

Scottish Parliament CPG on International Development

Wednesday 16th March 2022 18:00-19:30 pm

Towards a Wellbeing and Sustainable Development Bill

**Please note that it is not the intention of the minutes to record a verbatim account.*

MSP Attendees: Sarah Boyack MSP, Maggie Chapman MSP

MSP Apologies: Alex Cole-Hamilton MSP, Foysol Choudhury MSP, Alasdair Allan MSP, Mark Ruskell MSP

Member Organisation list: Scotland's International Development Alliance, ActionAid UK, ACTSA, Corra Foundation, EMMS International, Friends of Chitambo, IIED, Jubilee Scotland, Leprosy Mission Scotland, Link Education International, Oxfam Scotland, Scottish Fair Trade Forum, SCIAF, Tearfund Scotland, , Thrive, Unicef UK, University of Dundee, University of Edinburgh, University of Glasgow, University of Strathclyde, UN House Scotland, Water Witness International

Individual List: Pat Black, John Francis

Non-member Organisation attendees: African Lakes Company, Catherine Currie consulting Ltd, East Renfrewshire Council, Engineering Outcomes, National Justice & Peace Commission, Wellbeing Economy Alliance Scotland

In attendance (speakers): Ndivile Mokoena (Project Coordinator at Gender CC Southern Africa, based in South Africa), Jamie Livingstone (Head of Oxfam Scotland), Dr Graham Long (Senior Lecturer in Politics at Newcastle University), Ishani Erasmus (practitioner and advocate of sustainable development), Huw Owen (External Affairs Manager, Disasters Emergency Committee), Dr Najeebullah Hoshang (former senior Afghan Government Public Health Specialist)

Welcome: Sarah Boyack opened the meeting and welcomed everyone.

Sarah then introduced the theme of the meeting – the future Wellbeing and Sustainable Development Bill – and mentioned that a portion of time at the end of the meeting would be set aside for an update from the DEC on the Humanitarian Emergencies in Afghanistan and Ukraine. Sarah introduced all speakers.

The minutes from the last meeting were agreed. David moved. Maggie Chapman MSP seconded.

Sarah then passed to Ndivile.

Ndivile Mokoena: Ndivile thanked the CPG for welcoming her to the meeting. She explained that she works on gender and climate issues and that her intervention at this meeting would be based on her personal experience.

She then explained that the UN SDGs are a blueprint for global prosperity across the world, and that they demonstrate the need for holistic action to improve wellbeing. She mentioned that reducing poverty is statistically proven to be particularly linked to specific SDGs, namely: SDG3 (Health), SDG4 (Education), SDG 5 (Gender), SDG 6 (Clean water and sanitation) and SDG10 (reduced inequalities).

She highlighted that SDG12 focuses on reduced consumption and that this is key for a just transition – the move towards a circular and regenerative economy.

All this is linked to wellbeing – and shows we must understand this term through an holistic lens, including preventative actions.

The SDGs are a good guide for governments to consider wellbeing. She said it is important to remember the global interconnectedness of this agenda: we can never achieve global wellbeing independently.

With this in mind, Ndivile posed the question: how can we achieve global wellbeing with such great inequalities between and within countries? For example, women still face many barriers in accessing decent work in some countries, and global labour markets are still characterised by huge gaps between men and women.

There are enormous gaps in wealth and power globally. Access to resources and knowledge remain hugely unequal.

As building blocks to global wellbeing, we also need a just transition to a low carbon economy, particularly in terms of ensuring gender equality.

To finish, Ndivile said that governments everywhere have a primary responsibility to define policies and governance systems coherently at international, regional and local levels which should provide a transformative vision for people and planet-centred, human rights-based and gender sensitive sustainable development.

Jamie Livingstone: Jamie started by saying it was fantastic to hear from Ndivile, whose contribution really underscores the need to grasp this Wellbeing and Sustainable Development Bill to drive sustainable and equitable international development.

He then explained the background to the WSD Bill.

