is going to impact the world, moving forward, is critical.

We spoke today about how violence in countries that we see as middle income is causing mass displacement into other countries. That has an impact when we look beyond these countries that we would perceive as darlings in development. In moving forward and doing great things with the work, we have to see that there are pockets of vulnerability within these countries.

Our recommendation to the Canadian government, as you look at these countries of priority, is to identify who within these various countries, whether or not they're considered middle income or conflict affected, are the most vulnerable, and to target the aid towards those people.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Chair, I have one quick—

The Chair: I don't think so, no.

Thank you very much for that, though, Mr. Fragiskatos. Unfortunately, my job as the chair is sometimes not as enjoyable as it should be.

I want to take this opportunity to thank UNICEF Canada and of course World Vision Canada and CARE Canada for making this presentation.

Here is one question to take away and to come back to us on in writing, if you will.

It's clear, if you take a look at the countries of focus since 2000, that only eight countries have been consistent throughout this last 16 years. What that tells us is that there has been some change, and to go to Mr. Alba-Corral's documenting of our need to look at this more in the long term, I'd be very interested in the approach to this vis-à-vis our having 25 or 40 countries of focus. It seems to me we've been rotating countries as it is, over the last 16 years, because only about eight are consistent from 2000 on.

I want you to think about this because it comes to the issue you've been speaking to, but it also is contrary to your interest in and vision of being flexible and being able to move here, there, and everywhere. There may be a couple of issues or ways we can do this from a funding perspective and from a policy perspective.

I'd be very interested in your comments in writing, if you could, to help the committee with those major issues.

On behalf of the committee, I want to thank you very much. We look forward to hearing from you in the not too distant future.

Colleagues, we're going to take two minutes, and then we're going to go right to our next presenters.

● (1700)

(Pause)

● (1705)

The Chair: Colleagues, please take your seats.

In the second hour we will hear from some individual academics, which is very important to this process as well.

The individuals before you are François Audet, Lauchlan Munro, and Stephen Brown. Mr. Brown is a professor at the School of Political Studies, University of Ottawa; Mr. Munro is the director at the School of International Development and Global Studies at the University of Ottawa; Monsieur Audet is a professor at the School of Management at the Université du Québec à Montréal.

The list shows Mr. Brown first, so Mr. Brown, why don't you start?

[*Translation*]

Dr. Stephen Brown (Professor, School of Political Studies, University of Ottawa, As an Individual): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I am happy to be here today to speak to you about issues related to development assistance from Canada. As the chair, Mr. Nault, said earlier, I am a professor at the University of Ottawa's School of Political Studies. I have been working on development assistance issues for at least two decades, and on Canadian development assistance for about 15 years. It is with pleasure that I will be sharing with you the results of my research and observations in the medium term, not to mention the long term.

I should also mention that I've written a number of publications on development assistance from Canada, including a chapter I sent to the clerk today. I don't know whether it will be possible to provide copies of it to MPs and committee members. I am also co-editor of several books on development assistance, the latest of which will be out in a few weeks. This second edition is entitled *Rethinking Canadian Aid*.

● (1710)

[*English*]

I'll be happy to send copies of the book to each and every one of you, if that would be welcome.

I'm very happy to be talking about the question of focus, because I think it's quite a red herring in foreign aid programs, and not just Canada's. I think there's too much emphasis being put on which countries and which sectors and on the idea that if we just get the countries right and we just get the sectors right, with the themes right, Canada or whatever country we're talking about will have a much more effective aid program.

There's actually no evidence that focusing on a smaller number of countries or themes increases aid effectiveness. I believe my colleague Lauchlan Munro will be talking about that. He has published on this point. He makes a very compelling case.

What I would like to say is that it introduces an element of "flavour of the month". It's not quite "the month", because it usually takes a few years for priorities to change. If we look at the Chrétien government, we see that they actually changed pretty frequently, often every time there was a new minister. A new minister would come in, and agriculture would be put on the list. Then the next minister would come in, and agriculture would come off and children would come on.

Even if we only revise our themes and our countries every few years, this introduces many elements that are actually contrary to aid effectiveness principles. One thing that is pretty obvious would be volatility or unpredictability and the perception that Canada cannot be seen as a reliable partner working with specific countries or working on specific themes.

It can also lead to over-concentration. If we're picking themes that are trendy internationally, then we're following the herd. We're spending money where everybody else is spending money and we're neglecting themes that are neglected by other donors.

In terms of countries, let me illustrate some of the quandary that Canadian aid has been in because of this rotating list.

Burkina Faso and Benin were introduced as countries of focus or development partners, depending on the terminology used at the time. They were added to the list in 2005. They had not previously been on the list. They were added in 2005, removed in 2011, and added again in 2014. I think you can understand that this is not a formula for effective aid or being a reliable partner.

Having a list of countries of focus also constrains us needlessly. It introduces new problems when something happens in a certain country and we don't wish to continue our aid there.

For instance, soon after Burkina Faso was re-added to the list in 2014, there was a coup, and Canada suspended aid. Recently Canada suspended aid to Mozambique, a country of focus, because of corruption; aid was suspended to Mali, a country of focus, because of a coup; and aid was suspended to Haiti, a long-standing country of focus, as well. This introduces a very unhealthy dynamic, if what we care about is aid effectiveness.

To me, the question of focus is mainly one of branding. It's, for one thing, to be able to say that "we"—Canada or the Canadian government, or quite often "we", the political party in power—have this as our branded aid program: this is what we do.

I would say that this is in many ways very limiting. You heard from the previous witnesses about how it constrains countries in terms of lack of flexibility. If Ebola comes up and you're working in one country but not another, this hampers efforts.

The targets of having 75% or 80% or 90% of your bilateral aid focused in one country is not driven by effectiveness; it's driven by the idea that you can say this and it looks good to the Canadian public.

I would abolish the list of countries of focus. I think we should focus on certain types of countries, and I would agree with people from the previous panel who talked about low-income countries and fragile states. It doesn't mean that we should not provide assistance in middle-income countries, but I think our focus, even if we don't name the countries, should be on low-income and fragile states.

If you choose not to follow my advice and want to maintain a list, I have a few recommendations.

One would be to drop Ukraine. Ukraine is not even a developing country, in most people's perspective. It is literally at the border of the European Union, and they are much better equipped to provide assistance. It is also not a country with a lot of absorptive capacity right now, because of great instability and corruption.

Other countries that have made their way onto the list that I don't think should be priorities for Canada, whether they are named or not, would be Colombia, Mongolia, and Peru.

