

Written submission from Scottish Catholic International Aid Fund, 28 September 2026

Pre-budget scrutiny 2027-28

Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee

Since it was established in 2005, Scotland's International Development Fund has transformed lives around the world. By the end of the 2025/26 financial year, the International Development Fund and Humanitarian Emergency Fund (HEF) amounted to £16m annually, alongside a separate Climate Justice Fund (CJF) which was £36m over the course of the last Parliament.

Distinct in its funding as well as its operationalisation, the Scottish development contribution is complementary to UK aid, though is counted as part of the UK's overall contribution to official development assistance (ODA). With a smaller and nimbler budget, the Scottish contribution has been able to test and champion new models of development practice, from agroecology in Zambia to climate justice and Loss and Damage internationally. In SCIAF's experience, this combination of financial support, long-term partnership and Scottish civic engagement can achieve a "multiplier effect" which returns in benefit much more than the contribution from the tax-payer alone. By strengthening local organisations, creating enduring relationships between people and institutions, harnessing Scottish expertise and community support, Scotland's development aid is greater than the sum of its parts, and gives Scotland a distinctive role in shaping the international development agenda.

This submission covers 4 main areas, providing SCIAF's expert opinion and analysis on: 1) Increases in the Scottish Aid Budget, 2) Review of Existing Programmes, 3) Developing new modes of funding and partnership, 4) A New International Development Strategy and 5) Transparency and Accountability.

1. Increases in the Scottish Aid Budget

International Development Fund: SCIAF had called for the Programme for Government to front-load its commitment to increase the International Development Fund by 'at least 25%' in the 2027-2028 financial year. We warmly welcome this increase. The scale of the challenge facing existing priority countries is huge: Malawi, for example, is facing a 90% cut to its UK aid budget. By 2028/29, UK aid will be reducing from £50M in 2025/6 to £5M¹. On current trends, Scotland may be contributing more to Malawi in aid than the UK Government by that year². By increasing aid at a time when other Governments are making cuts, Scotland is standing out internationally as a progressive global ally and aligning itself with

¹https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6a61d75447af652afa0c8a73/FCDO_Annual_Report_2025_to_2026.pdf

² SG figures for 24/25 - <https://www.gov.scot/publications/international-strategy-annual-report-2024-25/pages/8/-table-15>

others such as Ireland³ and Spain⁴.

It is important to highlight the wider financial context that Global South countries face. Zambia will have to pay 20% of government revenue to external debt payments between 2025-2035⁵. For Malawi, public spending has been cut by 26% between 2022-2026 with another 8% to come in 2027, according to the IMF⁶. Illicit financial flows – for example through tax evasion by corporations or other means - have cost Africa \$40 billion a year from extractive industries⁷. Being a steady ally in times of need has never been more important.

By bringing forward this increase in the aid budget quickly, the Scottish Government will be in a position to get new initiatives and programming (including the proposed “aid match” scheme) in its partner countries up and running quickly- that will help communities address these increasing challenges.

Climate Justice Fund: The Programme for Government commits to increasing the Climate Justice Fund but does not specify the overall commitment to this fund over the course of the Parliament.

Climate change is already causing devastating and irreversible harm to communities across the Global South. Scotland has played an important role in recognising this. The Climate Justice Fund was established in 2012 and Scotland was the first Global North government to make a financial commitment specifically for Loss and Damage (L&D) at COP26 in Glasgow, which made headlines around the world and helped secure the UN commitment to establish a global L&D fund at COP27 in Egypt.

Since then, Scottish funding has supported communities dealing with the impacts of climate change while also helping to build the case for greater international action. SCIAF has been one of the organisations delivering this work, including through its partnerships in Malawi and Rwanda. SCIAF would encourage the Scottish Government to increase the Climate Justice Fund to match the International Development Fund, setting a target of spending across the whole Parliament, working out as at least £16m annually. We recommend that 50% of the Climate Justice Fund should be dedicated to L&D programming. This would be a significant commitment from Scotland and would reinforce the position it has established over recent years on one of the central issues of climate justice.

