

# Cross-Party Group on International Development

Tuesday 7th November 2023 18:00-19:30

Minute

Present

MSPs

Sarah Boyack MSP, Maggie Chapman MSP, Karen Adam MSP, John Mason MSP, Foyso Choudhury MSP

Invited guests

Lebohang Liepollo Pheko, Senior Research Fellow, Political Economist and Decolonial Feminist at the think-tank Trade Collective, Anam Parvez-Butt, Head of Research, Oxfam GB, Jessica Mandanda, Advocacy and Communications Specialist, Feminist Macroeconomic Alliance Malawi, Lewis Ryder-Jones, Advocacy Adviser, Oxfam Scotland

Non-MSP Group Members

Iain Black- University of Strathclyde  
David Cunningham – Scotland’s International Development Alliance  
Louise Davies – Scotland’s International Development Alliance  
Claire Duncanson - University of Edinburgh  
Frances Guy – Scotland’s International Development Alliance  
David Kenvyn – Action for Southern Africa  
Katlynne Kirk - Jubilee Scotland  
Andrew Tomlinson – Christian Aid  
Adam Wilson – Scottish Parliament

Other Attendees

Jasim Amin – NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde  
Madiha Butt  
Denya Findlay - Intertek  
Xavier Gonzalez – University of Wisconsin River Falls Experience Scotland Program  
Agnes Holmes - Friends of Chitambo  
Jack Lenox  
Elizabeth Loose  
Laura Malinauskaite – University of Iceland  
Lindy Montgomery - University of the Highlands and Islands

Chad Morse – Scotland Malawi Partnership  
King Omeihe – University of the West of Scotland  
Joanne O'Neill – ActionAid UK  
Natalia Rodriguez-Halagan – ActionAid UK  
Juliana Sofía Riaño Sánchez  
Emma Sedgwick – Rural Communications  
David Skene – University of the Highlands and Islands, North West Hebrides  
Anna Spiesova – Glasgow Caledonian University  
Katherine Trebeck – Edinburgh Futures Institute  
Sean Webster – City of Edinburgh Council

## Apologies

Alasdair Allan MSP, Liam Kerr MSP, Maurice Golden MSP (new member)

## Agenda item 1 - Welcome

Sarah Boyack MSP opened the meeting and welcomed everyone.

Sarah introduced the theme of the meeting – moving beyond GDP and building a feminist wellbeing economy.

The minutes from the last meeting were agreed.

## Agenda item 2 – AGM - Election of officials

Louise Davies of Scotland's International Development Alliance chaired the meeting temporarily to call for nominations for convenor of the parliamentary group. Maggie Chapman MSP nominated Sarah Boyack MSP as convenor. This was seconded by Foyso Choudhury MSP.

Louise called for nominations for deputy convenor. Foyso Choudhury MSP nominated Karen Adam MSP. This was seconded by Maggie Chapman MSP. Sarah Boyack MSP then chaired the meeting and proposed that Scotland's International Development Alliance remain as the secretariat to the group. John Mason MSP nominated SIDA. This was seconded by Maggie Chapman MSP. The AGM business was concluded.

## Agenda item 3 - Discussion

Sarah introduced Anam Parvez-Butt.

**Anam Parvez-Butt:** Anam began by sharing key highlights from the paper radical pathways beyond GDP. Anam outlined that we are in a situation of a policy crisis, with inequality rife and 81 billionaires holding more wealth than 50% of the world's population. Anam highlighted that we have crossed 6 out of 9 planetary boundaries, with chronic underinvestment in care, infrastructure, and services pushing 1.3 billion

women globally deeper into time and income poverty. Anam shared that this is driven by an extractive, patriarchal, neo-colonial economic system which systematically ignores and exploits both care work and nature.