I think we also need to take into account the issue of donors, of donor darlings, and of orphans. We can't just think, in isolation, "What should Canada do?" We need to look at what other countries are doing.

Consider, for instance, Mozambique. Everybody's in Mozambique. Does Canada also need to be in Mozambique? There are some countries, such as the Central African Republic, that were neglected for a long time by all the donors. This had maybe not a direct but at least an indirectly detrimental effect and reinforced instability in that country.

Myanmar is another example. It was added to Canada's list in 2014. I think it's part of a global rush not only to have a presence in Myanmar but also to have access to Myanmar's mineral resources.

I do not think these are good reasons to have these countries as countries of focus.

I'm especially interested, if Canada continues to select countries of focus, in what the criteria will be. Until recently one of the criteria on the Global Affairs website was the country's alignment with Canadian foreign policy. I noticed today that it's no longer there.

I was actually happy to see it was no longer there, because alignment with Canadian foreign policy is not about development; it's about Canada. This can often harm aid effectiveness, and it is not the purpose of foreign aid. Foreign aid is defined by Canadian law to be all about poverty reduction, and the definition of official development assistance agreed to, including by Canada, in the OEDC development assistance committee, DAC, means that it has to be directed towards the welfare of the recipient country.

Now I'd like to talk a little bit about themes. I'm aware that I should probably go too quickly, though the interpreters might not like that, because we're running late and I certainly don't want to steal time from my colleagues.

Regarding themes, again the tendency has been "flavour of the month". As I mentioned before, every time we had a new minister or a new government, we had new themes.

I notice that the instruction I received for the discussion here today —or perhaps it's the mandate for this committee—is to talk about "the sectoral themes that the Canadian government has prioritized, namely food security, sustainable economic growth, and securing the future of children and youth".

I was actually quite surprised by this, because it is my understanding that the Canadian government has already moved on to new themes. I was at a consultation at Global Affairs Canada on Friday, and Ms. Gould, the parliamentary secretary, was there. We were presented with six new themes. I'm interested in hearing from the members of the committee, perhaps after the hearing, to what extent you're examining the old themes, when it seems that the new themes have already been decided.

I have a lot to say about these new themes, but I won't say it now because of time. If you want to ask me a question about these specific themes, I would be very pleased to share my thoughts with you and also some thoughts, from what I've seen, on the consultation process.

One question I have about themes, and I've been following them for the past decade or more, is whether they actually mean anything. Sometimes we have so many themes that you can fit almost anything into them, in which case they don't actually provide any focus at all. In other cases it could be that they do have an influence, but in such a case, it's mainly about branding, about being able to say "this is what we do".

● (1715)

When we had new themes in 2009, we included food security, because that was a hot topic at the time. Now the six new themes don't include food security.

Or do they? When I asked Global Affairs officials about it, they told me how, from these six themes, you could sort of fit food security into three of them. That to me suggested that it's not about actually changing the work but about changing the optics, and I don't think that's a very effective use of anybody's time.

To conclude, I would say that Canada should not focus on specific themes unless we take a global theme, such as poverty reduction, or maybe add inequality, because those are the real purposes of aid. What we do should be focused on reducing and perhaps even eliminating poverty and reducing inequality.

I don't think we can reduce inequality, but that is what's defined in the ODA accountability act.

We should not be entertaining reasons of trade and investment, as has been the case in the past. Reducing the amount of partisan branding of particular themes and countries of focus would create more staying power.

To conclude, to me focus is not the magic bullet. It should not actually be the main topic under discussion, if we want to improve Canadian aid.

If the committee is interested, we can talk about other things that would improve Canadian aid, such as decentralization, empowering people on the ground, or giving decision-making power and spending power to people on the ground who understand what is going on in the country. We heard about the need to be nimble. You cannot be nimble when you're in Ottawa and don't have a strong sense of what's going on on the ground and need 23 signatures and three and a half years to get any new project approved.

I will end there. Thank you very much.

● (1720)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Brown.

Mr. Munro is next.

[*Translation*]

Prof. Lauchlan Munro (Director, School of International Development and Global Studies, University of Ottawa, As an Individual): Thank you, Mr. Chair and members of the committee.

I will be speaking to you in English, but if you'd like to ask me any questions or make any comments in French, it will be my pleasure to respond to you in the official language of your choice.

[*English*]

Countries like Canada provide aid to foreign countries for a variety of reasons. Sometimes we seek to alleviate poverty overseas, sometimes we want to help contribute to some global public good, sometimes we want to win friends and influence people abroad, and sometimes we contribute funding just so that we can have a seat at the table and know what's going on in that part of the world. Overarching all of these objectives is, of course, a concern that public funds should be spent wisely, effectively, and honestly.

Sometimes these various objectives come into conflict with each other. We saw an example of that under the last government, when the policy of focusing our aid on fewer countries in the name of greater aid effectiveness came into conflict with our objective of winning enough friends and influencing people to get them to vote us onto the UN Security Council.

The idea that Canada's aid should be focused on fewer recipient countries is rooted in the objective of aid effectiveness. The idea of greater country focus is, as my colleague Stephen Brown has said, an old one. Indeed, I suspect I was invited here today because over a decade ago I wrote an article on this, and I entitled my article "Focus-pocus?" I have long been, and continue to be, a sceptic on country focus as a way of increasing aid effectiveness.

Focusing aid on fewer countries makes intuitive sense, and that's why the idea became and has stayed popular in policy and media circles. Working in fewer countries means that we have fewer overhead costs for each country program. If we work in fewer countries, we get to know their problems better and can work more effectively with them to solve their problems, or so the argument goes.

Why, then, do I remain a sceptic about the benefits of country focus as a way of increasing the effectiveness of Canada's aid program?

Well, first of all, I know of no evidence whatsoever to prove the assertion that working in fewer countries increases a given aid program's effectiveness—not for Canada, not for any other country. I'm not even aware of any attempt to construct a measure of aid effectiveness for bilateral programs that could then be correlated with a measure of country focus. While country focus may make intuitive sense, the lack of concrete evidence to support the notion is absolutely striking. The idea that aiding fewer countries will make Canada's aid program more effective is faith-based policy-making, not evidence-based policy-making.

The most focused bilateral aid program in the world, as far as I know, is the Belgian development cooperation group. Historically, well over half of Belgium's aid has gone to a single recipient country, the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Without wishing any disrespect to my Belgian friends and colleagues, I know of no one who will tell you that Belgium's is the best bilateral aid program in the world, or even close to it.