Ahead of 2021 Scottish election, the Alliance, and many members, challenged all political parties to include a commitment to the Bill within their manifestos... we were delighted that many did so. The Scottish Government then put the Bill in the Programme for Government, with a commitment to place duties on public bodies and local councils to take account of the impact of their decisions on sustainable development, here and globally.

He said there is still plenty work to do to define what this bill will do, and crucially, how it will do it. For example: What should the stated purpose be? What should the

Bill require? And of whom? How can it complement and enhance existing legislation; And how should we monitor its delivery and impact?

Critically, we need to think through how we can lock in a focus on the global impacts of activities here in Scotland, not as an optional extra, but something that's absolutely core, both in what we want to achieve, and how we deliver it.

He mentioned that even though the Scottish Government's contribution to global development is growing, our contribution remains relatively small, and the reality is that our global impact goes well beyond our financial support, essential though it is.

In fact, much of the bigger systemic issues at the heart of global issues – inequality, poverty, the nature emergency and the climate crisis – are impacted, positively and negatively, by other public policy decisions across government.

Whether that's about the way we trade, what we buy through public procurement, or require of those securing public contracts, to how we use our tax powers, and where or how much emphasis we put on global citizenship – in schools and beyond. Across these and other areas the actions of our government, public bodies and local authorities – as well as how they interact with the private sector and other actors – really matter.

He asked rhetorically if we can confidently say that the global impacts of decisions are routinely considered and said that's where this Bill has the potential to make real difference. It can require decisionmakers, at all levels, to question, and to interrogate, the impacts of decisions here in Scotland. It can help us to identify when one policy actively undermines ambitions in another area. And, crucially, it can open up these discussions, and the decisions that flow from them, to public and parliamentary scrutiny.

He said that the definitions and scope of the Bill will really matter, something the researchers explain more below. Fundamentally, we can no longer, if we ever could, separate the nature and climate crises from our behaviours here in Scotland – our throw-away consumption culture, our fossil-fuel dependency, our investment decisions. And nor can we de-couple our economic prosperity and wellbeing from the poverty experienced elsewhere.

Jamie mentioned the National Performance Framework. He said he thinks this framework is maturing, with increasing wellbeing now an explicit goal – albeit alongside an ongoing focus on what's described as “sustainable economic growth”, with questions around what that means in practice.

Together, the 11 existing National Outcomes are, in theory, meant to describe the kind of Scotland the Scottish Government hopes to create, and they include making a “positive contribution internationally”. This new Bill can enhance the status and role of these Outcomes in policy and spending decisions.

Even though commitments from FM are clear and robust, and we've seen some progress with the creation of a PCSD working group, there is a big implementation gap when it comes to making SD part of the policy process, with much of

government operating in silos with competing and sometimes opposing priorities, and too little coordination, or public and parliamentary scrutiny.

Jamie concluded by saying that this new Bill must help narrow the distance between stated ambitions and delivery. It must strengthen and support other pieces of legislation – including the Community Empowerment Act and the Climate Change Act, while supporting delivery of the promised Circular Economy Bill. Above all, it can ensure that every public agency, every pound they spend, every policy they introduce, consciously – by law – must take the consequences here and globally, now and in the future, both fully and transparently into account.

Sarah Boyack: Sarah thanked Jamie and introduced the next speakers – Dr Graham Long (Senior Lecturer in Politics at Newcastle University) and Ishani Erasmus (practitioner and advocate of sustainable development, currently working with the Scottish Parliament) – two of three researchers who worked on behalf of the Alliance to develop recommendations for the WSD Bill. She mentioned a third researcher, Zoe Russell, was supposed to join them, but was ill.

Dr Graham Long and Ishani Erasmus: Graham thanked Sarah and the Alliance for the opportunity to join this meeting and also for having had the chance to contribute to the thinking about what a bill like this might aim to do.

Please note, the draft recommendations developed by Graham, Ishani and Zoe are available here: http://www.intdevalliance.scot/download_file/view/2403

He first laid out a little bit about the context of how this proposed bill compares to other legislation across the world, and mentioned their Learning from the Welsh Future Generations Act – but also similar acts in Canada, Malta, and others. He summarised three points, that:

- **Global** dimension of sustainable development (not just “here and now” but “tomorrow *and elsewhere*”) not captured effectively?
- The need for **policy coherence** in response is not communicated effectively
- Commissions/Commissioners/Guardians are common, but with limited independence and scrutiny powers

He said the Scottish Bill should have all of these points above. He then went on to discuss the Scottish Context.