According to Anam, it creates a false separation between the market economy and what feminist economists call the maintenance economy. This consists of care activities and ecological processes which in the current system are considered valueless and seem to lie outside of economic thought and policy making. At the centre of the system is GDP (gross domestic product) which has become the single most important indicator of economic and social progress. According to Anam, it's not just a metric, it's also an entire value system that equates well-being for all with the production of material goods. It's become deeply entrenched in formal frameworks for national, regional, global institutions such as the World Bank and IMF.

Anam explained that one of the biggest critics of GDP was the inventor of GDP, Simon Kuznets. According to Anam, it doesn't tell us anything directly about social and ecological well-being, ignoring the value of peace and clean air. GDP can happen in a way that tackles inequality when it's driven by investments in key public services. Anam argues that as a metric, it has no way of examining what is being produced, how it's being produced, and who it benefits or harms. It also takes no account of inequality. According to Anam, it isn't a good measure of economic activity, showing that 65% of women's working hours are excluded from GDP. Anam explained that this is due to unpaid care which is not captured in GDP calculations and women carry out 3/4 of unpaid care globally.

Anam highlighted that unpaid care saves the Scottish Government £12.6 billion pounds every year in social care costs. According to Anam, minority ethnic women tend to spend even more time doing this work.

Anam shared the importance of this issue. According to Anam, what isn't seen or counted influences what policies get prioritised and who benefits and loses. Anam shared the UK Government is providing £13.6 billion pounds in subsidies to oil and gas industries, which is more than three times as much as their investment in childcare.

Anam stressed that more needs to be done to ensure that care work is truly valued. Anam shared how ten years of austerity in the UK has been accompanied by a fall in life expectancy among women living in the most deprived areas. Anam highlighted that there are other ways of ensuring fiscal space to maintain and invest in critical public services such as progressive taxation. Anam highlighted how a focus on GDP not only drives inequalities at home, but also abroad. According to Anam, the brunt of the impact of climate change is borne by low-income countries and low-income households within those.

In response to growing recognition of GDP's huge shortcomings, Anam highlighted that numerous countries have invested in alternative measures. According to Anam, Scotland has made some good progress with the well-being economy monitor and its national outcomes. However, as many civil society actors have pointed out, these don't sufficiently recognise the importance of care. Very few initiatives can be said to be

explicitly feminist or decolonial in terms of their conceptual foundation, and they aren't being used to guide policies which remain subservient to GDP.

Anam outlined Oxfam's five core dimensions. Alternatives should capture all forms of economic activity, paid and unpaid, formal and informal, production and reproduction, a critical indicator that can give us insight into the incidence of unpaid cares. They should show how economic activity is benefiting everyone by capturing inequality.

For alternatives to be decolonial, they need to factor in the positive or negative impact of a country's policy decisions and resource use on social and ecological prosperity in other countries. According to Anam, indicators and alternative metrics need to be developed through a bottom-up process with women, minority ethnic groups and indigenous people being central to the design, implementation, and review of these.

Anam highlighted the need to transform dominant narratives in academic curriculums, political debate, and popular media on the universal positivity of GDP growth. According to Anam, there is a need to challenge the belief that the market economy is the entire economy and challenge narratives around women under-participating in the labour force, when in fact they do more total hours of work than men. There's a lot of positive work going on in Scotland for members of the Parliament to get behind, such as the well-being and sustainable development bill.

Sarah Boyack MSP: Sarah thanked Anam and introduced Lebohang Liepollo Pheko who joined virtually.

**Lebohang Liepollo Pheko:** The work that feminists have been working on regarding wellbeing economics form part of conversation that emerged more vigorously during COVID. It is very important that most of this work has been led and ideated by women of the global South/majority she world, which is extremely important in the colonial context and the decolonial feminist context. It is the anchor of the work that Black and Brown feminist researchers have been doing. The Oxfam research conducted by Lebohang Liepollo Pheko and Ritu Verna comprised the bulk on which the Oxfam research paper was sourced. It covered six countries of study namely South Africa, Kenya, Scotland, Vietnam, Malaysia and Bhutan. The work recognises the diverse cross sections, contexts and communities, and that our economies and our political geographies and are extremely diverse Because it says author GDP to flatten social measure graphic context.