If Canada did focus its aid on fewer countries in the name of aid effectiveness, would that be enough? Would Canada's aid suddenly become more effective if we gave it to fewer countries? It might, but if and only if Canada did other things to increase its aid effectiveness.

I have argued before this committee in the past that the first step in aid effectiveness should be a fundamental rethink of the tsunami of bureaucratic rules, oversight, and risk- and results-based management procedures that have engulfed our good public servants in recent years under governments of all political stripes in the name of accountability.

I hasten to add, lest I be accused of being partisan, that I cannot recall any opposition party denouncing this tendency either.

Moreover, the logic of country focus tells us that our bilateral aid program would be more effective because we would be specializing on fewer countries and would get to know these fewer countries better, but that logic, if we really followed it—and we haven't, as my colleague has just shown, with all the flipping in and out of that list—would impel us to redesign Global Affairs Canada's whole system of recruitment, training, career development, and rotation. At the risk of oversimplifying somewhat, our current system values generalists, not country or regional experts. Taking country focus seriously would imply a generation-long attention span by politicians and senior public officials to set a list of focus countries, and then follow that up with a systematic cultivation of deep expertise on individual countries, including fluency in local vernacular languages.

● (1725)

I cannot end without making one final comment on the whole issue of country focus in our bilateral aid program. That comment is to say that country focus is a very 20th century way of looking at things. It assumes that bilateral aid and bilateral co-operation with independent states is at the heart of the aid and international co-operation business. While that might have been the case 30 or 40 years ago, it is no longer the case.

Today the most interesting and important challenges in international development and international co-operation all cross national borders. Climate change; new and emerging diseases like Zika, Ebola and SARS; international peace and security; the fight against transnational organized crime, including terrorism; international financial instability—none of these problems will be solved or even dented by bilateral aid programs. They can only be addressed by international—indeed, global—co-operation.

At the next level down, the more mundane but nonetheless important issues, such as river basin management, the construction of regional infrastructure projects, and the movement of refugees, require transnational networks of projects that are consciously linked and complementary with each other.

Focusing our bilateral program on fewer countries is not inherently a bad idea, but it is no magic bullet and it is an unproven idea; in fact, it's one that's never been tried. Furthermore, and more importantly, we have reason to believe that the frontiers of development co-operation lie elsewhere, in areas where co-operation must be multilateral, not bilateral, and where developing countries must be brought in as equal participants in the search for solutions to problems that are global and networked and beyond the power of any single actor, even the most powerful, to conquer.

[*Translation*]

Thank you for your consideration.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Munro.

We now go to Mr. Audet.

[*Translation*]

Mr. François Audet (Professor, School of Management, Université du Québec à Montréal, As an Individual): Good evening everyone. Thanks for inviting me today.

I'm a professor at UQAM. I head the Canadian Research Institute on Humanitarian Crisis and Aid at the School of Management. However, before becoming an academic, I worked at CARE Canada for a number of years, as well as at the Red Cross. I was a practitioner and now I'm a researcher, which makes me a bit schizophrenic. That said, you need not worry.

[*English*]

I'll do my presentation in French, but as did my colleague, if there's any question in English, I'll be happy to respond.

[*Translation*]

I prepared my allocution trying to answer each of the four questions we were asked. My approach was therefore an academic one. My colleagues have already showed me what was required of us. This is what happens when you are the last one to appear. At least it's reassuring to me because, as scientists, we've arrived at the same conclusions. I will therefore avoid being redundant and and focus my presentation more on the recommendations.

Beyond what my colleagues have said—particularly with regard to inconclusive evidence on sectoral and regional focus —I will say, if I may be so bold, as a former practitioner—and Mr. Brown also noted this—I believe that geographic focus remains, even today, despite everything, a form of consensus that is associated with a way of thinking that is far from scientific, but that still seems absolutely reasonable.

I'd like to pick up on what Mr. Brown was saying about predictability, that is to say, the importance of being predictable. We understand that we're dealing with countries that don't have the ability to draw financial resources from taxes or their taxation systems. It's clear that their funding comes from outside the country. If they can't plan for the long term in developing their own policies, then we become a bad partner. I think that long-term agreements with countries or regions would be the way to go in that regard.

It's already been said, but I'll emphasize again that, for me, the importance that geographic focus can have on building local capacity is the other key element. This means that, within this predictability, it's important that local institutions and governance be able to develop. Unfortunately, we are often faced with extremely deficient and dysfunctional governance at all levels. If we are able to build local governance over time, I think we'll become a better partner.

The second question we were asked was whether Canada should focus its bilateral development assistance on fewer countries. This relates a bit to the first point. I believe that what my colleagues and I have found is a failure that's due to our country's inability to remain focused on specific countries. Rest assured that we're not the only ones.

Today I looked at the most recent statistics. Canada provides bilateral assistance to 130 countries around the world, out of a total of about 198. Ultimately, we're not that far from offering support to the United States. As far as I'm concerned, without getting into too narrow of a focus by country, I believe it is crucial that we dramatically reduce the number of countries with which we have bilateral or multilateral assistance agreements.

I think Canada is a very unique country. Its history, its diaspora, and its bilingualism make it such that we're locked into a number of multilateral and bilateral agreements. In the past, we've seen a good number of politicians, ministers, and governments pressured by requests and demands, which forced us to say yes because we wanted to be a good actor on the international stage. However, I think that in order to do that, we have to learn to say no and to keep focused.

We talked about the negative example of Belgium, and I agree. But, there are still countries that focused on assistance, which yielded more positive results. Take Denmark, for example. Canada could at least use it as a model because it's a good example. Denmark's assistance to Bolivia and Angola, among others, has been quite fruitful, even though there were many difficulties.

The third question we were asked was how Canadian assistance should take into account the varying circumstances in different countries? As we just mentioned, in the aftermath of the major crisis of the Ebola pandemic, with earthquakes, climate change, and the increased presence of ISIS, Canada has no other choice but to incorporate humanitarian assistance and the protection of civilians into its international assistance program.

● (1730)

These major issues, like others that were already mentioned, are not themes centered on specific countries. Rather, they are broader and more long-standing themes in certain regions and that must be analyzed in a scientific manner or, at a minimum, given serious consideration. All of this is aimed at understanding these issues and trying to respond in a general or geographic manner—and not by country—to the great challenges facing humanity today.

