The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee

Simita Kumar MSP
Minister for Equalities and International Development
Scottish Government

2 November 2026

Dear Minister,

Pre-budget scrutiny 2027-28

Please find in annexe conclusions and recommendations from the Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee following the work it has undertaken on international development as part of its scrutiny preceding the Scottish Government's Budget 2027-28.

Yours sincerely,



Patrick Harvie MSP

Convener

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Annexe: Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee Pre-budget Scrutiny 2027-28 – International Development

1. The Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee agreed that the main focus for its scrutiny preceding the Scottish Government's Budget 2027-28 would be the culture strand of its remit, on which it held several evidence sessions.

2. The Committee also decided that it wished to seek some targeted written evidence, from relevant organisations, in relation to international development.

3. The organisations were asked to provide input on the relevant Scottish Government Programme for Government (PfG) commitments and on current challenges and priorities for the 2027-28 Budget.

4. The main relevant commitments in the PfG 2026-31 are—

    - Increase the International Development Fund by 25% and in doing so review our existing programmes while developing new modes of funding and partnership, including the development of an Aid Match scheme.

    - Continue support for tackling global emergencies and conflicts through the Humanitarian Emergency Fund, including continued support for the people of Palestine and give particular focus on supporting the efforts related to United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, which recognises the disproportionate impact of conflict on women and girls.

    - Continue and increase our Climate Justice Fund, up from £36 million, over the course of this Parliament and, following an independent evaluation, deliver new programmes that support communities in the Global South to build resilience and address loss and damage.

5. The Committee received five written submissions—

    - Scotland's International Development Alliance (SIDA)

    - Scottish Fair Trade

    - Scotland Malawi Partnership (SMP)

    - Malawi Scotland Partnership (MaSP)

    - Scottish Catholic International Aid Fund (SCIAF)

6. Apart from SCIAF, the Scottish Government provides core funding to the above organisations (and Scotland's Development Education Centres) at a total of £800,000 per year.

7. The Committee considered these written submissions in its meeting on 6 October 2026.

Summary of key points arising from submissions received

Increasing international development funding

8. There was strong consensus across all submissions welcoming the Programme for Government commitment to increase the International Development Fund by 25% during Session 7. Scotland's International Development Alliance (SIDA) argued:

> “The core International Development Fund should therefore increase from £15 million to at least £18.75 million in 2027-28, (with Humanitarian Emergency funding separately ring-fenced and additional), and with subsequent annual increases at least in line with inflation.”

9. It further stated:

> "early delivery would maximise the real value and cumulative impact of the commitment, while providing greater certainty to partners at a time of significant pressure on global development finance."

10. Similar views were expressed by Scottish Fair Trade, the Scotland Malawi Partnership (SMP), the Malawi Scotland Partnership (MaSP), and the Scottish Catholic International Aid Fund (SCIAF). Respondents highlighted the significance of the increase in the context of aid reductions by major donor countries worldwide.

11. Several organisations also emphasised the importance of transparency in funding allocations from the International Development Fund. MaSP argued that information provided by the Minister for Equalities and International Development to the Committee following her evidence session on 1 September 2026, should be used to establish a baseline against which progress can be measured.

Effective delivery of funding: localisation, partnership and accountability

12. Beyond the overall level of funding, several submissions commented on how funding is delivered. A recurring theme was the importance of localisation, with respondents highlighting the value of partnership working and the involvement of partner-country organisations in setting priorities, designing programmes and shaping delivery approaches.

13. SCIAF highlighted the importance of community-led development and commented positively on the Climate Justice Fund's funding allocation model, which (at least for some projects) involved a participatory approach to selecting interventions after funding was allocated to a delivery organisation:

> “To the best of our knowledge, this innovative approach adopted with the [Climate Justice Fund] is the best example of community-led development funded by a major donor, and we believe it should be replicated across Scottish Government’s [International Development Fund] programme.”

14. Organisations also highlighted the importance of accountability and transparency in delivery. SCIAF called for regular and timely reporting, including yearly reporting to this Committee.

Humanitarian emergencies and climate justice

15. Several submissions highlighted the growing impact of conflict, humanitarian crises and climate change on partner countries and argued that the Scottish Government's funding arrangements should reflect these challenges.

16. Respondents supported the continuation of the Humanitarian Emergency Fund (HEF), but some raised questions about future delivery arrangements following a review of the Scottish Government's approach to humanitarian emergency funding. SIDA sought clarification on the Scottish Government's interim approach following changes to the HEF Panel mechanism used until recently and called on the Scottish Government to set out how its support for UN Security Council Resolution 1325 will be reflected in funding decisions.