He said that there is talk of sustainability and sustainable development scattered throughout Scottish legislation and policy, but there is no clear definition. There is an Existing duty around sustainable development in Climate Change Act.

He finished by saying that their research has led them to think that the Bill should:

- embed the idea of Sustainable Development in Scottish public life
- Give *substance* to the idea of SD – improve understanding of what it means and requires – and so improve the effectiveness of all existing SD legislation
- Give it an institutional *home*
- Improve implementation and accountability

Ishani then introduced a bit more detail on exactly what the purpose of the Bill should be. She started by saying that part of the problem with sustainable development duties is that there is no legal definition to hold public bodies account to...

Therefore, a clear definition is important and could be

“An Act of the Scottish Parliament to:

- define sustainable development by reference to key principles, including a requirement for coherent public policy, in order to give force to provisions for sustainable development in preceding Acts of the Scottish Parliament;
- to establish the duties on public bodies in respect of sustainable development, including monitoring and reporting;
- to provide for a transition to a wellbeing economy;

to establish the powers and duties of the Future Generations and Sustainable Development Commissioner.”

She said that wellbeing, sustainable development (SD) and policy coherence are interlinked, and there is a clear need to make existing sustainable development (SD) and wellbeing clauses more effective for accountability, justiciability, enforceability.

She defined Sustainable development as: the development of human societies in ways which do not threaten planetary boundaries, and which equitably supports the capability of present and future generations across the world to meet their needs. Core principles to be listed, including domestic and international policy coherence.

She explained concepts of planetary boundaries, and Kate Raworth’s Doughnut Economics.

She defined Policy coherence as the consistency of public policy, whereby:

- no policy undermines any other policy;
- where policy conflicts occur, the root cause of the conflict should be identified and efforts made to resolve it in a manner which:
 - minimizes trade-offs
 - maximizes synergies.

She emphasised that Policy coherence can be in pursuit of anything, so we must clarify that it is policy coherence for sustainable development that is the goal. This must:

- support ecological integrity and social equity within Scotland, and elsewhere in the world.
- support the self-defined sustainable development of other countries.

Ishani also laid out the kind of public duties that could be amended through this bill, and gave the example for the Climate Change Act. She said that a definition of sustainable development (SD), including policy coherence for SD (PCSD) will help to direct implementation.

She also mentioned the Community Empowerment Act and talked through how that could be enhanced in relation to the development of national outcomes.

She defined a wellbeing economy as one in which public policy is focussed on equitably ensuring that all people in Scotland have the capability to meet their human needs without having a detrimental effect on the capability of people outwith Scotland, and in the future, to meet their human needs, while seeking to minimize and reverse the risk of breaching planetary boundaries.

Graham then finished off the presentation by touching on their recommendations for a commissioner. He said that the office of the proposed Future Generations Commissioner for Scotland should be placed on a statutory footing by the WSD Bill, and be renamed to reflect wider role. It should be given resources and mandate to do job properly. Key learning from Wales and other duties in Scotland – support, guidance, body of good practice, peer-learning needed for SD duty to be effectively embedded.

Discussion: Sarah thanked the presenter and opened the discussion to the wider meeting attendees.

Geraldine Hill from SCIAF asked about the Good Food Nation Bill. She said it doesn't currently cover international impact. How would this WSD Bill support making a Good Food Nation Bill, or similar, take global impact into consideration.

Ishani responded by saying that by this is why definitions are important, and that by including a legal definition in the WSD Bill, we can then go back case by case and make sure other bills, like the good food nation bill are covered through this definition.

Sarah also noted that Good Food Nation Bill hasn't yet left parliament and there is still time to influence it.

Bertha, who said she lives in Scotland, but is from Nigeria, expressed that she had found listening to the presentations this evening a bit difficult – she talked about the incongruity of talking about these issues when oil is such a significant part of the development trajectory for a country like Nigeria. She was struggling to connect the dots between the ideas for this legislation and the lived experience of people in the Global South.