I do not share the view of my colleague, Stephen Brown. I think that Canada should withdraw immediately from middle-income countries, starting with Ukraine. It doesn't make us a good donor country. I think that withdrawing from middle-income countries would be a step in the right direction. We could reduce the number of countries of focus and significantly increase Canadian assistance based on the vulnerability of populations rather than on our own business opportunities, as was often the case in the past.

The fourth question is as follows: how can Canada align its bilateral assistance programs with its ongoing commitment to support the implementation of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development? The previous panel of witnesses discussed this a bit. It was interesting. I think it showed that the objectives of the United Nations were completely and practically always unattainable and unrealistic. So what happens is that you fail, change names, and start over again.

Obviously, having the same objectives becomes a kind of roadmap for donor countries to coordinate and harmonize their efforts. Coordination among donor countries is, in my view, one of the crucial issues, beyond even the geographic concentration we should have. My response to this question is that Canada must support this initiative while ensuring it always has added value.

I am getting to the value-added dimensions accompanied by a few recommendations. I will briefly list five.

Indeed, Canada must absolutely avoid the trap of spreading itself too thinly policy-wise. Even if there are howls of protest—as there sometimes are when political decisions are made, and you would know this better than I—I think we should withdraw our financial assistance from middle-income countries in a logical and gradual manner.

We must also ensure that building local capacity and governance is the central driver of all our actions. In fact, in my own writings, and based on my experience, this is certainly where there is the most agreement on effective ways of helping poorer countries free themselves from the grip of poverty. As I understand it, international assistance will have to cease one day because there will be no more poverty. To this end, we must indeed ensure the emancipation of our partners.

More than a cross-cutting theme, Canadian assistance must ensure that all of its methods are directed towards strengthening local institutions. Despite the fact that my former employers were seated at the table a few minutes ago, I note that this may involve funding local organizations without going through Canadian intermediaries. What Mr. Brown was saying earlier is fundamental. We must absolutely keep open the possibility of decentralizing assistance and having decisions made locally. Obviously, local populations and governance structures are in the best position to know how they want to work towards achieving their emancipation.

The third recommendation is aimed at ensuring women are at the heart of development. I won't say much more on the matter because it appears that the current government, particularly Minister Bibeau, already issued a statement on that this week or last week. As far as I'm concerned, I was extremely satisfied to hear that issues of gender equality will be a priority for this government.

The fourth recommendation is to capitalize on the added value Canada and its implementing organizations bring to the table. I'm basically referring to NGOs in the case of bilateral international assistance. In terms of geography, I won't be providing many details. I will do as my colleagues did. If you have any questions, we can discuss them later.

More specifically, we are prisoners of our bilingualism. As a result, dimensions related to West Africa and Haiti obviously have much meaning. The Horn of Africa also has a lot of meaning for English-speaking countries. However, India and Ukraine leave me scratching my head about the kind of expenditures we are making with our tax dollars.

On a thematic level, we quite clearly bring added value to the fields of health, water, and economic development. We need to maintain this important envelope of emergency humanitarian aid, which is an extremely well-built tool in terms of reacting and responding to the multitude of crises confronting humanity right now.

This last point is particularly important to me. I'm convinced that it is also of particular concern to my colleagues. It's the dimension of research and building Canadian capacity. What does this mean? It means that today, Canada's assistance policy depends, in my view, essentially on American and European assistance policies. By “American”, I mean the United States, of course. Why?

● (1735)

Why is that the case? Most humanitarian and development organizations are either American or European, and they themselves depend on external capacities. The development of their own capacities and analytic networks and their current influence on government officials tend to skew somewhat our perception of reality.

Canada must commit, with its community of practice, organizations, and researchers, in other words, with its community as a whole, to strengthening its capacity, and to stronger institutions that are more capable of carrying out research and establishing evidence to help us provide the information you need to make the best possible decisions.

The questions that you are asking today are completely legitimate and necessary. However, as I just mentioned, they are an indicator of the fact that we still have too little information and evidence on the impact of our official development assistance. We need to better understand what works. We need to find better ways of sharing what does not work as a result of our capacities. The assistance field is heavily controlled by NGOs, and the field is obviously strongly linked to consultation. This does not favour openness with regard to lessons learned. Instead, the assistance is presented as a black box, a charity business, and we are not at all up to date on what is being done, in particular in several European countries.

We must demand a better understanding of the problems and failures, because they do exist, to find solutions. Unfortunately, the failures are being hidden and what works well is basically being repeated.

Lastly, I would simply like to mention that Global Affairs Canada is currently providing one million dollars in funding to different think tanks and research centres worldwide, in particular in Europe and the United States, and that no funding is allocated to Canadian research and capacity development organizations. I am thinking of ODI and ALNAP, among others.

The Canadian government has resources. It encourages capacity development outside our country. Obviously, today we have very few resources, with limited research capacity and Canadian organizations that depend on their international networks to develop a Canadian public policy.

I am certain that if we reinvest in our capacities and our community of practice, we could better inform decision-making and possibly present much more satisfactory evidence to the committee.

Thank you.

● (1740)

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Audet, and to all three of you.

We're going to go straight to questions, and we will start with Mr. Allison.

Mr. Dean Allison: Gentlemen, thank you very much for being here. It was great to have a different perspective, and certainly one that will cause us to think a little bit more.

Mr. Brown, I have to go. You said you'd like to talk about the six themes that our country is looking at. Would you care to share those? Can you give us your thoughts on those?

Prof. Stephen Brown: How long do I have?

Mr. Dean Allison: I have six minutes.

Prof. Stephen Brown: Is the committee aware of what these six themes are? No?

Okay, let me read them.

My understanding is partial. I participated in these consultations that were held on Friday. They were aimed at NGOs and consultants in international development.

We were given six themes to discuss, and we broke into groups to discuss each of the six themes.

The first is health and rights of women and children. I noticed that Minister Bibeau was already making announcements and press releases around specifically this wording, so to me it seems as though it has already been adopted.

The second is green economic growth and climate change.

The third is governance, pluralism, diversity, and human rights.

The fourth is peace and security.

The fifth is responding to humanitarian crises.

The sixth is delivering results by promoting innovation and improving effectiveness, transparency, and partnerships. I still have trouble wrapping my head around that one.

Part of my problem is the way this consultation took place. To me, it wasn't really a consultation. It was a sort of stage-managed way of getting us to talk about them, but because we were broken down into groups with each table addressing one of these, there was no space to actually ask why these six themes were chosen, whether these were good ideas, or whether these themes were actually well formulated.