17. SCIAF commented on the recent changes and called on the Scottish Government to explore opportunities for Scottish charities to be involved in work with the HEF at pace. It also suggested exploring an alternative model:

> "Scottish organisations compete in open calls periodically to provide a humanitarian response function on behalf of Scotland, either in particular countries or across defined regions. Organisations with established international networks could be selected to stand ready to respond when a crisis occurs, working through their local partners and in accordance with agreed localisation and accountability principles."

18. Several respondents also called for humanitarian funding to remain ring-fenced and additional to the International Development Fund.

19. Respondents broadly welcomed the Scottish Government's PfG commitment in relation to the Climate Justice Fund, with SIDA calling for it to be increased "from £12.7 million to at least £15 million in 2027-28". Several respondents also called for a dedicated Loss and Damage element, with SCIAF suggesting that 50% of the Climate Justice Fund should be allocated to loss and damage programming and SMP recommending that a dedicated Loss and Damage Fund should be established.

Funding mechanisms and the proposed Aid Match scheme

20. Several respondents argued that the effectiveness of Scotland's international development spending depends upon maintaining long-term partnerships and providing funding arrangements that support strategic planning. SMP and MaSP emphasised that while single-year projects can achieve important outcomes, multi-year funding often delivers greater value by allowing organisations to build on learning, retain staff and plan over longer timeframes.

21. The four organisations receiving Scottish Government core funding argued that network bodies play a key role in supporting partnerships, coordinating activity

across the sector and maintaining public engagement. They noted that core-funding levels have remained unchanged in recent years, with several calling for core funding arrangements to be reviewed alongside the planned increase in the International Development Fund. SCIAF (which does not receive core-funding) similarly highlighted the value of existing network organisations in coordinating Scotland's international development sector and supporting collaboration.

22. There was broad support among respondents for the proposed Aid Match scheme. SCIAF welcomed the proposal as a means of raising additional funding and argued that it should be trialled in 2027/28 and draw on lessons from the UK Aid Match programme. However, some respondents highlighted the importance of ensuring that the introduction of the new scheme does not disrupt existing programmes or disproportionately favour larger organisations. Scottish Fair Trade stated:

> "As new funding mechanisms are developed, including the proposed Aid Match scheme, these should complement rather than replace existing funding streams and should be designed to support long-term partnership approaches. Funding should also remain accessible to smaller organisations and community-based initiatives that play an important role in strengthening Scotland's global connections and public engagement."

23. MaSP similarly argued that smaller organisations, community groups and diaspora organisations should be able to participate in the scheme and proposed measures including small-grants streams, flexible match requirements and recognition of non-cash contributions. SMP also suggested removing requirements (used in some existing programmes) that organisations are able to operate across all three African partner countries, arguing that this may exclude organisations with deep expertise in a particular country.

Conclusions and recommendations

24. The Committee notes the changing global context, instability and pressures on funding for development, which were also referred to by some Committee Members and by the Minister during the evidence session on 1 September 2026. As noted during the evidence session with the Minister, we look forward to hearing her views, following her review of the current frameworks in place, on whether she believes a review of the current strategy is necessary, in this context.

25. The Committee welcomes the support expressed in all of the written evidence for the Scottish Government's commitment to increase the International Development Fund and calls on the Scottish Government to consider seriously the clear consensus shown by the sector in support of early delivery of the increase. It further notes calls from the sector that subsequent annual increases should be at least in line with inflation.[1]

[1] Senga Beresford MSP did not agree with this paragraph. She does not support the Scottish Government's commitment to increase the International Development Fund.

26. The Committee is broadly supportive of the sector's call for an increase in funding for the Climate Justice Fund and the continuation of the Humanitarian Emergency Fund. We also note the views from the stakeholders that humanitarian funding should be ring-fenced and additional to the International Development Fund, and the call from some that the Climate Justice Fund should include a dedicated Loss and Damage element. We recommend that the Scottish Government further engages with the sector, in particular with regard to the views on models for delivery, and sets out its views to the Committee on these matters.[2]

27. The Committee is also broadly supportive of the proposed Aid Match scheme and we note issues raised by some respondents in relation to the design and delivery of any such scheme, and the need for complementarity of funding and accessibility for smaller organisations. The Committee requests a response from the Scottish Government on the points raised in the written submissions we received. Before any such scheme is introduced, the Committee asks the Scottish Government to publish its expected cost to the public purse over the Parliamentary session and how it will be funded.[3]

28. Finally, we agree with the points made by several organisations about the importance of transparency in funding allocations. It is important that the Scottish Government clearly sets out the rationale behind the different projects that it supports and what is being achieved. As such, we agree with SCIAF that there should be regular and timely reporting to this Committee on the Scottish Government's various international development activities and we invite the Minister to agree to such a process.

[2] Senga Beresford MSP did not agree with this paragraph and does not support an increase in the Climate Justice Fund.
[3] Senga Beresford MSP did not agree with this paragraph and does not support the introduction of an Aid Match scheme.