

British Council  
**Building Resilience to Radicalisation in MENA**  
**Evidence Session**  
10 July 2017

**Committee Members**

*David Warburton MP (Chair)*

*Baroness Hodgson of Abinger CBE*

*Lord Purvis of Tweed*

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**Witnesses**

*Sir Ciarán Devane, Chief Executive, British Council*

*Adrian Chadwick OBE, Regional Director Middle East and North Africa (2013-2017), British Council*

**Chair**

Welcome. I thought we had better get going because we only have an hour. Normally we have a little longer. This is our last chance, but we have the A-Team in front of us this time – fortunate as we are. I should say welcome to everybody and welcome to Adrian and to Ciarán particularly, and to the rest of the Committee. This is the sixth evidence session and it is almost certainly going to be the last evidence session. There is possibly going to be one more but I suspect not. I think this is the last one and then we will be able to produce some sort of report. To all intents and purposes this is a formal session, so it is all being recorded and all being minuted. Your words will be cast in iron for future generations, so be careful.

What I think we should do first is ask each of you, if you would not mind, to give us a little opening statement from you for five or ten minutes and tell us the state of play as you see it.

**Sir Ciarán Devane**

Lovely. Thank you very much, and thank you for the time you are putting in this afternoon but also through the whole inquiry. There is a little bit from me, because the greater expert by far here is Adrian. I will do a bit of positioning around how we do see things. I will go back to our origins. We were set up to counter radical extremism in the form of fascism in the 1930s, which was how we originally got into this thing around how we connect with real people in a way which is meaningful to the UK. It is about trust. It is about mutual benefit. It is around helping societies do what is in the interests of society in the knowledge that that is in the long-term interests of the UK.

Why specifically now, and what assets do we have as the British Council to work in this area? One is the experience of course we have as the UK in Northern Ireland. A lot of the theoretical foundation of how to build community resilience in conflict situations – which is used around the world – is the Northern Irish experience. We obviously had the police, the military and the intelligence services reducing the level of violence, but, as people often say, what brought peace was the work of building resilience in society. It was Carrowmena being a centre which brought young people from either side of the community together. It was punk as a form of music, which was the first to cross the divide. It was understanding about when people lived in separate communities and had no interaction, went to different schools and churches, used different taxi firms. If you had an accountant you would get a different business card depending on whether they thought you were from one community or the other. We have a lot of experience there.

The second one is that as the British Council we have been working in north-eastern Nigeria, where Boko Haram are active, and we have a lot experience there which has informed our log frames and models for how we approach this. Then of course there is the experience which Adrian in particular has led on, which is around the work in the Middle East and North Africa. What we are trying to do is bring all of that together in a way which is evidence-based, which is informed by working on the ground.

There are a few principles. Maybe I will just say them, and I will probably end up saying them again later on. There is something in this about operating at sufficient scale; there is something about operating for a sufficient length of time – this is not something you can just come and do for six months and then go and everything is wonderful; and there is something in this about having a sufficiently wide range of interventions. That can be vertical in what you are doing at individual and community level, institutional level or national level, but equally it can be what interventions you have available for different types of person.

For example, we work with Premier Skills, and those people who like sport tend to gravitate towards that, or it is public speaking, science or debating. It is having that range of things. If you can have that range and operate at different levels for a sufficient length of time at a sufficient scale, you can have an impact on the resilience of the community or society. If you dabble, you will not. I think that is one of the big things. For us at the British Council, of course, we like longevity. One of the reasons we are allowed to do what we do in Colombia is that we had worked there a long time and we did not go in the bad days, so we have this credibility. If we can package all of that well, as Adrian has been doing in the Middle East and North Africa, then you can have an impact.

### **Adrian Chadwick**

Let me just add my thanks to Ciarán's thanks for the inquiry, the interest and this opportunity. It is probably worth taking a couple of minutes just to re-immersing ourselves in MENA as we go into the discussion. It is a region I have spent quite a bit of time in and am very fond of. It is a region going through a very difficult period right now. There is clearly huge diversity in the region – 350 million people and 17 countries – but there are certain characteristics if you read across: the world's youngest population and highest youth unemployment. That is a powerful combination. There are various estimates of the number of new jobs needed. 30 million and above in the next seven years is the estimate. You cannot buy your way out of this. In Morocco, you are twice as likely to be unemployed if you have a degree, so it is not about educational attainment. In Tunisia, estimates are at a two-year wait for a first job. We are looking at 30% youth unemployment – twice the global average. It is a very systemic challenge.

