

Written submission from Malawi Scotland Partnership, 27 September 2026

Pre-budget scrutiny 2027-28

Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee

Overall position

The Malawi Scotland Partnership welcomes the Scottish Government commitments to increase the International Development Fund by 25%, review existing programmes, develop new funding and partnership models including Aid Match, and continue humanitarian support. These commitments should be reflected in the 2027 to 2028 Budget so that partners can plan and communities can benefit early in the parliamentary term.

MaSP is a Malawian-owned and Malawian-led national network, we work with our sister organization the Scotland Malawi partnership (SMP) in supporting links in Scotland. We connect civil society organisations, communities, schools, universities, public institutions and businesses involved in Malawi–Scotland links. This evidence reflects what is needed to make Scotland’s funding accessible, locally informed and effective in Malawi. It is not an application for funding.

Recommendations at a glance

Deliver the increase now	Apply the full 25% increase in 2027–28, using a published baseline. Keep humanitarian and climate justice funding separate and additional.
Fund lasting partnerships	Use multi-year, flexible awards with full-cost recovery and reporting that is proportionate to the size and risk of each grant.
Share power	Give Malawian organisations and communities a formal role in reviewing programmes, setting priorities and making funding decisions.
Make Aid Match fair	Create routes for smaller partnerships, community groups and diaspora organisations, and recognise suitable non-cash contributions.
Pay for safe delivery	Allow realistic costs for inflation, currency movements, taxes, banking, safeguarding, digital security and organisational capacity.

Why early action matters

The comparable submissions from Scotland Malawi partnership, Scotland’s International Development Alliance and Scottish Fair-Trade call for the increase to be delivered in 2027–28 and protected in real terms. MaSP supports that position. If the core International Development Fund baseline is £15 million, a 25% increase means at least £18.75 million.

In her letter to the Committee dated 22 September 2026, the Minister for Equalities and International Development provided annexed information on the current International Development Fund budget, the proportion managed by Scotland-based organisations, Scottish Fair Trade funding and loss-and-damage programmes. The Committee should use this evidence to confirm a transparent baseline and assess how much funding and decision-making authority reaches partner-country organisations.

International Development Fund

A genuine and transparent increase

The 25% commitment should be a real increase to the core International Development Fund, not a transfer from existing programmes and not a figure that includes separately promised humanitarian or climate justice spending. Delivering it in 2027–28 would preserve more of its value, give partners certainty and increase its cumulative benefit. Future budgets should at least protect the Fund against inflation. The Budget should publish the baseline, programme-level allocations and the proportions managed by Scotland-based and partner-country organisations so progress can be tracked.

Multi-year funding and full costs

Long-term partnerships cannot be sustained through short awards that cover activities but leave organisations to absorb the costs of coordination, staff, governance, safeguarding, monitoring, financial management and secure digital systems. Multi-year funding helps partners retain skilled staff, plan with communities and adapt when conditions change. The Scottish Government should make multi-year funding the normal approach where the work is multi-year and should allow reasonable full costs rather than imposing low or arbitrary overhead limits.

Core-funded network bodies also provide shared infrastructure for Scotland's international development work. MaSP, the Scotland Malawi Partnership, Scotland's International Development Alliance and Scottish Fair Trade connect government with civil society, coordinate partnerships and maintain public engagement. Their funding should be reviewed as part of the planned increase and set at a sustainable level for the parliamentary term.

A focused programme review led with partner countries

The review of existing programmes should improve delivery without creating a long pause in funding. It should assess whether funding reaches local organisations, supports national priorities, strengthens equitable partnerships and produces useful results at a reasonable administrative cost. It should also identify where application, due-diligence and reporting requirements prevent capable smaller organisations from participating.

Where funding is going to Malawi, Malawian organisations and communities should help design the review, agree its questions and interpret its findings. Consultation after decisions have largely been made is not enough. Partner-country representatives should have a clear role in governance and decision-making for future programmes, with feedback provided in accessible formats and enough time for meaningful participation.

Proportionate requirements

Strong accountability is essential, but the same process should not be applied to

every award. A small community grant should not carry the application and reporting burden of a large programme. The Scottish Government should use risk-based due diligence, simple application routes, staged assessment and proportionate reporting. Funding should cover the staff time and systems needed to meet those requirements.

What the 2027 to 2028 Budget should provide

- At least £18.75 million for the core International Development Fund if £15 million is the agreed baseline, delivered in 2027–28 and protected against inflation thereafter.
- A separate, clearly identified allocation for humanitarian response, with climate justice funding also additional to the core Fund.
- Multi-year awards, full-cost recovery and an uplift for the four network bodies that reflects their expected role and the cost of delivery.
- Resources for a focused, time-bound and partner-country-led review that does not interrupt current programmes.

