

## **Global Gender Equality and Health Debate on 17 June 2019**

### **Introduction**

On 17 June 2019, the House of Lords is scheduled to debate a motion moved by Baroness Sugg, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State at the Department for International Development, that “that this House takes note of the Women Deliver conference held in Vancouver in June, and the role the United Kingdom plays internationally in promoting global gender equality and sexual and reproductive health and rights”.

The Department for International Development (DFID) has oversight for the UK’s policy on promoting global gender equality and health. This briefing focuses on DFID’s progress implementing several of the UN’s sustainable development goals. It provides an overview of DFID’s global gender equality strategy and its five-year action plan to meet its international women, peace and security commitments. The key information section provides further reading on other UK Government initiatives. The briefing also provides background information on Women Deliver and provides a summary of the themes discussed at the 2019 conference.

### **Women Deliver Conference**

#### ***Background***

Women Deliver describes itself as a “global advocate that champions gender equality and the health and rights of girls and women”.<sup>1</sup> The international organisation operates in numerous networks, partnerships and working groups. These include the UN Population Fund (UNFPA), World Health Organisation (WHO), the World Bank, and UN Women.<sup>2</sup>

Women Deliver also runs a young leaders programme. It provides youth advocates with access to training and resources, as well as platforms for them to share their ideas and experiences. The programme has engaged with around 700 young people under the age of 30, representing more than 120 countries. Women Deliver provides online learning, facilitates networking events and speaking opportunities, and provides financial grants. To date, as part of the programme, Women Deliver has:<sup>3</sup>

- Provided 93 small grants, totalling \$465,000.
- Trained 469 young leaders through digital university. It delivers an online curriculum which focuses on gender equality; sexual reproductive health and rights; communications and media; and grant proposals and financial stewardship. The courses include webinars and tutorials and requires coursework to be completed.
- Hosted 91 workshops that brought together selected participants of the programme to build relationships and networks. Since 2017, Women Deliver has hosted 3 regional workshops.
- Facilitated over 129 speaking engagements in 2018.

## **Women Deliver Conference**

The Women Deliver conference is held every three years. It brings together around 6,000 political leaders, health experts, advocates and other stakeholders.<sup>4</sup> The fifth Women Deliver conference was held in Vancouver, Canada, between 3 and 6 June 2019.<sup>5</sup> The 2019 conference focused on “power, and how it can drive—or hinder—progress and change”.<sup>6</sup>

The conference’s aim was to look at the different issues affecting girls’ and women’s lives, produce solutions, and “drive action”. Health, including maternal, sexual, and reproductive health and rights, was discussed. Other subjects discussed included education; environment; political participation; economic empowerment; gender-based violence; and access to resources.<sup>7</sup> The conference focused on the operation of power at three levels:

- **Individual’s power:** girls’ and women’s individual power, self-esteem and agency and how to strengthen it.
- **Structural power:** systems, barriers, and opportunities for progress in power relations, including political, economic, and social structures.
- **Power of movements:** how to shape opinion and direct collective action for change.

The Canadian Prime Minister, Justin Trudeau, opened the conference on 3 June 2019. He argued that gender equality was under attack and expressed sympathy about “how hard it is to be a feminist on the front-lines”.<sup>8</sup> He highlighted the negative role of social media and suggested that:

Individuals and interest groups are trying to roll-back women’s rights, and politicians are giving into the pressure, shamefully campaigning to undo women’s hard-won victories.<sup>9</sup>

Speaking before the conference, Baroness Sugg, also argued that the world was “witnessing a global roll-back” in women’s rights. She concluded that gender equality was “facing uncertain times”.<sup>10</sup> Baroness Sugg asserted that the UK would continue to advocate women’s rights on the international stage. She stated that the UK would “step up” its work with its partners on gender equality and empowerment for women and girls. She expressed pride that UK aid had helped “millions of women” to access “life-saving” sexual and reproductive health services.