The region has the world's lowest women's participation rate in the workforce at about 25% – one-in-four. The education systems in the region – with a couple of exceptions – struggle. By international standards such as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), the Trends in International Maths and Science Study (TIMSS) and the English Proficiency Index, the region scores amongst the lowest in those who take part in those exercises. Many of the countries also score lowly against their own national measures. For example, a few years ago in Jordan, three-quarters of school-leavers either did not take or failed to pass the Thanaweya – the school leaving certificate. The performance of the education systems is not due to a lack of investment. The region is, relative to world investment in education, spending a fraction above the global average. There is something systemic happening, and it is not due to lack of investment. A lot of it is around transforming the education system, focusing on the learner, learner outcomes, readiness to work, soft skills and that package of stuff around education.

In the last five or six years, conflict and instability have really grown in the region. We have conflict in four of the countries in the region and instability in many more, and that has led to the tragedy that is the Syrian crisis, the crisis emerging in Yemen and the crisis of instability in Libya. It is a region plagued by instability and conflict, and that is also damaging levels of trust. There is polarisation, sectarianism and division. That is quite a powerful combination.

When you are looking at a region like that, as Ciarán mentioned, there is the matter of what you do and that of how you work. I think the first thing to say is that, in all that we do, how we work is absolutely critical. You have to operate under the principle of 'do no harm', paying very close attention to protection of your own staff, of people who work with you and of customers and participants who take part in your programmes. It is about long term. It is about mutuality – working on shared agendas – and, as Ciarán said, we are lucky because of the amount of time we have been in the region. Our first overseas office was in Cairo in the late 1930s, and we have been in the region for a very long time and enjoy fairly high levels of trust. That is the 'how'.

The 'what': the strategy in MENA, supporting the UK's prosperity, influence and security, operates at three levels. The first is systemic. We need long-term systemic change to really bring about the kind of change that the region is looking for. That is partnering with education systems which are not yet producing enough people who are ready to work with the right skills; partnering with civil society at a time when it is being squeezed in parts of the region; increasing women's participation in the workforce and so on. That is the systemic level, but that takes a long time. I should also have mentioned English and working with teachers are two very big parts of the systemic work we are doing. This is across all levels including higher education, further vocational training – which is critical to the employability challenge ultimately – and school-level. That takes a long time.

We have the systemic, long-term stuff. In the middle we have programmes which are trying to give young men and women opportunities much sooner. That is around giving young people access to English, giving them access to some of the skills they will need to be employable and some of the skills they will need to survive and thrive – so to manage themselves to get that job but also to cope with the weight of the work and to manage themselves through the challenges that that brings – the chance to take part in debate clubs and sport as Ciarán mentioned. There are a range of programmes which are designed to develop young people's capabilities, skills and ability to manage themselves through the immediate years.

The third part of the strategic response that we put in place five or so years ago is around future leaders. This is really recognising, in any context, the disproportionate impact of those leaders –

whether that is a community, a school, a university or a family – and the way that future leaders can demonstrate to others through political pathways, encouraging others and so on.

That was our strategy put in place. For a couple of minutes – as I am sure you have to take us out into questions – if I may just move into areas slightly more specific to the question of resilience and what we are learning about that, that was the context before the Arab awakening and the changes that have happened. We already had challenges around unemployment, tension and instability. Layered on top of that we now have much greater conflict and much greater tension, so we are now really looking at how we have adapted our programming in order to respond to what is in many cases a worsening of the situation for young people in the region.

We are learning quite a bit about how we work effectively in societies which are facing major instability. For example, RUSI – which gave evidence to this group – talked about the fact that there is no single way to understand an individual's vulnerability to radicalisation, but you can look at factors at the individual, the community and national levels, and that successful programming needs to begin to address those three levels. We are perhaps the only organisation in the region that is able to and does work across the region to scale with individuals, whether that is through an English language course or a qualification or a sports club or a debating club; works with communities, whether that is through Active Citizens or working with Young Arab Voices in the community; and works at a national level with the government. As such, we have an ability to work with different bits of society and bring them together.

You will have understood from all of the witnesses who have spoken that this is emerging evidence, and we are quite clear about this. We are delivering programmes in the region, some of which are specifically targeted at strengthening young people's resilience, but the evidence is emerging. The emerging evidence shows that in locations where young people are most vulnerable and most at risk and where there are disproportionate numbers of young people being radicalised – so for example in Tunisia one-third of foreign fighters came from three locations and in northern Morocco there are three villages where approximately 40% of foreign fighters are estimated to come from – you can take combined programmes for individuals with elements of English, debate and sport, and we can see positive signs in terms of the outputs that you can impact upon young people's resilience.