Aid Match and new partnership models

Purpose and additionality

Aid Match could increase public involvement in Scotland's global partnerships and bring additional resources to effective work. It should add to existing grant programmes rather than replace them. The Minister's 22 September letter notes that the Official Report contains an inaccuracy concerning her comments on Aid Match and that a correction is being sought. Scheme design should therefore be based on the corrected record and a published consultation. Its purpose, eligible costs, match rate and annual budget should be clear before launch.

Avoid favouring organisations with the largest fundraising base

A conventional pound-for-pound model can favour large organisations that already have professional fundraising teams, established donor lists and unrestricted reserves. It can exclude small charities, diaspora groups, schools, faith organisations and community partnerships even when they have strong local relationships and credible plans. A scheme that measures commitment only through cash raised in Scotland would also undervalue the leadership, time and resources contributed in Malawi.

Practical design features

MaSP recommends that the Scottish Government co-design Aid Match with organisations of different sizes and with partner-country representatives. The scheme should include:

- a small-grants window with a simple expression of interest and support to develop a full application;
- different match rates or lower match requirements for smaller and diaspora-led organisations;

- recognition of eligible community fundraising, diaspora contributions and carefully valued in-kind support, while keeping verification simple;
- reasonable preparation, safeguarding, monitoring and administration costs;
- payments that do not require small organisations to spend first and wait for reimbursement; and
- published data on the size, location and type of organisations funded, including the share reaching partner-country organisations.

Direct and locally led funding

New models should also create practical routes for Malawian organisations to lead or receive funds directly where they meet proportionate standards. Local leadership is not achieved by changing the language of a programme while retaining all financial and decision-making power in Scotland. The design should therefore address banking, currency, audit and regulatory requirements at the outset and fund the capacity needed to meet them.

Partnership quality

Funding decisions should examine how partners share decisions, budgets, information and credit. Partnerships should agree responsibilities, safeguarding arrangements, dispute processes and exit plans. This would help ensure that the new models strengthen reciprocal Malawi–Scotland relationships rather than short-term transactions.

Recommended safeguards for Aid Match

1. **Accessibility.** Test the scheme with small organisations and Malawian partners before full launch.
2. **Fair recognition.** Accept suitable non-cash contributions and offer more than one match rate.
3. **Up-front finance.** Use advance payments so that participation does not depend on unrestricted reserves.
4. **Transparency.** Publish award data and review whether funding is reaching smaller and locally led organisations.

Current pressures and priorities

The cost and mechanics of delivery in Malawi

The value of an award can change materially between approval and delivery. Inflation, foreign-exchange pressure, fuel costs and new taxes and levies increase programme and operating costs. Budgets need a clear process for revising cost assumptions, using contingencies and responding to major currency movements without reducing agreed outcomes silently.

Cross-border banking requirements can also delay otherwise sound programmes. MaSP recently experienced a delay because its initial bank could not provide an IBAN. We fast-tracked an already planned foreign-currency account with another bank, provided the required IBAN and transactions are now on track. This experience shows why funders should confirm transfer requirements early, allow reasonable banking costs and maintain practical communication when a solvable issue arises.

Organisational and digital resilience

Local organisations need adequate systems to manage funds safely. Eligible costs should include financial controls, safeguarding, staff development, data protection, secure websites, back-up arrangements and response to digital incidents. These are part of responsible delivery, not optional administration. Shared training or technical support may help, but it should complement rather than replace funding for each organization's own responsibilities.

Humanitarian preparedness and women's leadership

Humanitarian finance should be separately identified, quickly accessible and connected to longer-term resilience. Decisions should draw on information from national authorities, local civil society and affected communities. In Malawi, climate and economic shocks can worsen food insecurity and place additional pressure on public services and community organisations. Flexible anticipatory funding can reduce harm before a situation becomes an emergency. The loss-and-damage information supplied with the Minister's letter should help the Committee test whether climate finance is genuinely additional and whether enough reaches locally led resilience work.

The commitment linked to United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 should be reflected in published funding criteria and results. Women-led and women's rights organisations should help set priorities and should be able to access funding directly. Budgets should include the costs of safe participation, safeguarding and reaching women and girls who face disability, distance, poverty or other barriers.

Recommendations to the Committee

- 1. Deliver the full 25% increase in 2027–28. State the baseline and protect the increase in real terms.**
- 2. Keep funds distinct. Maintain humanitarian and climate justice allocations as separate and additional commitments.**
- 3. Make multi-year full-cost funding standard. Include a sustainable settlement for the four international development network bodies.**
- 4. Put Malawian leadership into programme governance. Co-design the programme review and new funding models with partner-country organisations and communities.**
- 5. Design Aid Match for broad participation. Provide small-grant routes, flexible match rules, advance payments and transparent monitoring of access.**
- 6. Recognise the real cost of safe delivery. Fund inflation and currency responses, taxes, banking, safeguarding, digital security and organisational capacity.**
- 7. Support locally informed humanitarian action. Connect rapid response with resilience and provide meaningful access for women-led organisations.**

Further information [Malawi Scotland Partnership](#); [Programme for Government 2026 to 2031](#);