## **UK Initiatives on Global Gender Equality and Health**

### **UN Sustainable Development Goals**

In 2015, UN member states, including the UK, adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 sustainable development goals (SDGs). The goals cover a range of issues. These include: gender equality and empowerment to all women and girls (SDG 5); good health and well-being for all (SDG 3); quality education that is inclusive and equitable (SDG 4); and reduced inequalities within and among countries (SDG 10).<sup>11</sup>

DFID retains policy oversight for the SDGs in the UK. Other government departments are required to embed SDGs in their single departmental plans (SDPs). In March 2017, DFID published [Agenda 2030: The UK Government’s Approach to Delivering the Global Goals for Sustainable Development](#). This set out the Government’s approach and gave examples of how DFID was contributing to the delivery of each of the

goals.<sup>12</sup> In May 2018, the Government published an update on the UK's key targets.<sup>13</sup> DFID said it would:

- Continue to lead global efforts to tackle sexual violence in conflict (contributes to SDG 5).
- Work to end the subjugation and mutilation of women (contributes to SDG 5).
- Continue to place gender equality at the heart of all that the department does (contributes to SDG 5).
- Provide global leadership on girls' education which is key to progress in so many countries (contributes to SDG 4).
- Continue as a global leader on sexual and reproductive health and rights and boost our support for family planning for all who want it (contributes to SDG 5).
- Raise safeguarding standards across the aid and development sector to prevent violence, sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment (contributes to SDG 10).<sup>14</sup>

In July 2019, the UK will present its voluntary national review (VNR) to the UN. This reports progress made on meeting the SDGs at a national and sub-national level.<sup>15</sup> The UK Government has stated that its VNR will consider what programmes and policies are contributing to the SDGs. It will also “take stock” of progress that has been made and will seek to “understand better what more needs to be done”.<sup>16</sup>

In its annual report for 2017–18, DFID states that it has:<sup>17</sup>

- Supported 11.4 million children worldwide to gain a decent education between April 2015 and March 2018.
- Helped 40.3 million people to access sustainable clean water and/or sanitation between April 2015 and March 2018.
- Supported immunisation of approximately 37.4 million children between January 2015 and December 2017.
- Reached 42 million children under 5 years-old, women of childbearing age and adolescent girls through nutrition-relevant programmes from April 2015 to March 2018.
- Supported 14 million women and girls to use modern methods of family planning between April 2017 and March 2018.
- Contributed £4 million [in 2017–18] to the [UN Trust Fund to End Violence Against Women](#), to help increase access to legal assistance and healthcare for survivors of sexual and gender-based violence.

### **Global Gender Equality Strategy**

In March 2018, DFID published its [Strategic Vision for Gender Equality: A Call to Action for Her Potential, Our Future](#).<sup>18</sup> It set out the Government's intention to “step up and deliver results for girls and women, pressing DFID and its partners to take action across the board to make gender equality a reality”.<sup>19</sup> The document presented the Government's priorities on promoting global gender equality for the period between 2018 and 2030. It called for a sustained focus on existing commitments, especially those on conflict and crisis areas. The strategy placed a greater focus on ensuring no girl or woman “is left behind” through setting out a series of commitments. Among these, DFID said it would:<sup>20</sup>

- Continue to integrate gender equality into its policies and programmes.

- Increase collaboration across the UK Government to ensure there is a coordinated approach with diplomacy and investments complementing and reinforcing one another.
- Work to eliminate all forms of violence against women, girls and boys, in peace, conflict and crisis, including: sexual violence; female genital mutilation and cutting; and child, early and forced marriage.
- Continue to support universal sexual and reproductive health and rights. This includes action on sex and relationships education, HIV and other sexually-transmitted infections, family planning, safe abortion, and maternal and new-born health.
- Work to improve learning outcomes for girls: ensure transition to secondary school, training or employment, and keep girls safe from violence in schools. The document stated that DFID would focus on the education of highly marginalised girls, including those affected by conflict and crisis, survivors of violence, girls with disabilities, and those who become pregnant.
- Support girls and women to have better access to jobs in high-growth sectors; improve working conditions; and address gender-specific barriers, including laws and social norms such as the unequal burden of unpaid care work, harassment, violence and discrimination.
- Increase women's participation and leadership in decision-making structures, including in communities, local administrations, national governments and parliaments.
- Protect and empower girls and women in conflict and humanitarian emergencies.
- Build on its obligations under the UK's Gender Equality Act 2014 to consider gender equality at the outset of all development and humanitarian assistance, by improving the delivery and tracking of results for girls and women.
- Invest in data collection, to understand who it reaches and who is left behind—by age, sex and disability.

