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30 January '26

Dear Sarah,

Ahead of the Christmas recess period, we met to discuss the report on Scottish international development funding published by the Cross-Party Group (CPG) on International Development in June 2025.

I undertook to write to you with an update on activity officials have been taking forward which aligns with the findings and recommendations in the report. I also thought it would be helpful to provide an update on the allocations for international development in the recent draft Scottish budget.

CPG Report

I welcome the support expressed by the CPG within its report for the SG in its distribution of Official Development Assistance (ODA) and the CPG's recognition of the impact that the International Development Fund has made in partner countries over 20 years. At a time when other donors have been cutting aid budgets with severe consequences for vulnerable communities worldwide, it is imperative that Scotland remains focused on being a good global citizen; committed to climate justice, international development, and humanitarian aid.

I also welcome the many positive views expressed by respondents during the CPG's evidence gathering process in 2024 about the priorities and impact of the Scottish Government's overseas development spending. In particular, our new approach since 2021 and the adoption of the new International Development Principles to support a shift in power to the Global South and taking a feminist approach. As respondents highlighted, this has meant further aligning our international development funding to the priorities of our partner countries, and in implementing innovative initiatives such as mainstreaming of gender equality through our programme.

I wish to acknowledge the report's findings and note the thorough consideration that informed it. I can confirm that the matters around communication and transparency highlighted in the report correspond closely with areas in which my officials have already been advancing substantive work (see attached). I am pleased to share that the Scottish Government's overseas development spend is now available on the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI) platform referenced in the CPG's report. Officials have also established a mechanism for regular engagement with the sector delivered in partnership with Scotland's International Development Alliance (SIDA). I am mindful, however, that there may still be some outstanding concerns amongst some organisations regarding communications, given that you had raised

this issue with me. I had asked therefore if you could please seek to establish more information about where those concerns lie, in order that we can look to address these.

Draft Scottish Budget 2026-27

In line with our publicly stated commitment to international development, the draft Scottish Government budget published on 13 January delivers on our Programme for Government commitment to uplift the IDF to £15 million by end of this parliament, and to maintain our £1 million humanitarian spend, and allows us to continue to support our partner countries through the steady increase of international development funding. Funding has also been secured for International Climate Change, including Climate Justice programmes, of £12.7 million.

My officials are considering how we might deliver on the proposed IDF uplift. We will not know until the end of February if the draft budget has been passed. It is likely that in the initial year of the uplift (financial year 2026/27), we will focus on enhancing existing projects that are currently successful, rather than establishing wholly new programmes. And in response to the forthcoming review of Humanitarian Emergency Fund, I am considering the proportion of our humanitarian spend that comes from Scotland's ODA budget, which could take an increasing share and therefore absorb the majority of the additional funding in 2026-27.

Consulting with our partner country governments and institutions in formulating spending plans is also a priority - to ensure our spending priorities are suited and developed in partnership (in line with our International Development Principles). This engagement process will commence once the Budget is confirmed and ahead of the new Parliamentary Term. Given the proximity of the next Scottish Election, spending plans will be subject to confirmation by the incoming Government.

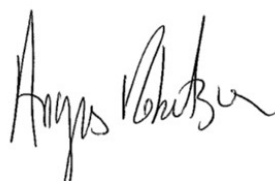
It will also be important for Scotland to consider how our spending responds to the UK Government's aid allocations, which we expect to have a significant impact on our partner countries, especially Malawi. The First Minister has written to the Foreign Secretary expressing his profound concerns about the potential consequences of aid cuts and we await her response.

All of this too will be set against a backdrop of the Public Service Reform in Scotland. Delivering these ambitions within tight funding constraints demands reform and innovation. I will be looking at ways that we can drive prioritisation, efficiency and transformation to maximise impact in the approach to international development. Views from the CPG on how we achieve the balance between these objectives will be very much welcomed by my team.

I will ensure that my officials continue to keep you informed on these developments and engage with SIDA members and others whilst developing our plans.