Jamie responded by saying that Scotland can lead by example, in full knowledge the limits to its influence. By doing this, it allows us to speak with authority on the global stage. He acknowledged that this doesn't necessarily make a difference to people's lives in the way that Bertha would like.

Graham also responded to Bertha by saying that her point raises an interesting question on what is Scotland's full/fair share of global sustainable development. What does it mean to do no harm? What is a positive contribution etc?

Ndivile then added that taking points like this into consideration is vital.

Another participant, who is a former climate advisor at DFID, then mentioned that climate framing is clearly the right way to go, and he thinks the recommendations of this Bill are absolutely the right thing that's needed in the Scottish context.

Clare Duncanson, from University of Edinburgh, the asked about the risks of having both 'wellbeing' and 'sustainable development' in the bill, and whether having two concepts could dilute are create risks of confusion.

Ishani responded by saying that in fact the two concepts are mutually supportive if defined properly, so she doesn't see this as problematic.

Lukas Hardt from Wellbeing Economy Alliance Scotland then added that the definitions presented are both really useful, and agreed that they support one another conceptually. He also said that each term/concept can be useful for different audiences, so its good to have them together. E.g. Wellbeing economy helps frame things as an economic problem, and sustainable development doesn't, so as long as the y speak to each other, we're more likely to reinforce arguments for both concepts.

Sarah then brought the discussion to a close and thanked everyone before introducing the final part of the meeting which was an update from the DEC on the Humanitarian Emergencies in Afghanistan and Ukraine.

She introduced Huw Owen (External Affairs Manager, Disasters Emergency Committee) and Dr Najeebullah Hoshang (former senior Afghan Government Public Health Specialist)

Huw Owen: Huw started by saying that he was sitting in the Ukrainian Association Scotland in what is an ever-changing environment in relation to the crisis in Ukraine.

He then presented a short film about an Afghan refugee who ended up in Ukraine as the war broke out there. It emphasised that these crises are both ongoing.

He gave a few facts about the crisis in Ukraine (true on 16 March 2022):

- Fastest-growing refugee crisis since the Second World War
- 3 million refugees have now fled to neighbouring countries
- UN estimates 1.9 million people internally displaced
- UN estimates \$1.1 billion needed for response inside Ukraine, currently 20% funded

He then spoke about the DEC Appeal which had raised £190 million in two weeks. More than £18 million raised in Scotland so far. Scottish Government has donated £2 million to the Appeal, UK Aid Match £25 million. SG has also released £1 million to UNICEF, £500,000 to both British Red Cross and SCIAF too. SG also providing medical equipment and supplies alongside UK Government.

He then gave an overview of how DEC works, and what different organisations are doing, including details of what type of support was being delivered.

He then went onto the Afghan crisis and explained that the DEC Appeal launched in December 2021 and had so far raised £38 million pounds to provide food and nutrition support along with medical care, clean water, shelter and more.

Through the HEF, the Scottish Government has put £380k towards the Humanitarian response.

Dr Najeebullah Hoshang then finished the contribution by making a plead for people in Scotland not to forget about Afghanistan.

He said that poverty and health are even worse than media reports – children are dying due to lack of food and health support. There is also concern that support may not be reaching those most in need.

In Kabul and other big cities, food is being distributed to those who know where and how to get it. Prioritisation of need is difficult, particularly in rural areas.

People desperately short of money are selling their young daughters, such is the need to feed other, even more vulnerable members of the family. Despite reassurances, there are still high levels of Insecurity, particular for those connected to former regime.

He summarised by saying that the crisis is not over and repeated his statement about the need to remember that Afghanistan.

Aid should be delivered through efficient, effective and non-political bodies. Many humanitarian INGOS have been in the country since before the US led operation to remove the Taliban in 2001.

Sarah Boyack MSP: Sarah thanked all speakers and summarised the themes discussed, from gender inequality, the future WSD Bill & the ongoing crises in Ukraine and Afghanistan.

The next meeting will be 8th June at 6pm.