### ***Conflict, Peace and Security***

In January 2018, the Government published its [UK National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security 2018–2022](#) (NAP). This is a five-year strategy about how the Government will meet its commitments under UN Security Council Resolution 1325 to reduce the impact of conflict on women and girls and to promote their inclusion in conflict resolution.<sup>21</sup> The NAP is the UK's highest-level strategy on gender and conflict. It applies globally and is intended to provide a framework to ensure that the international women, peace and security (WPS) agenda is incorporated into the government's defence, diplomacy and development work.<sup>22</sup> It has seven strategic outcomes areas:

- **Decision-making:** an increase in women's "meaningful" representation and participation in decision making, conflict prevention and peacebuilding.
- **Peacekeeping:** a gender perspective consistently applied in the implementation of international standards and peace operations.
- **Gender-based violence:** increase in the number and scale of interventions.
- **Humanitarian response:** women's and girls' needs are more effectively met by humanitarian actors.
- **Security and justice:** increase in accountability to women and girls, and focus on responding to their needs.
- **Preventing and countering violent extremism:** ensure the participation and leadership of women in developing strategies.

- **UK capabilities:** the UK Government continues to strengthen its capability, processes and leadership to deliver against WPS commitments.<sup>23</sup>

The Government states that the NAP is part of its “wider efforts to ensure that the UK’s foreign policy consciously and consistently delivers for women and girls”.<sup>24</sup> It highlights the work of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office-led preventing sexual violence initiative (PSVI). The PSVI was founded in 2012 by then Foreign Secretary, Lord Hague of Richmond, and UN Special Envoy of the High Commissioner for Refugees, Angelina Jolie. The initiative’s aim is to raise awareness of the extent of sexual violence against women, men, girls and boys in situations of armed conflict and “rally global action to end it”.<sup>25</sup> The first annual report of the current NAP provides a summary of the PSVI’s work:

Since launching the preventing sexual violence in conflict initiative (PSVI) in 2012, the UK has continued to lead global efforts to end the horror of sexual violence in conflict, and 2018 has been no exception. The UK allocated nearly £3.4 million, to tackle sexual violence in conflict in countries such as the Democratic Republic of Congo, Burma, Colombia, and Iraq, and has responded to the Rohingya crisis, where the UK has been one of the largest bilateral donors, contributing £129 million to the humanitarian response. Of the latest £70 million of funding committed to the Rohingya crisis response, up to 18 percent is devoted to rights for refugees including prevention and monitoring of exploitation and abuse, support to survivors of gender-based violence (GBV), and strong safeguarding and referral practices by service providers in camps.<sup>26</sup>

In November 2019, the UK will host an international conference on preventing sexual violence in conflict.<sup>27</sup>

The Independent Commission on Aid Impact (ICAI) scrutinises UK aid spending. It reports to the House of Commons International Development Committee.<sup>28</sup> In its 2016 review of DFID’s work on combatting violence against women and girls (VAWG), ICAI concluded that DFID had made “a strong start in a challenging area”.<sup>29</sup> DFID was awarded a green light. However, ICAI stated that there were still “difficult issues” to resolve about how to “turn a young portfolio into a large-scale, sustained engagement that can deliver transformative impact”. In a follow-up review in 2018, ICAI acknowledged that VAWG remained a priority for DFID.<sup>30</sup> However, it did note that VAWG was “competing with a broader range of priorities” than before. ICAI concluded that while some progress had been made, DFID’s work was “moving slowly”.

## Key Documents

- Women Deliver, ‘[About Us](#)’, accessed 6 June 2019
- Women Deliver 2019 Conference, ‘[Conference Theme](#)’, accessed 5 June 2019
- Department for International Development, ‘[Her Potential, Our Future](#)’, [Baroness Sugg Speech at Women Deliver](#)’, 3 June 2019
- Department for International Development, ‘[Single Departmental Plan](#)’, updated 28 May 2018
- Department for International Development, [Agenda 2030: The UK Government’s Approach to Delivering the Global Goals for Sustainable Development](#), March 2017
- Department for International Development, [Strategic Vision for Gender Equality: A Call to Action for Her Potential, Our Future](#), March 2018