According to Lebohang, one of the biggest sins of the GDP is that it tries to flatten social and geographic context. It tries to flatten the political economy of different spaces and places. It suggests that the global north is the exemplar of economic growth, of economic development, and of economic excellence, while completely ignoring that it's an extractive economy. It's linked with settler colonialism, with the trafficking of African people across the world as part of the transatlantic slave trade. She argues that we are living in the vestiges of settler colonialism arguing that she is also recovering from settler colonialism as a person who is South African.

Lebohang argues that the research she and Ritu conducted found fatal flaws in the GDP metric. It doesn't describe what is being produced and what is being lost. The use of calculations that include nonproductive market transaction including carbon emissions, environmental pollution, loss of indigenous knowledge and species. The GDP does not describe what is being produced cannot describe what is being lost. GDP has not yet understood that once a species, language, knowledge system, way of being or an epistemology has been eroded, and the archives completely erased from human recollection, they can never be replaced. According to Lebohang, GDP makes this assumption that not only is all growth good, but that all loss can be replaced, and this is not true.

Secondly, it externalises the environmental, social and cultural cost associated with it. It could be war mongering or weapons production, but it will still count these as productive and as useful to the economy, no matter what the cost of human life, human health, social health and psycho emotional health. This includes the production of weapons and the activities that are generated by war. Lebohang also noted how it fails to account for non-market activities. Not only the unpaid work or 'nonmarket activity' but also the paid work women do that is often care work anyway. She gave the example of paid work that mirrors care work like teaching and nursing, that women do, which acquire greater prestige and remuneration as they become more masculinised. For example, the distinction between a nurse and surgeon, a nursery school teacher and a high school maths teacher or university professor is often that these roles become more masculinised, prestigious and better paid when men enter the field.

It's not only a case of the work that is unpaid, but even the work that is paid there is a huge differentiation in status in prestige, in power, in influence, and in voice based on gendered social prejudices. According to Lebohang, GDP assumes that the earth is this infinite resource to be extracted, exploited, and polluted. One of the tenants of feminist economics and feminist wellbeing economics is that the earth is the relationship between ourselves and the economy, ourselves as human communities but also ourselves and the Earth. This is linked with the ethics of many people of the Majority World who view themselves as being in community with the planet and other species. They eschew the western colonial impulse to subdue and dominate other life forms. Rather they view themselves as being in sacred community with sentient and non-sentient beings. This considers that humanity is in partnership and community including the beings that move and do not move, the things that speak and don't speak, the things that breath and don't breathe, the tangible and intangible and that Earth also needs to be nurtured and replenished. The framing provides an ethic that the planet is not merely an object to be extracted, depleted and consumed without receiving GDP is also not equipped to measure things like well-being happiness, indigenous knowledge, and past injustices.

Feminist wellbeing is not only measured in the context of economics and monetary terms, but also in the context of communality which measures non-financial wellness including friendship, a community of care, a sense of joy and hope, neighbourliness and a life without loneliness. Many non-Western communities measure wellbeing in mutuality and collective care. Wellbeing economics offers qualitative measures such as enjoyable work and dignified lives rather than flat employment numbers that do not describe the cost of commuting, workplace stress, and toxic work environments within those workplaces. This requires new and expanded ways of describing and defining

what work is beyond the standard, narrow frames. It also requires us to examine the idea of 'sufficiency' and what is enough, in a world that is driven by the drug of over consumption and punishing production models. The Covid pandemic gave new language in regard to work and social reproduction. Thus, social reproduction encompasses complex tasks that convey intergenerational knowledge, culture, languages, ethics and a way of being in community with each other. This is far more complex than teaching children to count and to 'say please'. It is showing the next generation how to be fully human by being compassionate, competent and considerate beings and cannot occur spontaneously. Social reproduction this form, cannot be understood in the context of mere GDP.