The next step is to see whether that impact on young people's resilience will impact on community resilience, and that is where we are right now. Alongside this, you need to be working at the state-level. You need to ensure there is citizen-state delivery of services and a sense that the local authority or central authority cares, is making an effort and is trying to improve the education system and the opportunities for you. You need to have that combination of individual participation to develop their resilience, and community involvement to develop authentic programming. I believe some of the Committee saw that experience whilst travelling to Morocco. Alongside that you need a national level where the government is trusting civil society to develop authentic programmes and supporting, but not being too closely involved with that kind of programming. That is an overview.

## **Chair**

Thank you both. I neglected to say who you are for the record. Of course, Adrian, you have been the Regional Director for the MENA region for the British Council from 2013 - 2017, and Ciarán is the Chief Executive. I should just say that so that we all know where we are. Now I should throw it open to the Committee for questions, and I am sure there are many.

**Baroness Hodgson**

Thank you both very much for finding the time to come in to talk to us today. I think this has been such an interesting inquiry, and we are very grateful to you for having set this up as the British Council.

Are you seeing particular kinds of programmes that appeal to those who are most vulnerable? Is it different in different places, or is there a common theme you can see? Is it gendered? Are you mostly finding that you need to work with the male youth rather than the female youth, or are there ways that the female youth can influence? Sorry, it is rather a broad-reaching question.

**Sir Ciarán Devane**

I think what we are seeing is that how programmes land will be specific and local, but there are very common elements because effectively if you go to Tripoli – the Lebanese Tripoli, not the Libyan Tripoli – and talk to the different communities there, whether it is the Cameroonian community, the Druze community, the Maronite community or whichever, they will all say they have a problem with bored young men and disempowered young women. How it plays out would be very slightly different in each community, but they are all saying the same thing.

If I could give you two examples, there is a group of young people called Mobaderoon that we have been working with for 10 years in Syria, and they are still operating in Syria. When we met them recently in a safe house outside Beirut they were talking about how they personally developed Active Citizens training that we had given them and what use they were putting it to. They run peace committees in Tartous, which is a regime-held area, but the refugees are of course from non-regime areas, so there is a lot of tension. If you remember when there were bombs in the bus station in Tartous, these young people went out on the streets and convinced people not to riot, not to attack the refugee camps and so on. The same group are carrying street theatre around Syria as best they can, really as a forum for having intercommunity dialogue.

The same training was given in north-east Uganda, in an area which is half-Christian and half-Muslim, and quite literally the left half of the road is Christian and the right side of the road is Muslim. They went into microbusinesses and social entrepreneurship, so they used the same training and said, ‘What do we want to do? Well, let us start beekeeping and raising turkeys’ and so on. So they took the same skills and just applied them in a way which was relevant to them, as determined by them, not by us sitting down and saying, ‘We think you should raise turkeys.’ That idea of how it plays out needs to be locally attuned, but the skills you need to have the confidence to engage with the person from the local authority, and to have that confidence to go and talk to the police commissioner in the district, are generic. How you choose to use them is different.

**Adrian Chadwick**

Just to add a couple of points to that, if I may: if you look at the need across the region, English, for example, is universally stated as one of the top needs. It is stated by young people, by employers, across the board. In terms of what works, clearly there is a huge ask around English and the core skills. The idea is that education alongside content is going to equip young people to get on, whatever that means for them. Whether that is to study or to work or outside in the community, there is really very strong demand for that and I think wherever that is happening it is being lapped up and we are being asked for much more.

I think at the moment there are a couple of very interesting areas. One is digital and essentially how one uses digital to amplify, in the case of the work you saw, for example, around strengthening resilience. Digital can amplify through the content of this small, necessarily highly-localised intervention. I think that is very important. What we are also getting, for example, in the case of Young Arab Voices, is that the participants themselves are saying, 'What is next?' In terms of that popularity, the participants are developing their own skills, confidence, ambition, influence and asking for training in advocacy. They are beginning to want to exert influence beyond their immediate environment and so on. I think we have a bedrock of programming which is successful, and there is still plenty of need to take that programming to a much greater scale, but I think the young people are also looking beyond that to a higher level as well.

### **Baroness Suttie**

I will just start by echoing Fiona's thanks, because I think this has been a hugely interesting inquiry since it started, and it is a bit like an onion: you find another layer and another. Actually constraining the whole inquiry and making sure that we stay focused on what we originally set out to do has been one of the challenges. Thanks very much for that.