I would be happy to discuss any of the above further with the Group, if this would be helpful.

Your sincerely



ANGUS ROBERTSON

Update to CPG International Development

Recommendation 1- The Scottish Government should publish through IATI

The Scottish Government is a member of the international [Open Government Partnership](#): a collaboration of 90+ governments around the world who sign up to the principles of openness, transparency, accountability and citizen participation.

All Official Development Assistance (ODA) provided by the Scottish Government is guided by a rigorous process to ensure complete transparency and accountability focused on areas of need where Scotland's ODA can make an impact.

The Scottish Government's international development work is funded from within its own budget and, like any other part of that budget, is subject to Scottish Parliament approval and scrutiny. Our ODA spend is included by UK Government within its overall ODA return to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), and is counted by the UK towards its commitments on spending a stated percentage of gross national income (GNI) on ODA (*currently the UK commitment is to 0.5% GNI on ODA, reduced from the global 0.7%, and due to be further reduced to 0.3% GNI in 2027*). Scottish Government ODA spend is then reported by the UK Government in its ODA returns every calendar year as part of the UK wide Statistics on International Development: [Statistics on International Development - GOV.UK](#).

The Scottish Government has also itself, since 2017, published its own regular Contribution to International Development Reports (CIDRs), to capture the additional contribution which the Scottish Government makes to international development within the devolved constitutional context – whether through our three Funds (International Development Fund (IDF), Humanitarian Emergency Fund (HEF) and Climate Justice Fund (CJF)), or through wider policy activity across our Ministerial portfolios. See:

- [Scottish Government contribution to international development report: 2017-2018](#)
- [Scottish Government contribution to international development report: 2018-2019](#)
- [Scottish Government contribution to International Development Report for 2019-2020](#)
- [Contribution to international development 2021 to 2023](#).

Since the CPG report was published in June 2025, and following discussion with the sector on most appropriate and useful publication routes going forward, we published the Scottish Government's most recent ODA spend through [Scotland's International Strategy Annual Report 2024-25](#) which provides a breakdown of ODA spend across our three funds (IDF, HEF and CJF) in 2024-25. This therefore follows that series of earlier CIDR publications covering ODA spend in years 2017-18, 2018-19, 2019-20 and 2021-23.

Alongside this we have also been exploring publishing our international aid data through the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI). ODA spend for 1 April '25 through to end of December '25 is now available on the [IATI platform](#) and the intention is that this will be updated every quarter going forward. For ease of reference, the organisation identifier for the Scottish Government is GB-GOV-21.

As the CPG notes, migrating to this reporting system will improve accessibility and interrogation of ODA spend by those with an interest. As noted by a stakeholder in the CPG report, as we become more familiar with the system, we can look to enhance our usage of the platform over time.

Recommendation 2 – Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee (CEEAC) to review ODA spending every three years

Appropriate Parliamentary scrutiny of international development funding would be welcome, however, any decision to take forward this recommendation is a matter for the CEEAC itself (or any future committee of the Scottish Parliament). As noted in the CPG report, that data on international development spend is now being published through IATI will be a helpful resource for the Committee should they choose to progress this recommendation.

Recommendation 3 - For SG to publish a new clearer strategy and rationalise their choices around themes, localities and application processes

Given the upcoming elections, the request for a refreshed SG International Development Strategy covering all ODA spend encompassing international development, humanitarian and climate justice, will be for any new Government to consider in due course.

In the interim, work is currently underway to scope out an approach to refreshing the wider International Strategy (published in 2024) which is in place until the end of the current Parliamentary term. The intention is that the refreshed Strategy will provide a clear and outcomes-focused overarching framework guiding international activity by the Scottish Government and key delivery partners across the public sector in Scotland. Subject to the views of incoming Ministers, a refreshed strategy could be in place in late 2026 or early 2027 and officials are keen to hear views from stakeholders on the approach to this work. E.g. how a new International Development Strategy might align with the planned work to refresh an International Strategy reflecting incoming Ministers' priorities after the election and would encourage the CPG's input to that exercise.