Many models suggest that it's better to slow down GDP rather than to divest completely away from it. The pragmatic political economy school of thought says you can't really let go of something as pernicious as GDP. Other models suggest that you can have a complementary, reinvigorated version of GDP. The research that Lebohang and Ritu conducted identified several false alternatives to the GDP that are actually still rooted in the GDP measures and dogma. These the Human Development Index, Gender Inequality Index, Global Gender Gap Index and the Sustainable Society Index. This also includes the Bhutan Happiness Index which runs parallel to the GDP and may not be easily reproduced in other contexts which have larger populations and are not secluded feudalist monarchies. Lebohang called for a move completely beyond GDP. There are interesting social ethical measures like Buen Vivir from Ecuador and Bolivia which is social philosophy centred on social harmony and between people and nature as well as deeper interconnected community co-existence.

Other real alternative measures from the Global South include the Gross National Happiness Centre in Bhutan, The Composite Well Being Index from the American University of Beirut. From the Global North is The Canadian Wellbeing Index, the Donut Economy model although it does not reference any colonial and feminist constructs, and the circular economy. Of particular interest to Lebohang's research is the Aotearoa model (He Ara Waiora) which is embedded in Maori wellbeing philosophies. It was composed in tandem with many indigenous Maoris. The Aotearoan model is unusual in this regard. Centring the voices of the dispossessed, indigenous, invisibilised people is crucial.

What does the presence of voice mean in the context of a wellbeing economy. The iterations of feminist economics and feminist wellbeing economics of the Majority World are very crucial. The contributions of non-white women are often erased and even plagiarised and Lebohang mentioned Masego Madzwamuse, Fatimah Kelleher and Ritu Verma among the women who are pathbreaking this work. It is important that discussions on Feminist and Feminist Well-being Economics centre the voices of researchers, scholars and activists from the Majority World in order to indeed be authentically decolonial. Feminist equity and social equity are central to wellbeing and wellbeing economics. The Malawi model, which Lebohang was also part one of the lead researchers, begins to provide alternatives pathways away from Structural Adjustment, more radical interpretation of Gender Responsive budgeting as long as it is not a pink washing exercise. Wellbeing economics also forces us to speak to reparations in the context of the time that Black and Brown women have given to the global economy, the knowledge that has been extracted from Black people to the global polity and archive that has not been recognised or remunerated. She mentioned

that apartheid had also used early GDP constructs to justify racialised apartheid. The current global economic system is a continuation of that logic. Countries like Malawi show how labour and personhood are completely diminished under the GDP. The Feminist Wellbeing Economy is an attempt at socio economic reparate, repatriate, repair, restore. In short, a reclamation.

Lebohang shared that the tools of economics need to be changed to reflect not only gender differences and feminism, but also race.

Sarah Boyack MSP: Sarah thanked Lebohang and introduced Jessica Mandanda who joined virtually.

**Jessica Mandanda:** Jessica shared why a shift to the well-being economy is needed in Malawi as the current economic model has not worked since it was introduced in the country. Consistent austerity measures over the years have incrementally reduced public funding for the provision of public services, and there has also been a push for privatisation, and the establishment of public private partnerships. This diminished accessibility to services has led to structural violence and persisting societal political violence.

In 2022, Malawi's debt hit 6.7% of the GDP and this has continued to rise in 2023. The introduction of the structural adjustment programmes in Malawi led to one of the worst periods of hunger in the country, because of the advice that came from the IMF and the World Bank to remove funding from one of the biggest agricultural production institutions in the country. According to Jessica, resultant over reliance on export-oriented agriculture has led to chronic food insecurity. Instead of producing their own food, Malawi is reliant on imports. Based on the advice from the IMF and the World Bank, the wealthy are prioritised in Malawi and the poor majority, mainly women, are being overtaxed. According to Jessica, Malawi has been devastatingly affected by inflation to the point that they are unable to purchase resources, including medication for public hospitals.