Two quite difficult questions if I may: what do you think are the main threats to the effectiveness of the programmes? I would imagine financial would be one. Secondly, I think one of the things that we have struggled with and thought quite a lot about over the course of this inquiry is that there are two sides to it. There is the work that the British Council and other organisations are doing in the MENA region, and there is also selling the effectiveness of these programmes to the UK audience. How do you think that can be done most effectively? I did say they were quite messy questions.

### **Sir Ciarán Devane**

If I may go first again, I think one of the threats is always resistance, and it is why I said what I said at the beginning: that if you think you can go in, do something and leave after six months or a year or even five years you are wrong. I think people getting bored with the usual three-year programme being funded by the donor or agency of your choice would be one.

The second one is you have to know how to work in a system where not everybody will like this. One of the reasons that those programmes in north-eastern Uganda are working so well is that the local head of internal security is the biggest fan. He said, 'I have got 40% of my population under 30, I have got effectively complete unemployment. If I had streets there would be riots on them.' It is the fact that he knows that this programme can sustain itself, because once the training is given people know how to train the next cohort. In another community, another head of internal security would say, 'You are giving my population ideas. They are going to ask us to try and change things around here and I do not know how to do that. I, as the police commissioner, do not have that confidence.' As Adrian made the point, for the programme to be successful, you have to make it work at all levels. That takes skill, because not everybody at any level will really be supportive, and knowing how to work yourself through that is one of the critical success factors.

### **Adrian Chadwick**

I would endorse those totally. I was going to start with the question around being in a position to be able to make a long-term commitment. To bring UK partners, regional partners and local partners into a working consortium for the long term requires funding commitments or expectation of that for the long term, so there is a challenge there.

We are getting some very interesting examples. For instance, if you look at Egypt and what is happening across the board, but to a large part on the back of the Newton-Mosharafa Fund, what you can see there is how the relationship changes when a significant programme as a centrepiece came into that education collaboration between the two countries. The fact that the two countries committed initially £4 million per year to develop high-profile collaboration, fully backed by government on both sides, really enabled a lot of programming to cluster around it. One needs the funding commitment for a long period of time, but you also need sufficient funding to get local governments to buy. Look at North Africa, which you have experienced, and the desire to bring in more English – the English Baccalaureate in Morocco – or to teach more about entrepreneurialism and core skills right the way across the region – Saudi Vision 2030, Jordan, Lebanon. The host countries struggling to cope with this incredible influx of Syrian refugees, and doing so with incredible generosity, are looking to partners to make a significant long-term commitment to work with them, because these are very long-term significant issues. That is a kind of challenge.

In terms of effectiveness in selling the message back to the UK audience, I think if one looks at migration, at terrorism and at the UK's commercial interest in the region, it is very clear that the region is critically important to the UK. I think that there is a degree of awareness, but one can always do more: things like bringing Young Arab Voices participants or the founders of the Mobaderoon peacebuilding civil society network to the UK. This is an area where arts and culture have a huge amount to contribute just in terms of raising public awareness and public interest in an issue, in a way which challenges stereotypes and actually promises a movement forward, which arts and culture do better than anything else.

### **Lord Purvis of Tweed**

I just to want to add my name to the comments of Fiona and Alison as well. It has been a real pleasure, but also extremely difficult, as Alison indicated. My first question is going to the British Council's own definition of extremism, which you have very helpfully put in the briefing note that was given to us, as, 'A radical ideology which opposes core British and universal values set out in the Charter of the United Nations', and violent extremism as 'the use of violence to further the aims of this radical ideology.' The British Council operating across the whole region will have a consistent definition of both radical ideology and violent extremism, but that does not seem to be in place for each of the countries that you are working in. One country could define a terrorist as anybody who is acting against the interests of their government, and others will have a definition closer to yours. Is it too political for you to have a relationship with the governments within the region to move towards common definitions?

It struck me that in our inquiry it took us quite a while for us to separate our terminology, and I was using the wrong terminology for quite a long time and still fall into that. That is my first question as to whether that provides a difficult scenario, even to the extent of the Gulf tensions at the moment, as I see that you operate within GCC countries. If anyone in Bahrain or the UAE even tweets anything in support of Qatar at the moment, it is potentially a five-year prison sentence. That is not really what we could consider to be a terrorist, but under their penal code that can fall foul of that sentence. I wonder what your approach is in that area.

### **Sir Ciarán Devane**

It is difficult. I think we have to calibrate. It is no secret that we had difficulties in Russia. In fact you will know somebody who was at the wrong end of that at one point, and that was because our activities and the expectations the host government had of us were out of sync, and it was exactly

this area. I think the reason that we can be effective is – in a funny way – we tend not to have that debate in-country in the sense that we are not the military, we are not the police and we are not security. I often give my own background and say we are not the surgeons, but we are the public health doctor. We are operating at a population level and helping to improve the resilience, skills and capability of the population through what we do.

