

CPG on International Development

Report on Scotland's International Development Funding

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Introduction

Scotland's International Development Fund was launched by First Minister Jack McConnell in 2005, and since then more than £100 million has been committed to the Fund. Ahead of the Fund's 20th anniversary, the Scottish Parliament's Cross Party Group (CPG) on International Development agreed at its meeting in January 2024 to undertake an investigation into international development spending by the Scottish Government, with a view to considering its effectiveness in the communities and countries benefiting from the investment and to reflect on areas for potential improvement. The exercise focused on the International Development Fund, but also considered the important contributions of the Climate Justice Fund and the Humanitarian Emergency Fund.

This document sets out how the exercise was carried out and offers some reflections and points to consider for future implementation.

The Scottish Parliament's CPG on International Development supports the Scottish Government in its distribution of Official Development Assistance (ODA) and recognises the impact that the International Development Fund has made in partner countries over nearly twenty years. Through targeted funding, the Scottish Government provides vital support in areas such as education, health and climate resilience. The CPG believes that it is the responsibility of governments in higher income countries to play their part in the international community, and it commends successive Scottish Governments for their commitment to consistent, ongoing support of its partner countries.

"We believe that the International Development Fund makes a significant and additional contribution to international development in Scotland's partner countries. Ministers and the Scottish Parliament should be proud of the transformative work achieved by the Fund."

- Stakeholder response to the call for input

In recent years, at some of its meetings the CPG has heard calls for greater levels of transparency and scrutiny to be applied to how ODA is spent, communicated, measured and reported. Greater scrutiny of the funding will ultimately benefit both the Scottish Government and the organisations, communities and countries that it supports.

In a meeting with the then Minister for International Development in September 2023, concerns were raised about an announcement of Scottish Government funding to global health funds of which stakeholders had previously been unaware. Following concerns about accessing information about the different funds, and where they could be accessed competitively - as well

as concerns that there was little information about where the money was being spent and whether it was having its intended effect - at a meeting in January 2024, the CPG agreed to explore the operation of Scotland's International Development Funding.

The aim of this exercise was to help ensure that the impact of the funding committed is maximised through full transparency, clarity of purpose and enhanced reporting.

The reflection, therefore, was designed to take into account responses from: organisations in receipt of Scottish Government funding; other organisations working in the same sector; experts in funding transparency; and the Scottish Government's own publications on ODA. The goal was to build as complete a picture as possible, with the time and capacity available, of the strategy, communication and reporting on international development funding and to provide recommendations on how these can be improved.

Members of the Scottish Parliament who are members of the Cross Party Group on International Development have agreed to publish this document containing the findings of the reflection exercise for consideration by the Scottish Government and other stakeholders. The views expressed do not necessarily reflect the personal views of individual members, their political parties, stakeholders who have contributed to the review, or of the Scottish Government.

Key findings

- 1. The Scottish International Development Fund is a positive force for good at a time of substantial need.** It was clear from stakeholders, funding recipients and the Scottish Government's own publications that Scotland assigns a relatively small part of its overall block grant to make a significant impact through the international development budget. The CPG commends the Scottish Government for making this financial commitment, and welcomes the cross-party support that has existed throughout the lifetime of the Fund.
- 2. The Scottish Government can be considerably more transparent with its funding.** The funding is welcome and the targeting is effective, however it has sometimes been difficult for stakeholders and the wider public to find out where some of the money is going or the impact it is having. Reporting by the Scottish Government can be infrequent and the decision making behind allocation is sometimes unclear. Scotland could be seen as falling behind other countries in its international aid transparency.
- 3. Adopting the International Aid Transparency Index (IATI) Standard would be an efficient and globally recognised way to improve transparency.** Expert panellists on funding transparency universally recommended that the Scottish Government publish its aid funding through the IATI, the globally recognised standard for funding transparency. This would be cost-effective, bring Scotland in line with other nations, and would contribute to a more targeted strategy as a result.
- 4. Communication between the Scottish Government and the third sector could improve.** Potential funding recipients highlighted the need for clearer funding processes and greater collaboration with partner organisations. There were calls to use partner countries and agencies more effectively in decision making processes, and to enhance the localisation of delivery.
- 5. The Scottish Government should publish an updated International Development Strategy.** The last strategy published is increasingly out of date and does not reflect current approaches to international development funding. A new strategy would help provide clarity to stakeholders and streamline a potentially disparate set of approaches.

"This support is invisible to people, unless you happen to read the document on the government website. It's invisible to those who might want to hold you to account and is invisible to those in the country to which it goes. It's invisible to others who are working in that same country. It's invisible to the citizens of that country. Unless they go onto a Scottish Government website and read a Scottish Government report which is lengthy and three years after the event." - Liz Ditchburn, Independent Commission for Aid Impact

Methodology

This document has been created using input that was collated over three stages of the investigation. It was also informed by the information available in the Scottish Government's publication named "Contribution to International Development: Report 2021 to 2023"¹, published in June 2024 after initial work on this exercise had begun.

The three key inputs to the report were:

- 1. An Online Survey**
- 2. Roundtable of Experts**
- 3. Desk-Based Research**

These three approaches helped to build a picture of the funding landscape from the perspective of both stakeholders in receipt of funds and from external organisations viewing Scotland's approach from an objective position.