Other matters

Scottish Government Communication

Key Finding 4 in the report raised that "Communication between the Scottish Government and the third sector could improve. Potential funding recipients highlighted the need for clearer funding processes and greater collaboration with partner organisations. There were calls to use partner countries and agencies more effectively in decision making processes, and to enhance the localisation of delivery".

The 2020 review of the Scottish Government approach to international development resulted in changes to the allocation of the International Development Fund, with a focus on supporting localisation, in line with good development practice and the new Scottish Government International Development Principles. Our progressive approach to international development (through our new Principles, feminist approach and commitment on shifting power) has been welcomed in particular by and within our partner countries, but it has also been supported by many of the larger Scottish INGOs including Oxfam Scotland, who said at the time "*The Scottish Government has rightly recognised that if it's to continue to help tackle these growing challenges, then its approach to international development must evolve. If we're to create a kinder, radically better and fairer world, then governments around the world and organisations like Oxfam need to stand together with communities driving their own change while challenging the gender and racial injustices trapping people in poverty.*" (Jamie Livingstone, March 2021).

The evolution of the international development programme to one that is even more clearly partner country led inevitably means some changes have ensued in how and on what we communicate and engage with stakeholders within Scotland.

Having listened carefully to the sector in Scotland on their asks to continue to engage with the Scottish Government (whilst still respecting the role and views of our Global South partners), a number of new initiatives have been established over recent years to support increased communications and transparency:

- as noted in the CPG report the [ID webpages on the SG website](#) have been refreshed to provide more accessible information on new international development programming;
- as noted above, information on ODA and projects has been regularly published through the series of Contribution to International Development Reports, since 2017;
- a regular cycle of stakeholder sessions has been established. These are hosted and facilitated by Scotland's International Development Alliance (SIDA) and take a thematic approach informed by the interests of stakeholders. Previous topics include a [general update on the ID programme](#), the [Climate Justice Fund](#) and the [Global Solidarity Fund](#) (which will replace the previous SG International Small Grants Scheme); topics for 2026 are being explored with SIDA;
- Ministers have continued to meet in person with groups of both Scotland-based and Global South stakeholders, including attendance at roundtables and conferences by Cabinet Secretaries Angus Robertson and Gillian Martin, and meetings hosted by the First Minister;
- now that the majority of new ID programmes have come on-stream, work with all of our new grant/contract holders has resumed, bringing them together as a group for a holistic whole programme approach and to enable cross-sharing of learning between all organisations; and
- in line with the commitment made as a result of the review of the ID programme, to shift power to global south partners, we continue to engage more heavily outwith Scotland so that our work is informed by the voices of the people and governments in our partner countries, who are best placed to identify their own needs and lead their own development: this included through the recent First Minister visit to Zambia and Malawi, where he met with both Presidents to discuss partnerships, and with local delivery partners.

Prioritisation of Scotland-based aid charities

Although our international development work started 20 years ago (2005) with an ambition to support Scottish organisations partnering abroad, as a key component of Scotland's international contribution as a good global citizen, our approach and programmes have evolved progressively over those 20 years, in line with recognised good development practice, towards increased localisation.

Throughout this shift, the valuable role of civil society in Scotland, and the appetite for global citizenship in our local communities continues to be a key priority. For this reason, around £800,000 per year from the International Development Fund is allocated to 4 networking organisations (3 of which are Scotland based) to support global citizenship in Scotland and our partner countries.

In terms of the wider international development and climate justice portfolio, the Scottish Government has set out clearly in our series of reports information on these awards, including stating where these have been awarded through a competitive process (this typically involves a consortium of organisations and incorporates participatory and country-led design approaches). These competitive processes aim to ensure transparency, accountability and value for money.

Where funding has been awarded on a non-competitive basis, this has been set out within the CIDRs; in particular our funding rationale and processes during the period of COVID were clearly set out in our [Scottish Government contribution to International Development Report for 2019-2020](#).