What we are not doing is saying, ‘This is an extremist over there. Somebody needs to go and shut down their website’ or whatever it is. That is not our role. Our role is in this area where there is a lot of common ground, and every society wants to develop its social and intellectual capital as well. By making sure of not having the debate on transubstantiation, we are able to just get on and do. It does not mean that things do not come up and they do not go wrong. We do have two members of staff in Yemen who are under arrest, not because they are working for us; they just happen to be from the wrong community in the place that they live. We do get involved in that, but by and large as long as we stick to doing the things which are the right side of what is doable in the ‘politics’ – in inverted commas – of the communities we are in, and not engaging in the debate of who is okay and who is not, then in many ways we sidestep the debate.

### **Adrian Chadwick**

Yes, I think so. I would just add that in many ways what we are doing is understood implicitly by the host governments where we operate as being helpful and a good thing. We have examples in the region where for instance diplomatic relations between the UK and that country may have been going through a challenging period. Both sides have found it incredibly helpful to still be able to talk about the power of the educational collaboration and to talk about the cultural collaboration.

Not only do we not find ourselves really being challenged too much in finding common language around some of these harder-edge issues, but I think the host governments prefer us not to, because it allows us to continue to do what we do, which is benefiting tens of millions of young people, improving their prospects, strengthening civil society and improving women’s participation in society. These are worthwhile and very important achievements.

For example, around the Strengthening Resilience programme, we spent a lot of time as an organisation, as did the European Union – who we delivered that programme for – trying to understand precisely what we were doing, and whether strengthening resilience was something normally done by others. We actually felt that it was this ability to operate with individuals, communities and governments that we more or less uniquely had which meant that only we could bring these different players together in this trusting way to enable that programme to happen. We spent a lot of time, at arm’s length, trying to understand and trying to be very precise about what we are doing.

### **Baroness Hodgson**

Can I just pick up on the point you were making? I was going to ask about how the British Council is perceived in the region, and I think you have answered that in terms of government perceptions. What about community and individual perceptions, especially where you are working with people who are vulnerable and maybe going down the radicalisation route? Is the British Council not seen as something from the West, and is there not terrific anti-Western sentiment in some of these communities?

**Adrian Chadwick**

There are examples from across the region which suggest that, on the whole, communities and individuals differentiate. For example, if you look at periods where the relationship between the two countries is not good, that has no appreciable impact on the number of people who take part in our programmes, the number of young men and women who learn English with us or the number of people who come to an arts event or a cultural event. We do not see a direct impact on us of these broader areas. As I said, in fact in some ways we see a bit of the opposite, actually. Some people quite welcome the chance to maintain a relationship with the UK in spite of it.

**Sir Ciarán Devane**

We did peace work a few years ago called Trust Pays, and what it showed was that, where young people have a cultural relations interaction with the UK, trust in the UK goes up. Where they have two interactions it goes up further. The notable country was Saudi Arabia. Of all the countries we surveyed it was the only one when there was a net promoter score which was negative of the UK, but where somebody had engaged it went to +2% I think, and then where they had engaged twice it went to +12% or some number. We do know, where there is a cultural relations engagement, that people's perception – not of the British Council but of the UK – shifts, and down the track they say, 'I am more likely to visit,' 'I am more likely to study,' 'I am more likely to do business with,' so engagements help. Particularly in our case where you have been there a long time, you are building on the compound interest you have earned over the previous few decades as well.

**Adrian Chadwick**

We do have some brand research which three of the countries in MENA took part in, so we can share that with the Committee, which will give you that sense of the popular understanding of 'What is the British Council, what do they do, and do we think that it is a good thing?'

**Lord Purvis of Tweed**

Are people who are from other communities that perhaps are more susceptible to young people being radicalised but who have a better perception of the UK less likely to be radicalised? An element of the debate is that the more they know about the United Kingdom and our foreign policy gives a greater chance that they will become more radicalised, because it is our foreign policy that has been the source of some of the negativity.

**Sir Ciarán Devane**

I think the *n* is too small for us to be able to say that. On a given programme we can say that people's views shifted. At a community level I can make grand statements like, 'People in Saudi Arabia have more positive views where they engage.' I think the *n* is too small for us to make that.

There are some things that we do know, which are slightly at a tangent. For example, we know that it is very difficult to find a humanities graduate in ISIS. It is relatively easy to find a scientist or an engineer – as the engineer in the room – in ISIS. We know enough because that population is big enough to say that the humanities graduates – either by self-selection or because of something they learned through their education – are better at saying no than somebody who went through a straight

education. We can see things at that level. What we can see is that differentiation on, ‘Now that I know more about you, I do not like you.’ What we seem to see is the opposite.