For instance, the first one is health and rights of women and children. My guess is that they took maternal, newborn, and child health—MNCH—which was a Harper government initiative and closely associated with the prime minister, and they wanted to add sexual and reproductive rights, which is something the Liberals had talked about, so they somewhat transformed it: they changed the word “mothers” to “women” and then added on “rights”. However, if we're talking about health and rights of women and children, why just health and rights? Why not also education? What about human rights, which are in number three? Why are women's rights number one and human rights number three? There have been court cases about whether women are people, and I think that's been resolved.

To me there's overlap there. It seems to be... You have to go into the path dependency of this. It wasn't designed to be effective; it was designed to take the old one and rebrand it and add in the thing they wanted.

Responding to humanitarian crises is something that we do. To me, it's an activity; I don't understand how it's a theme. I don't know, to go back to health and rights of women and children, whether it is different from gender equality. Is this an overarching theme, a cross-cutting theme, a separate theme? I'm not sure.

I don't know what the future consultations will look like, but I hope they will involve some space such that people can actually comment on these themes. We were told time and time again that nothing was set in stone, that everything was up for debate, but the way it was organized showed that these six themes were already decided, and off the record, people from Global Affairs Canada said that the minister was very attached to these themes. I don't quite understand what a consultative process is if the decision has already been made.

As I said, I was interested in the fact that food security was no longer there. When I asked about whether that means that Canada is no longer going to work on food security, I was told that it fits in theme number one, because women need good nutrition, especially expectant mothers, and children need nutrition too. I was told that agriculture fits under green economic growth and climate change and that food aid is an important part of responding to humanitarian crises.

That goes back to my previous point: does this make a difference or not? If we're still doing food security and we have now split it among these three themes but are going to keep doing what we're already doing, why does it matter? Why do we need themes? Why do we need to change themes?

If it does make a difference—if we are dropping food security—then can we have a discussion about that?

● (1745)

Mr. Dean Allison: Thank you. How much more time?

The Chair: You have a couple of minutes more.

Mr. Dean Allison: Oh, I do? Okay.

You didn't use the whole six minutes. Thanks, Mr. Brown.

This is to Mr. Munro. You talked a bit about some of the thought processes, whether it was working collaboratively among countries in terms of investments that were important or....

One thing we've talked about is the whole issue of DFIs, the development finance initiatives. Just give some of your comments on that subject. Does it lead into trying to address some of the things that we can deal with now? Are we late to the party? I know we're the last G7 country.... What are your thoughts?

That is going to be a separate study. I get that, but you talked about it in terms of the ability to deal with some of those possible infrastructure needs. Do you see it as a vehicle, or is it something else?

Prof. Lauchlan Munro: I'm not a great expert on DFIs, development finance institutions or initiatives, but let me say this.

Yes, you're correct, sir: Canada is late to the party, in that other people have had such institutions for many decades. The amounts that Canada is putting in are, I believe, a couple of hundred million dollars a year. Compare that to international financial institutions such as the World Bank, which lends $25 billion a year, and then look at the BRICS bank, which is aiming to have a capitalization of, I think, $10 billion U.S. You can imagine the leveraging of loans that you can make from a capitalization of $10 billion.

Ours may be a good initiative—I don't know—but it's small potatoes. It's also hard to do that new initiative and still make the argument that we're focusing even more, because that looks like more spread, not more focus.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Fragiskatos is next, please.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Thanks to all of you for appearing today.

In the previous session with UNICEF, CARE Canada, and World Vision, the last question I wanted to ask got cut off because we didn't have time. It was about the process by which countries have been put on the list of countries of focus and taken off the list. All of this seems very.... It's a mystery.

What have you been able to ascertain—this question is for all of you—in your studies of this process? It seems to me that strategic considerations have been paramount, but could you comment on that?

My second question is for Mr. Munro and Mr. Brown. Both of you have written on the over-concentration of aid being a problem with the countries of focus approach. Could you expand on that and perhaps give examples of over-concentration of aid leading to a quite negative outcome?

Prof. Stephen Brown: I've been setting the various criteria since the international policy statement of the Martin government in 2005. That government and several other iterations started with the top criterion being where aid is needed. The second one was where it can be used the best, the most effectively. Often those first two contradict each other, because the poorest countries often have the least capacity, and those that have a great capacity to use aid need it least. For instance, China would have a great capacity to use aid to reduce poverty, but it is not a country in great need.

Often, there has been a third criterion that muddies the water even further. For the Martin government, it was an opaque World Bank score on institutions. For the last iteration under the Harper government, it was alignment with Canadian foreign policy, which I've already spoken against.

My fundamental reading of this is that these criteria could allow you to include any country that you wanted to include. They provide absolutely no guidance. They can give you some cover to say that it aligns with this one or that one, but the criteria are vague enough that you can use whatever political preference you have, and very often these are very political preferences, no matter how much people might say otherwise.

I talked to the people at CIDA after the international policy statement and that new list of 25 countries and asked if it wasn't going to be just a Liberal initiative, such that when the next government would come in, it would change that list. They said no, no, that it was not partisan at all, that they had consulted widely, that these were the 25 countries, and that everybody agreed on them. Then, four years later, the countries were changed again by a different government.

● (1750)

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Talk about the previous decade and any interviews you've had with NGOs. Under Mr. Harper, were NGOs consulted? You touched on this point, but were you able to find any NGO that was consulted on this question of adding and subtracting from the list?

Prof. Stephen Brown: As far as I know, there weren't consultations, either with NGOs or with the recipient countries themselves.

In 2005, when the new list was announced, a number of African countries that were dropped actually found out from the media, which created a lot of tension and might have contributed to hostility towards Canada's UN Security Council bid. My sense is that this is a very internal process, done at the highest level, and that even employees in what was then CIDA and is now Global Affairs Canada were not involved in this process.

Prof. Lauchlan Munro: Sometimes reality kicks. Correct me if I'm wrong, Stephen, but I think the very first list of focus countries from 2001—

Prof. Stephen Brown: It might have been 2002.

Prof. Lauchlan Munro: Yes, it was 2001 or 2002. It didn't have Iraq or Afghanistan on it.

Then reality kicked in. There were a couple of major wars in those countries, and Canadian aid ramped up. Then, glory be to God, the next iteration of the list included those countries because the aid had happened already. Reality kicked in.

There are other considerations that one has to suspect. Again, there was Ukraine. One has to wonder whether Canadian electoral politics didn't play into that.