- HM Government, [\*UK National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security 2018–2022\*](#), January 2018
- UKaid, [\*Violence Against Women and Girls: May 2019\*](#), 4 June 2019
- House of Lords Library, [\*International Women’s Day: Steps Being Taken to Press for Gender Equality Globally\*](#), 28 February 2018
- House of Lords Library, [\*International Women’s Day\*](#), 26 February 2019

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- <sup>1</sup> Women Deliver, [‘About Us’](#), accessed 6 June 2019.
- <sup>2</sup> Women Deliver, [‘Catalysing Action’](#), accessed 6 June 2019.
- <sup>3</sup> Women Deliver, [‘Young Leaders Programme’](#), accessed 6 June 2019.
- <sup>4</sup> Women Deliver, [‘Women Deliver 2019 to be Held in Canada’](#), 13 June 2017.
- <sup>5</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>6</sup> Women Deliver 2019 Conference, [‘FAQs’](#), accessed 5 June 2019.
- <sup>7</sup> Women Deliver 2019 Conference, [‘Conference Theme’](#), accessed 5 June 2019.
- <sup>8</sup> Michelle Ghoussoub, [‘Gender Equality is Under Attack’: Justin Trudeau Opens Women Deliver Conference in Vancouver’](#), CBC News, 3 June 2019.
- <sup>9</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>10</sup> Department for International Development, [‘Her Potential, Our Future’, Baroness Sugg Speech at Women Deliver’](#), 3 June 2019.
- <sup>11</sup> Further information on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the SDGs, and how they are being implemented in the UK, can be found in the House of Lords Library Briefing: [UN Sustainable Development Goals: Integration into UK Policy](#), 16 November 2019.
- <sup>12</sup> Department for International Development, [Agenda 2030: The UK Government’s Approach to Delivering the Global Goals for Sustainable Development](#), March 2017.
- <sup>13</sup> Cabinet Office and Department for International Development, [‘Implementing the Sustainable Development Goals’](#), updated May 2018.
- <sup>14</sup> Department for International Development, [‘Single Departmental Plan’](#), updated 28 May 2018.
- <sup>15</sup> United Nations, [Transforming our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#), October 2015, p 38.
- <sup>16</sup> UK Government website, [‘About the Voluntary National Review’](#), accessed 6 June 2019.
- <sup>17</sup> Department for International Development, [Annual Report and Accounts 2017–18](#), July 2018, HC 1215 of session 2017–19, pp 5 and 24; and [‘Single Departmental Plan’](#), updated 28 May 2019.
- <sup>18</sup> Department for International Development, [Strategic Vision for Gender Equality: A Call to Action for Her Potential, Our Future](#), March 2018.
- <sup>19</sup> Department for International Development, [‘DFID Strategic Vision for Gender Equality: Her Potential, Our Future’](#), 7 March 2018.
- <sup>20</sup> Department for International Development, [Strategic Vision for Gender Equality: A Call to Action for Her Potential, Our Future](#), March 2018, pp 13–15.
- <sup>21</sup> HM Government, [UK National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security 2018–2022](#), January 2018. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the Department for International Development and the Ministry of Defence developed the national action plan with support from the Stabilisation Unit.
- <sup>22</sup> Department for International Development, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Ministry of Defence, and Stabilisation Unit, [‘UK National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security 2018 to 2022’](#), 16 January 2018.
- <sup>23</sup> HM Government, [UK National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security 2018–2022](#), January 2018, p 4.
- <sup>24</sup> Department for International Development, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Ministry of Defence, and Stabilisation Unit, [‘UK National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security 2018 to 2022’](#), 16 January 2018.
- <sup>25</sup> Preventing Sexual Violence Initiative [‘About Us’](#), accessed 10 June 2016.
- <sup>26</sup> Department for International Development, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Ministry of Defence, and Stabilisation Unit, [UK National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security 2018–2022: Annual Report to Parliament 2018](#), December 2018, p 11.
- <sup>27</sup> *ibid.*, p 3.
- <sup>28</sup> Independent Commission on Aid Impact, [‘About Us’](#), accessed 11 June 2019.
- <sup>29</sup> Independent Commission on Aid Impact, [‘DFID’s Efforts to Eliminate Violence Against Women and Girls’](#), 17 May 2016.
- <sup>30</sup> Independent Commission on Aid Impact, [ICAI Follow-up Review of 2016–17 Reports](#), June 2018, p vii.
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