### **Adrian Chadwick**

The first thing to say is that, based on the available evidence, local factors are more significant than perceptions linked to the foreign policy factors. Right at the heart of that question, the local factor seems to be more telling. I think the other thing to say is that we have a theory of change: if we engage young people in these kinds of activities, if these are developed locally and authentically by their own civil society by themselves, and if that experience is positive, the individual becomes more resilient. This is quite carefully-crafted, and it is a skillset to develop these things which I do not have.

Then you get into this question: if the outputs are there, what is that doing to the community? Is that community more resilient to shock, to conflict, to instability and to tension? One of the potential consequences is radicalisation, but there are many other consequences of that. We locate it within the tension, pressure, conflict and wait-hood challenge at the community level, which can make young people vulnerable to a number of different pathways, one of which is that. It is too early for us to be at that next stage. We can begin to see what is happening with individuals, we can see the reach we are getting through social media pickup of this programme, but we cannot yet evidence the impact at community level. Our theory of change says that it is a reasonable assumption.

### **Lord Purvis of Tweed**

Do you know if our government is doing any work in this field? If people are aware of what Britain the brand is or UK the brand, does that automatically lead to a more favourable view of what they would use to call British values on critical thinking, free debate openness and tolerance?

### **Sir Ciarán Devane**

I do not know of it, if it does exist, but we can see if we can check and let you know.

### **Lord Purvis of Tweed**

Thank you.

### **Chair**

Can I ask about measuring outcomes and success, and how that works? Obviously there is no control group, as it were – or perhaps there is. How do you do that on those levels of individual, community and state? Adrian, you said that one of your aims is to try and achieve systemic change. This is a state-level aim. How do you measure that accurately?

### **Sir Ciarán Devane**

‘With difficulty’ is part of the answer. On a given programme, it is relatively easy to say, ‘Are those people who went through Young Arab Voices better at the end of it than they were at the beginning?’ The answer would be, undoubtedly, yes. This is the unproven bit as yet, but the theory

of change – and the early evidence suggests this is working – is that they have a good influence on their society. If I could take us back to Tripoli (Lebanon), one of the things we were able to do was to bring young community activists from all the quarters of Tripoli together to see what they had in common. We were able to do that in support of what the deputy mayor was trying to do. We are pretty confident, when we have done that a few years, that we would be able to say that in Tripoli as a city you can see a measurable difference.

There is another bit around, ‘Was that the only thing?’ or, ‘Was it enough?’ or whatever, and how you disaggregate it from the educational reform and what that has done at the same time. The macro bit of, ‘What does the public of country  $x$  think of us now rather than previously?’ can be measured, but how do you ascribe that to what we did as the British Council, or what does the aid budget do or what does the BBC do? It gets tricky. What we can say is that, where we seem to be collectively doing this well, it looks as if this is true. How do we prove that correlation and causation go together? That will take some time. We are putting a lot of infrastructure in place at the moment to try and measure that over time.

### **Baroness Hodgson**

Can I just ask a supplementary there? I absolutely understand what you are saying. Do you ever do any qualitative research with people? That might give you more of an indication as to whether things are being moved by the programmes.

### **Adrian Chadwick**

I think the first thing to say is that we invest much more time, effort and resource in evidencing the difference we are making, because we should. It is a responsible thing to do and it enables you to access funding and do more of it, so it is a worthwhile activity. For example, if we look something like Connecting Classrooms, picking up on the question of systemic reform, to demonstrate an improvement in an education system, as you rightly say, will take many, many years. We spend a lot of time supporting school leadership and a lot of time supporting teacher development for example through Connecting Classrooms, a big programme where we partner with DFID. What we can do is incrementally build evidence.

If we take the example of citizenship, we now have both qualitative and quantitative evidence from teachers. More than 1,000 schools have taken part in Connecting Classrooms in MENA, so it is a significant programme. The biggest country is Lebanon, the host of the largest number of Syrian refugees. It is critical to our relationship there. We have evidence that approximately 60% of teachers – we will send you the data – now understand what citizenship means: the most basic issue. A similar number now feel more comfortable to teach it, and most importantly nearly two-thirds of teachers now try to teach citizenship in their classroom more regularly. In addition to trying to look for that macro, systemic, ‘Is the whole education system performing better?’ you can look at these key points of school leadership, teachers and English, and evidence improvement there as well.