To direct this funding, the Scottish Government should set out its L&D ambition at COP31 in Türkiye. The priority should remain getting money to communities experiencing the impacts of climate change, working through effective partnerships and drawing on Scottish expertise, while continuing to use Scotland’s voice to push for greater international action. SCIAF would also encourage the Scottish

³ [ODA Increase in Budget 2026 is Evidence of Ireland's Commitment on Global Stage - GOAL Global](#)

⁴ [Spanish Official Development Assistance reaches highest level in 15 years](#)

⁵ [Debt Crisis in the Commonwealth: A Call for UK Global Leadership | SCIAF](#) and Debt Justice, pg 13

⁶ SCIAF, *ibid*, pg 15

⁷ [Tackling Illicit Financial Flows: Africa's Path to Reparatory Justice | United Nations Economic Commission for Africa](#)

Government to make a modest contribution to the Fund for Responding to Loss and Damage (FRLD) when its next replenishment takes place, ideally alongside other sub-state governments and to continue championing greater Loss and Damage finance within the UK, Europe and international climate negotiations. It should also consider supporting the Fill the Fund campaign: the global campaign coordinating efforts to increase funding for the FRLD. Scotland's experience of providing finance directly to communities gives it a strong basis from which to argue for an adequately funded international response.

2. Review of existing programmes

Community-led climate justice: With the Climate Justice Fund (CJF), we have welcomed the community design and 'rights holder' approach that has been taken, and we have seen the benefits of this model. To the best of our knowledge, this innovative approach adopted with the CJF is the best example of community-led development funded by a major donor, and we believe it should be replicated across Scottish Government's 's IDF programme. The model has ensured that the community's needs are placed front and centre and that the communities have led in the identification of the challenges they face, and the most locally appropriate solutions. This innovative model has worked best when implemented through a trusted Scottish organisation founded on localisation, a partnership approach and ensuring that over 95% of the budget is spent in-country.

Return Livelihoods to the agenda: SCIAF believes that it is vital to return to the issue of livelihoods as an objective for the International Development Fund. When we look at our partner countries, communities in Africa rely on agriculture to feed their families, build food security amidst mounting climate change impacts and use it to earn a living. There are a growing number of communities using a more sustainable farming approach called agroecology which shifts farming away from using fossil fuel products like industrial fertilisers that negatively impacts on the quality of the soil and thus the yield. Successful programmes, previously funded by the Scottish Government, continue to benefit communities long after funding has ended, through continued, long-term food security. In addition, these communities reaped the rewards of this approach even during the worst drought conditions, such as those in Zambia in 2024/5, when communities that had adopted agroecology continued to produce their own food, whilst neighbouring communities required food aid.

Expand peacebuilding initiatives: Against of backdrop of escalating global conflicts, we believe the Scottish Government should continue to support peacebuilding work through the Scottish Peace Platform and the Women in Conflict 1325 Fellowship. We recommend expanding this fellowship to those who do not speak English, by providing fellowships in French, Spanish, and Arabic. We also recommend considering additional peacebuilding programme funding by broadening the IDF through a focus on the triple-nexus of Humanitarian-Development-Peace (HDP).

Plotting the progress in global health: Health was a relatively recent programme addition, and it would be ideal to have a review of the progress and future plans in this area – this could be integrated into the work for the international development

strategy. This should apply to all areas of the programme as it stands.

3. Developing new modes of funding and partnership

Aid Match: SCIAF supports the commitment to Aid Match as a means to catalyse Scotland's support of International Development, and we believe that it is important that the aid match commitment is trialled in 27/28. SCIAF are well-positioned to help test a pilot with the number of countries we are active in as well as our domestic footprint in Scotland. With UK Aid Match, we undertook five Aid Match programmes across Africa and Asia - all were community-designed and led.

We encourage the Scottish Government to explore key learning from the administrators of the UK aid match scheme and look for a lighter touch model. There is also a UK aid match All Party Group in the House of Commons who have explored the issues involved in aid match⁸.

We would suggest three objectives for the Scottish Aid Match programme:

- To help provide communications and public awareness opportunities - this would spread the word of the life changing work that Scottish aid is doing. On one iteration of our UK Aid Match work, up to 29m 'opportunities to views' were given about the work.
- Provide support for Scotland's struggling aid sector to ensure scrutiny and pressure to act as well as providing connection between the general public and programmes.
- Act as a multiplier. SCIAF's own experience with the UK Aid Match programme showed it raised 72% more in total amount raised. Average gifts increased by 46%.

It will be essential to make sure this scheme is designed in an agile way and has a low administrative burden all-round: from application to evaluation for both the management end and the applicant. It will also be vital to have a version of the scheme that gives smaller Scottish based organisations access to the opportunity too. Alongside this, it will be important to invest in tracking awareness of Scotland's International Development Fund and footprint amongst the Scottish public.