● (1755)

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: You thought they did?

Prof. Lauchlan Munro: That's a fact, I think.

To go to your question on over-concentration, sir, my fear isn't so much about over-concentration on a few countries, but there are one or two examples. Mr. Audet has correctly identified Denmark, and I think Norway is another case of a country that has—and they tend to be small countries, and they tend to be donor countries with little or no colonial history—focused on a few countries and a few lines of business.

The Norwegians for a couple of decades became good at peace-building, peace negotiations, and those sorts of things. It was a cross-party consensus. It lasted an awfully long time. It was cultivated by generations of ministers and also helped by a long tradition of coalition governments in those countries. You can make it work. You can make country focus work.

My point is that if you just say, “Here's our list of countries”, and even if you do focus your aid on them—and history suggests Canada makes these lists and then does something different—it's not enough just to give more aid to fewer countries. You have to address the issue of what I call the tsunami of regulations and risk management and rules and regulations. You have to decentralize to the Canadian missions in the field.

A decade ago, it was said the average Dutch ambassador in Africa had a higher spending authority than the Canadian minister for international development. You have to address those issues if your aid is going to be effective in those fewer countries you give your money to. You have to develop deep, long-term knowledge. You have to rotate the staff in Global Affairs Canada so that they spend some time on the West African desk. They're in Burkina Faso for five years and they go to the West Africa desk and they come back to West Africa later. They learn local languages and they develop deep regional or local expertise. I think if you look at the rotation patterns in Global Affairs Canada over the last 20 years, you will see that the deep cultivation of country-based expertise is the exception and not the rule.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: You touched on red tape. Could you send me an article, or send the committee an article, with specific examples, or bring it up in an answer to follow, including remarks, or whatever you want to do?

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Fragiskatos.

I'll go to Mr. Aubin, please.

[*Translation*]

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

Thank you for participating in our work. You did not beat about the bush. Your presentations were very refreshing.

My first question is for Mr. Audet.

Out study is being conducted at a very fast pace. We have only three meetings to meet with witnesses, which means that we cannot invite certain stakeholders from Quebec. I am thinking of the *Association québécoise de la coopération internationale*, among others.

Based on your experience as a practitioner and researcher, is the approach of international aid groups in Quebec different from or similar to the approach of groups in the rest of Canada?

Mr. François Audet: I could say more or less that there are also two solitudes in terms of international cooperation, even within Global Affairs Canada. I am certain that, in this building, the situation is similar. There are networks. The difference is not in the networks but in the systems of values, traditions, and beliefs that vary from region to region in Canada. I believe that Canada's missionary past is widely acknowledged. In some parts of Canada, society has opted for secularism. In other parts, this is not yet the case. This means that the traditions within organizations are different and that our representatives abroad each operate differently.

In the past, we have noted differences in funding for organizations depending on the government and type of organization and depending on whether the organizations were closer to one government than to another. That being said, I believe that this is what creates Canadian diversity and our complementary approach. It also probably explains our diversity. The diversity of our capacities, expertise, and identity in countries around the world is demonstrated in different ways. Here, there are relationships, networks, and diasporas from, as you know, almost every country. I am not an expert in Canadian policy, but I believe that this is why, as soon as we receive requests, they generate interest. We cannot abandon countries in need. We must do something, and this feeling exists everywhere. The means to do so, however, can vary.

I would answer yes to your question. I would like to know the opinion of my colleagues from the other side of the Ottawa river, but I believe that, overall, there are clear distinctions.

Mr. Robert Aubin: Thank you.

My next question is for Mr. Brown.

In your opening remarks, the concept of “flavour of the month” caught my attention. We all understand that this approach is not very positive. You all seem to more or less agree that the bilateral approach is outdated and that we must consider a more multilateral approach.

Can Canada serve as champion and coordinator of multilateral organizations so that each country participating in development—not in a country of focus, but in a country where we would like to become involved—co-operates with the others to solve more problems and to prevent activities from overlapping? Can Canada coordinate an international multilateral program?

Dr. Stephen Brown: Absolutely.

Canada has shown leadership in the past in development assistance matters. For example, it took the lead on gender equality matters and on ways to support NGOs in development assistance programs in the 1970s to 1980s and maybe in the early 1990s. We have seen some withdrawal from multilateral forums in recent years and in the last decade. However, it is entirely possible to restore these institutions and to again show leadership. However, our approach must be different from the way we present our branding. We need to work together more and not expect our partners to act as we do, but listen to them more and work with them.

We must also remember that the attitude toward development assistance in the 21st century has changed. We must stop thinking that because of Canada's expertise and comparative advantage in certain fields, we are obligated to take care of a given need. Development assistance is no longer done this way. It does not involve simply sending Canadians who have expertise in nutrition or in another field to a given country to solve a problem. We must support the priorities of local governments and institutions. Canada signed the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness 15 years ago. We are committed to respecting the priorities of countries, to local ownership, and to aligning our efforts with their priorities. I believe that when we focus too much on our own priorities, we fail to comply with our commitment and with our new way of working together with others.

For example, if we believe that we must work in the immunization and vaccination field, it should not be because Canada has a certain expertise. If we believe that it is important and that there are deficiencies and a need for additional funding, we should not limit our support to this sector when we could, for example, contribute to Gavi or to another institution working in the field. Our view of development is somewhat outdated.

● (1800)

Mr. Robert Aubin: Thank you.

I have a question for Mr. Munro.

I got the sense that you cut your presentation a bit short because of time, but you were doing a great job discussing how to increase Canada's aid effectiveness. Red tape was one of the problems you pointed to. I think we could really achieve savings on the administrative end, potentially freeing up resources to make more international assistance funding available on the ground. I assume you have other ideas on how to improve aid effectiveness with the same budgets.

Prof. Lauchlan Munro: Everyone always looks for a magic bullet, but it doesn't exist. Like my colleague, Mr. Audet, I worked in the the sector, spending a long time over at UNICEF. We were always so glad to come to Ottawa to meet with the people from what used to be known as CIDA. Despite their constantly shifting priorities, there was always room on the list for children's issues. We had to be creative and ever mindful when writing our proposals. Back when I was a senior editor on a four-year UNICEF strategy, I paid close attention to what high-ranking CIDA officials had to say. I made sure to use the right terminology, which I think was social development at the time. We would highlight the fact that social development involved children, as the witness mentioned earlier.

That's how the game is played. Regardless of the priorities that have been set, development officers in their NGOs, in UN or other agencies, have their priorities and mandates. UNICEF will always find a way to align its initiatives with those priorities, whatever they are. The same goes for World Vision and all the others.