### **Sir Ciarán Devane**

The other thing we are trying to do is to run a series of next-generation research in Pakistan, Ukraine, Tanzania and I am sure others will come. They will be exploring social attitudes of young people in those countries. Yes, we will have some numbers, but actually we will have the focus groups and the illustrative examples as well. We can tell you now that the next generation of young

people in Pakistan are on average more – small C – conservative than their predecessors. For us in informing our strategy for how to engage with society in Pakistan, that is important because it tells us where we need to be having some of the conversations.

## **Chair**

You are surveying people regularly, and looking at opinion all the time.

## **Sir Ciarán Devane**

Yes.

## **Baroness Suttie**

When we had our first evidence session with you at the beginning of this inquiry we talked quite a lot about scaling up. I think at the end of this inquiry I am not entirely clear about how this can be achieved. Clearly there is a financial element to scaling up, but do you believe there is a structural co-operation element to scaling up? Could you say a little more about how you would like to see that achieved?

## **Sir Ciarán Devane**

We are ready to go. This will bring us back to money, for which I apologise, but we have been doing a lot of work around the empowerment fund on this issue of resilience, the consequences of the crisis in Syria and relationship with wider Europe. We know we can scale up. We know as the UK we have the base that is capable of doing it. We are operating on a cascade learning model. If you take Young Arab Voices, we do not run the debating clubs. It is the people we train who run the debating clubs and then go and set other ones up. Active Citizens is identical. The cost of the Uganda project was less than £1 per person who was involved in that, so we know we can do it.

The issue is whether that funding is available. If you asked me a week ago I would be telling you that we have some very significant bids into the empowerment fund, that they had scored the highest of all the bids that went in and they are going to business case, but in the meantime the empowerment fund has been paused, so those bids will no longer be going ahead in the same way. We have to talk to the Cabinet Office in particular to ask how we can get some of this funded. There is a problem there. Can we do it? Absolutely, because it is not relying on a limited number of experts who go and do something very specialised. It is a cascade model. It is achievable and it is affordable, and there are other funders that we need to try and get on board as well. Yes, it is doable.

## **Adrian Chadwick**

First of all, I endorse that totally. It is doable. My view is that we need to do it, because the level of demand and the level of readiness from the host countries in the region is higher than I have seen it. We are actually at a point where – as I mentioned earlier – right the way across the region, you have the Vision 2030 and Vision 2025 which are all about upscaling young people. They are all about upscaling their young men and women to prepare them to contribute to their society and so on. The demand and the expectation is definitely very high.

It is also worth mentioning that, if we look at somewhere like Iraq, which, needless to say, is critically important and a very challenging place to operate, we are just starting a €15 million countrywide education programme. We are just starting a multimillion-euro programme to work around the sorts of thing we have been talking about today around debate, participation and civil society and its potential positive ability to reduce conflict. We are also doing a €2.5 million programme around vocational training, which remains the key opportunity for many young people to be employed across the region, but is not their preferred route.

In that very challenging environment, we have one person in Basra, a small office and a part of the embassy presence in Baghdad. That is €20 million plus, which we are delivering. We can do it, and in fact we are beginning to do it in parts of the region.

### **Lord Purvis of Tweed**

In visits that we have been making in Iraq, we have seen David Pardoe and what he has been doing in the country directly. It is fantastic that that comes from the EU, and I was wondering if Brexit will have an impact on any of your future activities. Will the British Council still want to be a recipient of EU support going forward? My second part of the question was: it has been great to see the uplift in government support over the coming years, looking at your plan up to 2019-2020. The Foreign Office grant today which is from ODA is going up, but it is coming to an end in 2019 from non-ODA, so down from 35% this year to zero in 2019-2020. I am wondering if that is going to be restricting your activity in this region where most countries if they are conflict-affected are indeed qualified, but if they are not and if they move to middle income such as Tunisia or other countries that you have been referring to, will that inhibit your ability to work?

### **Sir Ciarán Devane**

Yes. If you ask me what I worry about most, we can do a lot more in the Middle East. Let us pick Jordan or Lebanon as an example. The more ODA we access, the more we would be able to do. I am fairly optimistic about that. I am also relatively optimistic about continuing our ability to access European Commission funds. We have what is called Pillar Assessed Grant or Delegation Agreement (PAGoDA) status, which is something I would love to see replicated here in the UK. It means if you jump the hurdles and you qualify then if you have a good idea you can approach the European Commission or the developments directorate of the Commission and say, 'We think you should do this.' There is a negotiation and then it either does or does not go ahead, as opposed to responding to a call. It is a very efficient way of doing things, and I would love to see that replicated. I think it is a great model.