Humanitarian Emergency Fund: The Humanitarian Emergency Fund (HEF) has been an important part of Scotland's international development offer since its establishment in 2017. Its original model involved a panel of Scottish humanitarian charities, who would quickly submit proposals for emergency response funding after a disaster. These were then "peer-reviewed" and awards were made, ensuring quick disbursement of funds to communities in need around the world. This model helped the Scottish Government, 1) access Scottish expertise in humanitarian aid, 2) deliver locally led aid quickly to charities on the ground, 3) outsource risk and compliance to Scottish expert humanitarian NGOs, and 4) ensure communication about Scottish humanitarian aid reached the Scottish public.

Following the recent review of the HEF, however, Scottish charities such as SCIAF,

⁸ [UK-Aid-Match-Real-Aid-or-Charity-Washing-Full-Report-September-2023_1.pdf](#)

Oxfam Scotland and Christian Aid Scotland no longer have opportunities to access the fund to support their partners. The Scottish Government has indicated that it is exploring future opportunities for the HEF to work with Scottish charities again, but there is currently no clear timetable for establishing such a mechanism. SCIAF believes that there is a strong case for progressing this work promptly. A future HEF should be agile and quick to respond, transparent, predictable and accountable, while putting localisation at its centre and ensuring that power and decision-making remain with local organisations wherever possible. Scottish humanitarian organisations are well placed because they have established partnerships and networks in countries affected by crises, while also providing an important link back to the Scottish public and Parliament, enabling people in Scotland to understand the impact of humanitarian funding and the contribution it makes. A well-designed mechanism can therefore combine strong local leadership with appropriate Scottish accountability and public engagement. It may be prudent for the Scottish Government to consider some pre-positioning of HEF funds in partner countries to speed up response for when a crisis hits.

SCIAF would welcome consideration of new funding models in which 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. Such an approach could retain the speed and expertise required in an emergency while providing greater predictability for Scottish organisations and their partners. It would also give the Scottish Government a clear and transparent mechanism through which to communicate Scotland's humanitarian contribution to the public. The precise model should be developed through consultation with the Scottish humanitarian sector and, crucially, with organisations and communities in the countries in which the fund operates. This model should ensure it adopts a community-led design approach to best meet the needs of communities themselves.

4. A New International Development Strategy

SCIAF calls on the Scottish Government to commit to revise the government's International Development Strategy in a transparent, open and consultative process. This has not been comprehensively undertaken since 2016 and is overdue in a changing world. We believe this review of the international development programme should consider the context of increased conflict across the globe and examine the impact on livelihoods and agriculture.

This review should involve civil society from all development partner countries, as well as from Scotland. Consultation of international stakeholders recently informed the development of Scotland's Circular Economy Strategy (following best practice outlined in this publication: [Successful consultation with global south | SCIAF](#)). SCIAF calls on Scottish Government to commit to a similar consultation process for the International Development Strategy.

SCIAF's view is that the number and countries already set out as partners should remain unchanged in a new strategy. Through the long-term commitment of the

Scottish Government, and Scottish Civil Society, to Malawi, Rwanda, Zambia, and Pakistan, strong relationships have developed at multiple levels, from local communities, to national authorities, allowing for an approach to development funding based on authentic partnership. Achieving this level of partnership in additional countries, would take significant additional time, and resources.

5. Transparency and accountability

Transparency and accountability from the International Development Fund, like all monies, is important. The Scottish Parliament Cross Party Group for International Development published a report⁹ ix in the last session, which made several calls we would echo:

- Ensuring timely and regular reporting on funding
- Reporting back to the External Affairs Committee yearly
- Publishing regularly on the global International Aid Transparency Index
- Improving communication and collaboration with the third sector
- The need for clearer funding processes and greater collaboration with partners

To help the Scottish humanitarian sector have greater impact, we support the continued core funding for several network organisations such as Scotland's International Development Alliance, Scotland-Malawi Partnership, Malawi-Scotland Partnership and Scottish Fair trade. It would be worth considering similar partnerships with civil society networks in Zambia and Rwanda, too. All of these organisations help coordinate work across the sector – vital to ensuring we get the right message out and coordinate activities for maximum impact.

⁹ Scottish Parliament Cross Party Group on International Development, session 6 [250604-CPGReportForPublication.pdf](#)