In a country where there is no medication, doctors, or clean water, it's difficult for Malawi to properly recover from a crisis such as Covid-19 or cholera. Jessica shared how learning is being facilitated across the country, specifically for young women to contextualise the gender impact of macroeconomic policy. A feminist or well-being economy pushes the current economic policy towards the realisation of human rights. According to Jessica, the well-being economy also pushes to prioritise measuring well-being as opposed to GDP. It prioritises unpaid care work and prioritises solidarity over privatisation. A feminist well-being economy puts people first and ensures that human rights are represented, as is the mandate and obligation of the Government of Malawi under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This includes urgent and basic rights, such as the rights to health, education, decent work, and food security.

According to Jessica, it is important to understand that disruption and dismantling of the neoliberal agenda is an active effort that must be done by everybody. This includes collaborating with governments, advocates, and different institutions, because the neoliberal agenda has embedded itself in every aspect of society.

Sarah Boyack MSP: Sarah thanked Lebohang and introduced Lewis Ryder-Jones.

**Lewis Ryder-Jones:** According to Lewis, conversations about the well-being economy and moving beyond GDP, are often dismissed by decision makers for being unrealistic and idealistic. Lewis outlines measures that can be taken, and that the Scottish Government can action with pressure from MSP's, to encourage and deliver progress both here in Scotland, and elsewhere in places like Malawi.

According to Lewis, instigating fair and progressive tax reforms are critical. Lewis emphasised the importance of Scotland getting its own house in order before being authoritative in calls for change elsewhere. Lewis argued that Scotland should use its voice to demand global action from governments, international organizations, corporations, and the richest people in society. He said that the Scottish Parliament, the Scottish Government, and MSP's have a responsibility to advocate for change on behalf of Scotland.

A key opportunity for progress in Scotland is the well-being and sustainable development bill. According to Lewis, this legislation could strengthen the legislative underpinnings of the national outcomes in Scotland, which is Scotland's primary well-being framework. These outcomes, which include things like tackling poverty and improving people's health, are meant to drive policy and spending decisions, but too often they are just an afterthought. According to Lewis, they almost always become a distant second to the pursuit of economic growth, regardless of whether that's inclusive and sustainable.

Lewis believes the upcoming bill must change this, and ensure the national outcomes are front and centre in decision making. The bill could place further duties on Scottish public bodies to consider the impact of their activities beyond Scotland. The bill could also embed statutory definitions of currently ill-defined terms, such as sustainable development, and the well-being economy, bringing greater clarity and specificity to delivery of stated ambitions in these areas both domestically and internationally.

As well as improving the status of the national outcomes, Lewis shared that we also need to improve their substance to help shift away from GDP and create a genuine feminist well-being economy in Scotland. According to Lewis, there are 11 outcomes in the national outcomes, and care is currently invisible. Lewis emphasised the need to end that invisibility by creating a dedicated new national outcome, with robust indicators to track progress. According to Lewis, MSPs should also put pressure on the government to build on, and further embed, the well-being economy.

Lewis shared that Oxfam calls for fair tax reform. For transformational progress on key priorities, whether it's climate or child poverty, transformational investment is needed. To achieve this, Lewis argued that a long-term approach to changing the tax system is needed to raise more money from those who can pay the most. That includes targeting wealth, not income.

Lewis outlined that MSPs should urge the Scottish Government to use its voice internationally and use their own voice internationally in support of better business models globally, that shift support away from human rights violations and profit extraction. For example, they can urge the UK Government to introduce measures



which place a legal requirement on all UK companies to undertake gender responsive, human rights, and environmental due diligence in their supply chains.

Lewis also called for the elimination of tax avoidance, evasion, and illicit financial flows, and the establishment of a UN Convention on Tax, a global initiative led by African states.

## Agenda item 4 – Q&A

Sarah Boyack MSP thanked the presenters and opened the discussion to the wider meeting attendees.