The biggest impact of frequently changing priorities, countries of focus, and so forth is the work they generate for the administrative personnel of those agencies. They are forced to exercise more creativity when writing their proposals, reports, and assessments. It's time to find another way to play the development game.

Mr. François Audet: That's the point I wanted to make earlier. It's important for the Canadian government to avoid getting too close to co-operation agencies. The government needs their help, not to mention their existence is essential, but the job of reporting on needs and overseas situations shouldn't be solely up to them. In terms of institutional survival, it's important to keep in mind that these agencies, non-profits though they may be, are still businesses at the end of the day. And that means that the dispersion of aid will always be warranted.

As you know, once jobs are created, they don't go anywhere. It's similar to the situation with Quebec's CEGEPs. It works the same with co-operation agencies. Maintaining a certain measure of diversity is important when collecting information.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Audet.

[*English*]

Mr. Levitt, please.

Mr. Michael Levitt: Thank you.

I actually want to come back to the issue that I was exploring with the previous guest, which was around obstacles, particularly as they relate to delivery and less in terms of domestic policy.

Professor Brown, you talked about reducing and eliminating poverty and reducing inequality, but there are factors like civil unrest and conflict in the countries of focus, as well as state corruption, red tape in NGOs, UN agencies, and things like admin fees and money getting batted around before it actually reaches local networks and local actors that are in a position to make a difference in a very tangible way. If the goal is getting the development dollars where they're needed most, how do we build the system or how do we adapt or modify our system to remove some of these obstacles so that we can more effectively get the money where it needs to go? Do you see this as a problem?

I guess I should have asked that first: do you feel that these obstacles are a problem?

● (1805)

Prof. Stephen Brown: Yes, absolutely, the obstacles are a problem, and there's no easy answer to any of them. When a civil war breaks out, it is going to hamper your aid delivery and it will increase overhead costs.

I think that what happens all too often is that aid effectiveness is not the determining factor in aid programs. Often, these are very political decisions. The largest program the Canadian government has ever had in foreign aid was in Afghanistan, and that was all about security interests. It was about showing to NATO that Canada was a team player.

In many ways, the spending was very misguided, so much of the money was wasted. Our focus in Kandahar was related to the fact that we had Canadian troops there. There was this facile idea that aid would help win hearts and minds.

These considerations are not helpful for aid effectiveness. We need to take into account things like absorptive capacity. I'm in favour of increasing aid budgets, but often we're presented with a false dichotomy, such that it means you're just throwing money out the window or through the door.

I think aid should be smart aid. It should be spent well. This requires a Global Affairs Canada that has staff who are well trained, who know what they're doing, and who, as we've discussed, are decentralized, who have presence on the ground, with decision-making authority, and who can be more nimble.

In one book I edited, there was a chapter by Molly den Heyer, who talked about budget support to the Tanzanian government. They would have a donor meeting, and the U.K. would say it was putting in this amount and the Danes would say they were was putting in that amount. They were doing basket funding that had been negotiated over a long-term period. It was considered the right way to do aid. It was not isolated little projects, but joint support for the Government of Tanzania for.... I can't remember which sector. Perhaps it was education. It was to support the education sector rather than to just build one school in one community. The Canadian representative was not actually able to make any commitment and had to go back to Ottawa.

Canada's representative was the only one at the table who said, “I can't tell you because I need to check first.” Then it turned out that Treasury Board guidelines prohibited Canada from transferring what I think was $10 million to the Government of Tanzania, so Canada gave it to the World Bank, and then the World Bank gave it to the Government of Tanzania. The World Bank charged $1 million, I think, as a fee for carrying out this service, so nothing was gained except by the World Bank. Canada had to go through this red tape and the Government of Tanzania got $1 million less.

The parts of the problem that we can do the most about are the parts that are internal to Canada. The problems abroad, such as corruption, civil strife and so on, are very, very complex. That's where we need well-trained and empowered people who are knowledgeable on the ground, people who can respond to these issues and come up with strategies that are appropriate, people who will not have a cookie cutter approach but will design adaptations to programming.

For instance, if it's no longer a good idea for whatever reason—corruption or something else—to channel money through the government, they would be able refocus and rechannel it through local NGOs, Canadian or other international NGOs, or the UN to continue supporting the people of that country, rather than punishing them because we don't want to support their government.

Mr. Michael Levitt: I've heard the complaint made for a while that one problem with our international development program is that we're constantly chasing the emergencies. You've talked about the trendy cause, or the cause of the day, the month, or the year.

How do we move away from that? How do we start taking a longer-term approach? Is there anything in terms of design that you can think of as a recommendation?

● (1810)

Prof. Stephen Brown: Focus on poverty and political interference.

There were so many decisions made in the past that went into the minister's office, sat there for a year, and then came out changed. For instance, there were recommendations for funding of NGOs. Everybody who knew about the topic and who had studied it—all the people from CIDA and DFAIT, as it was then—said, “This is a great project”. It went to the minister's office. The minister signed off on it and then later inserted a “not”, reversing that decision.

That kind of political interference harms our aid effectiveness, because decisions are being made for political reasons and not for the good that these programs can actually do. Whether it's political preferences, security considerations, or perhaps wanting to favour NGOs from your riding or your home region or something like that, these should not be part of the decision-making process.

Mr. Michael Levitt: Professor Audet, would you comment?

Prof. François Audet: To your two questions, if you asked me if Canadian aid is effective, I would say yes. I think the results of our projects are quite good in general.

However, we have to be realistic as to what aid can really do in any country around the world. It's nothing in comparison to the global economy, and even to the economy of one country, especially for a country like Canada. We have to be careful when we are asking ourselves as a country, as government, whether we are effective, and against what standard, exactly? What are the criteria or the management issues there?

The second thing, and this is clearly an issue all over Canada, is the problem of chasing emergencies. Every country is like that. I think the best way to change that or to modify the pattern of behaviour is the education of the public.

Political interference comes with pressure from the public. If the public understands better what is happening outside our borders, we will be better informed as a society. There will probably be less pressure for a minister or a government to take a decision only because they face microphones every morning, with the media asking what's happening with this earthquake or that emergency.

The better educated the public is about international issues, the better we will be as a country. We had an NGO program ten years ago on public awareness. NGOs in Canada had the mandate to educate the population about international poverty issues, and it has been cut. I think one good investment for our effectiveness is certainly to educate the public in general.