Because we have PAGoDA status, as do the likes of UNICEF, that PAGoDA status will continue, so I absolutely have every intention of making sure that we continue that relationship. Some things in other areas will go, potentially. For example, access to structural funds to do work in accession states may be more restricted.

What I really, really worry about in my job is that non-ODA funding going to zero. When that was put on the table before the last spending review it was pre-Brexit, which had two effects. One is the exchange rate effect, which costs us. Unlike the Foreign Office and some other government departments, we are not protected for exchange rate, so all of the grant is worth 20% less overseas than it was 18 months ago. The second bit is of course the restriction in meeting the expectation on us as the British Council to do our bit in the global Britain work in developed countries that do not

qualify for ODA. That would include Saudi Arabia and Russia and would also include Japan, Canada, Australia and the United States as well.

There is a relative level of optimism that we know what we are doing and that we have a major contribution to make. One way or another we will find ways of getting funding for that to some degree. On the ODA side, I am quite seriously concerned about the sustainability of our existing level of operations in the non-ODA world. Where we are at the moment, given the increase in expectations, I see no way of meeting those expectations, if I am honest.

### **Chair**

A very straightforward answer. Thank you for that, Ciarán. If there is anything you would like to add finally, do feel free.

### **Baroness Suttie**

I have a very small question, which allows that to be said. What would you like to see as the outcome of this first inquiry?

### **Sir Ciarán Devane**

A ringing endorsement. I think it is a recognition that, in how we think about everything from countering violent extremism through to resilience, through to development – if I can describe that as a spectrum – we recognise that this thing we have been talking about, around the role of education, the role of developing social capital, for want of a better phrase, of that model of engaging with people at those levels that Adrian described, is not the only thing that should be done, but it is absolutely critical. Back to where I started around Northern Ireland; without that, we would not be where we are today in Northern Ireland. The rest was not sufficient on its own. That had to happen.

Our belief – and we would suggest that the evidence would agree with this – is that in other communities and other societies, without this kind of approach, everything else is not sufficient either. We can make progress. There will be peace declared in Syria one day, but back to our Mobaderoon young people, they are the future leaders of Syria. One of them I am sure will be a minister, prime minister or whatever, and investing in them now to give them the skills to do that is a necessary part of the solution. It is not just rebuilding the infrastructure.

### **Lord Purvis of Tweed**

You mentioned before that it was not only the scale of activity but also the breadth of activity in this time period. If you did have a minister from the Foreign Office coming along with a chequebook and saying, ‘I am writing you a cheque for a considerable amount of money,’ would you prefer to simply uplift all of your breadth of activities, or would you think about something like massively expanding fellowship programmes – which I believe are really important – if you had the ability?

### **Chair**

Not that there are necessarily any plans in this direction.

**Lord Purvis of Tweed**

Would you be uplifting it or, if it was one programme in particular, what would that be?

**Adrian Chadwick**

Back when I took up the Regional Director, MENA job back in 2013 we had quite a broad portfolio, and one of the things we did quite successfully over the first couple of years was really reducing the portfolio. Every office in the region had a pyramid on the wall that said, 'These are the four main objectives where we are working.' We knew our priority geographies, so we were able to very substantially reduce the number of programmes we did, and our mantra was 'Multi-country, multi-year', because that is how you make a difference to these issues.

We have already gone quite a long way down this road in terms of saying it is about Syria response; it is about barriers to access to education; it is about preparedness for work and the waithood; it is about North Africa education transitioning towards being more entrepreneurial with more English and being more responsive to the labour market with the employer's voice brought in; it is about civil society and youth. We have done a lot of this. I do not think that it is going to be one programme. I think that really is one of the lessons of educational systemic non-reform over many years in the region. I actually think you have got to be able to stick. It is what is coming out with a lot of the work around resilience. It is this combination of work, but it will not be everywhere. It will be a combination of programmes – some new – in partnership in the places that matter most to the UK and to the region.

To pick up on Baroness Suttie's question of what I would hope for, I genuinely believe there is an opportunity because of the readiness of the region, because of a consensus emerging amongst the international community and in the region of what some of these key interventions are, and because of the potential availability of funding. I genuinely think there is an opportunity here, so what I would hope would be that the inquiry will contribute to building people's belief and awareness that there is this opportunity and their commitment to it.

**Chair**

Hear, hear. On that note I should say thank you both very, very much from us for a truly fascinating conversation. We probably could go on a lot longer. It is lovely to hear this. Thank you also for hand-holding us through the whole process of the inquiry so far, particularly to Zaf, to Siobhan, to Emma[?] and the team. You have been fantastic, so thank you very much indeed, and we look forward to seeing how this all turns out. Thank you.

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