Claire Duncanson, University of Edinburgh: According to Claire, it seems quite possible to persuade the Scottish Government to add well-being as a goal, but much more difficult for them to let go of GDP. Claire asked for advice on challenging the response of needing GDP, and asked MSPs how they can get government to see that supporting the Malawian government to embrace a feminist well-being economy is part of what Scotland can usefully do.

Sarah Boyack MSP: Sarah emphasised the importance of including the CPG on Malawi in this discussion. A debate two weeks ago looked at loss and damage, and an example of something that had come up was how the Scottish Government does International Development spending as it would provide an opportunity to pick that up as a practical issue. According to Sarah, people working together and being constructive is critical. Malawi is one of the four countries that the Scottish Government works with, so it's crucial to explore how the government spends its money in International Development.

Maggie Chapman MSP: Maggie reiterated the importance of external pressure from international development organisations, partner agencies in Malawi, and elsewhere.

According to Maggie, the well-being economy is not an add on to the current neoliberal economy; it's transformational.

Katherine Trebeck, Edinburgh Futures Institute, University of Edinburgh: Katherine shared that one of the most fundamental aspects of the well-being economy agenda is its profound shift in thinking about the role of the economic system. According to Katherine, what is absolutely critical to the well-being economy agenda, is that it's taking on board what feminist economics and ecological economists have been saying for decades, and what First Nations communities around the world have been living for millennia. We cannot separate the economy from society, nor can we ignore the limits of the natural world. The economy and society are both embedded in the biosphere, and their interactions have profound implications for our well-being and survival. Katherine emphasised the need for policymakers to take that seriously and to start thinking about how the economy serves the higher order goals of social justice on a healthy planet. Katherine agreed that we need to get a proper robust definition of the well-being economy, but shared concern about who creates this definition. Katherine signalled her intention to help with this.

Sarah Boyack MSP: Sarah thanked Katherine for input and asked for further questions. Sarah emphasised that the last comments from Lewis were a call for action. Sarah outlined what's going to be happening in the Parliament over the next few months, including a debate on the circular economy bill, which is going through the Net Zero Committee. Sarah shared the issue about the global impact of the products from Scotland that sometimes get recycled somewhere else. Sarah reiterated the need to think about how every bit of legislation from Scotland can make a difference globally. Sarah shared how attendees can lobby by writing in advance of the budget. Sarah also outlined other action points, including the need to circulate notes from Lewis, and write to MSP's urging them to read the reports discussed during the meeting, including the action aid report, the briefing on a feminist economy in Malawi, and Oxfam's radical pathways paper. Sarah intends to continue lobbying for a decent salary for care workers.

Xavier Gonzalez, University of Wisconsin River Falls Experience Scotland Program: Xavier asked whether there are any successful models or practises that could be taken as inspiration for Scotland.

Lewis Ryder-Jones: According to Lewis, there are a number of more progressive things happening in the care space in Scotland than elsewhere in the UK. That is really positive, and it shouldn't be ignored. The living wage for care workers only covers frontline staff, it doesn't cover any of the auxiliary roles, which are also predominantly carried out by women, so it doesn't solve the problem fully. Lewis noted that the implementation gap between what we state our ambition is in that care space, and the delivery of said care, is quite a big gulf and it remains a big gulf, so there's lots of progress to make.

Iain Black, Strathclyde University: The living wage is undermined by a lack of availability of land in Scotland and the implications this has on rents and mortgages. Ian emphasised the need to address the cost of land in Scotland as a route to transformational action on the well-being economy.

Sarah Boyack MSP thanked speakers and reiterated the need for the group to think about how to increase their collective influence and circulate the reports that were referenced. Sarah shared a proposal for a cross party group inquiry to put more light on how the government spends its money across International Development.

## Agenda item 5 – next meeting

Sarah outlined date of next CPG on the 16<sup>th</sup> of January and its focus on the UK Government's white paper on international development. Anyone with further suggestions of topics or speakers should contact [louise@intdevalliance.scot](mailto:louise@intdevalliance.scot).

Sarah closed the meeting.