The Chair: Thank you.

I'm going to move to the next questioner.

I'm going to start the second round, and Mr. Miller is going to split his time with Mr. Saini.

Mr. Miller.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marc Miller: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to thank the witnesses for their input.

Mr. Munro, I sense a considerable amount of frustration on your end, and it's clearly justified. As you said, eliminating extreme poverty should be the focus. I was particularly struck by Mr. Brown's remarks and his frustration with the review process. To that, I would say, give it a chance. Our mandate has only just begun, but there is a genuine desire to take action, as well as a significant amount of consultation taking place, particularly within this committee.

I heard a number of practical suggestions. You'll have to forgive me on that front; my father was an academic and I get very frustrated when people don't propose practical solutions to a problem. I've always had that mentality. Please don't take offence because of my bias, but I heard you talk about decentralization and specialization. You touched on increasing funding for eradicating extreme poverty and giving decentralized diplomatic channels an opportunity to get involved. It may also be a good idea to consider funding for diplomats, given that they have an intimate knowledge of the issues on the ground.

Could you elaborate on concrete decisions and measures that could be implemented straightaway or perhaps after a short period of reflection?

You talked about possibly wanting to bask in the glory of donating money. That said, are there other countries doing a better job than we are? Is handing over the money and just letting them do their thing the way to go?

Prof. Lauchlan Munro: As Mr. Audet said, I think we need to be realistic about the impact that the donor country can have and the impact that assistance, in general, can have. Even for those countries that depend the most on official development assistance, it likely represents only 10% of their GDP. Let's be realistic about what assistance can and cannot do.

In addition, I think that where we need to start, in terms of making reforms and cleaning things up, is in our own backyard. Let's do things right. As a G7 country, a member of the OECD, and so forth, we carry a certain amount of sway. We should continue to exercise our influence on international standards. But, if we truly want to improve Canada's aid effectiveness, the way to do that is through measures like the ones my colleague, Stephen Brown, suggested, in other words, by decentralizing and significantly building expertise in regions and theme-based areas of action.

As I mentioned a few moments ago, some administrative reforms need to happen in both the public service and foreign service. That includes putting an end to the practice of rotating workers so frequently. When I worked for UNICEF, during my five years in Zimbabwe, I dealt with three different Canadian counterparts. In Zimbabwe, as in many other countries, it takes a year and a half to get adapted, have people know who you are, and really get a handle on the local situation. Someone does well for a year and, then, gets ready to leave after three. Frankly, it makes no sense. The worker rotation system has to change.

The last thing I would say is that we need to revisit some of the practices in place across the public service. That's an observation that applies not only to the official development assistance program, but also to all programs across the entire public service. I think the results-based management approach taken by the Canadian government for the past 20 or so years hasn't always been suitable for international development projects or a great many Canadian projects. It's a great tool when building a bridge or an airport. It's very effective for projects of that nature. But when you're dealing with a project to promote stronger governance, women's rights, and so forth in other countries, this approach makes things significantly harder. Once again, as I said earlier, it forces government workers to become increasingly creative in their proposals and reports, and that's not necessarily a good thing, in my opinion.

● (1815)

Dr. Stephen Brown: I think there's a growing problem, and it has to do with the focus the government has placed on accountability. People have to be able to say where every single dollar or cent was spent. Development is an area with considerable uncertainty and not just in fragile states. It entails risks, so failures are inevitable. The goal, however, should be to learn from those failures, to admit to them, to study them, and to speak frankly about them. That information shouldn't be confined to a secret report that is kept out of the public domain. We should follow the lead of organizations like DFID in the UK, which subjects its programs to scrutiny through a sort of self-review and opens the door to discussion. It acknowledges its failures and tries to learn from them.

My sense is that, in Canada, there is a fear of admitting that money was wasted. The government goes to great lengths to tout the success of a project or hide the results when it turns out to be a failure. I think this focus on the “flavour of the month” forces public servants to misrepresent the reality somewhat or to reframe what they want to do. For example, if the project seeks to build a school in a certain part of Kenya, they will highlight the fact that the region is home to a major extractive sector in order to draw the attention of a former minister who placed a lot of importance on such considerations.

Even before CIDA merged with the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, I believe it was *The Globe and Mail* that revealed the existence of a report on priority countries. An analysis had been done to determine why we were active in those countries and whether that involvement should continue. A summary had been prepared for each country. In some cases, a good chunk of the text had been blacked out because the information only became available in response to an access to information request. It was not public information. But when the reasons cited for Canada's involvement in the country were not blacked out, in most cases, they revolved around our commercial interests. And that was even before the merger.

Personally, I worry that the merger will make that kind of approach easier. One of the reasons the government gave for the merger was policy consistency. That may sound like a very good thing, but if it really means consistency across policies that favour Canada's commercial interests, then development is going to suffer. That is more or less where the line has been drawn in terms of the current consultation process, and that may also be the case as regards the committee's mandate. You are focusing on development assistance without discussing other sectors or other Canadian government institutions that have an impact on development.

Consider, for instance, the priorities announced last week as part of the consultations. Women's rights, human rights, and peace and security were among those priorities. I have a hard time wrapping my head around the fact that we are focusing on these issues when we have decided to sell weapons to the government of Saudi Arabia, a country that violates both women's and human rights. We are talking about one of the worst authoritarian regimes in the world.

Not only is it very important to think about what development assistance can do, but it's also essential to look beyond that, at the bigger picture, and take into account other areas of activity that Global Affairs Canada and even other departments are engaged in.

● (1820)

[*English*]

The Chair: Colleagues, I'll have to wrap it up here.

This has been very interesting. I think if we had a couple more hours, we could probably sit here for a while to talk about it. It's been refreshing to hear the three of you speak about the issues relating to this study.

I'll let everyone know that we are just in the process of having a discussion about extending the discussion and the study. Simply put, we've found that the time we've allocated will not do justice to this study, so we'll increase the time that we will have.

I want to admit, Mr. Brown and the rest of you, that I'm one of those who think these themes are all just basically laid out so that you can fit any country into them, so it's not as important, at least to me as the chair, as it might be to some.

Take, for example, securing the future of children and youth. I could put every country in the world into that category. I don't think that's the issue so much as the countries and how we would develop a strategy to get some real results on the ground. I think you've helped us with that this afternoon and this evening, and I very much appreciate that.

Thank you very much for coming. We hope we can do this again sometime.

Colleagues, I will now suspend the meeting while we go in camera.

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]