1. Online Survey

An online survey was open for anyone to respond from 3 April to 31 May 2024.

The survey was promoted via the CPG mailing list, at CPG meetings, via Scotland's International Development Alliance's website and newsletter, and via other partner promotion such as the Scotland Malawi Partnership's newsletter.

18 responses were received. 14 of the respondents had applied for and received funds from the Scottish Government's International Development Fund, Climate Justice Fund, or Humanitarian Emergency Fund in the last five years. 4 respondents had neither applied for nor received funds.

The survey questions can be found in Annex 1.

The questions covered funding opportunities across the International Development Fund, the Climate Justice Fund and the Humanitarian Emergency Fund, assessing the funds' accessibility, communication and operation.

¹ [10. Global Citizenship - Contribution to international development: report 2021 to 2023 - gov.scot](https://www.gov.scot/publications/contribution-to-international-development-2021-to-2023/pages/10-global-citizenship)

2. Roundtable of Experts

On Thursday 19 September 2024, the CPG hosted a roundtable in Committee Room 3. Parliament representatives were:

- Sarah Boyack (Lab) - Chair
- John Mason (Ind)
- Maggie Chapman (Green)
- Liam Kerr (Con)
- Ben MacPherson (SNP)

The principal focus of the roundtable was on transparency. The panel was made up of:

- Liz Ditchburn, Commissioner for the Independent Commission for Aid Impact (ICAI)
- Gary Forster, CEO of Publish What You Fund
- Written submission - Mark O'Donnell, Public Financial Management (PFM) consultant

The roundtable began with opening remarks from Liz Ditchburn and Gary Forster, who shared their observations of Scotland's approach to ODA and the availability of information on this topic. They then shared recommendations on how the Scottish government's approach might be improved. This was followed up by questions from all of the MSPs present. The verbatim report of this roundtable can be found in [Annex 2](#).

3. Desk Based Research

Research examined the Scottish Government's last three publications on their international development funding and the figures from the different funding rounds covering the period 2021-2023. The aim was to establish how the money was distributed, whether it aligned with the Scottish Government's stated strategic goals, what information was presented and the accessibility of the information. A Freedom Of Information (FOI) request was submitted to the Scottish Government asking for more detailed information, which is available in Annexes 5.1 and 5.2. Questions asked included:

- How many grants per year over the last five years?
- What was the geographical spread of the grants?
- How was ODA split between the three funds?
- What parliamentary scrutiny was applied?
- Availability of reporting?
- Whether funding added up to spending announced?

Relevant results of the desk-based research have been incorporated into the findings of the report.

Strengths of Scotland's International Development Support.

The CPG for International Development commends the country's commitment to international development funding and believes that it should continue and would need to increase to meet the Scottish Government's previously stated commitments. The Scottish Government has committed to increase the International Development Fund from £10 million to £15 million per year². In 2025/26, the International Development fund will be £12.8million³, representing 0.0214% of the total £59.7billion Scottish Budget⁴.

The amount that Scotland spends annually on ODA is therefore relatively small, but the impact is nevertheless significant, thanks to targeted funding within partner countries. Any findings and recommendations within this report should not detract from the fact that the funding currently contributes to transformative projects in the Global South, as outlined in the Scottish Government's *Contribution to international development: report 2021 to 2023*, published in June 2024⁵.

Respondents to the open inquiry spoke positively about the priorities and impact of the Government's ODA. These have been kept anonymous in order to allow respondents to share their views freely:

"The international development principles are a very welcome recent development, and we strongly welcome efforts made so far to apply these throughout programmes. We welcome how the funds are managed, including the straightforward (but still robust/rigorous) compliance and reporting." - survey respondent

"We welcome several of the changes made to the Fund, including the integration of principles designed to decolonise the model, with these applied across the Scottish Government's funding streams. We...welcome the focus the Scottish Government is placing on: aligning the IDF to the priorities of the Scottish Government's partner-countries; being transparent and accountable to local communities; being anti-racist; and on practices that help keep people

² <https://www.gov.scot/publications/fairer-greener-scotland-programme-government-2021-22/documents/>

³ <https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/corporate-report/2024/12/scottish-budget-2025-2026/documents/2025-26-level-4-budget-tables/2025-26-level-4-budget-tables/govscot%3Adocument/2025-26-level-4-budget-tables.xlsx>

⁴ [Scottish Budget 2024 to 2025: guide - Scottish Budget 2025 to 2026: Your Scotland, Your Finances - a guide - gov.scot](#)

⁵ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/contribution-international-development-report-20212023/pages/1/>

safe. We also welcome the creation of the Global South Advisory Panel, the mainstreaming of gender equality and the creation of a dedicated Equalities Programme.” - survey respondent

“We also welcome the continued vital, and proportionate, core funding for network organisations like Scotland’s International Development Alliance, the Scotland Malawi Partnership, the Malawi-Scotland Partnership and Scottish Fair Trade. These organisations play an important convening role supporting civil society organisations and communicating to the wider public about the importance of global solidarity.” – survey respondent

The survey questions are attached as Annex 1.

Summary of existing information

Regularity of reporting

Following a commitment made in the Programme for Government in 2017⁶ from 2018 – 2020, the Scottish Government reported annually on its overseas development spending. There then followed a hiatus in reporting until the publication of the latest report “Contribution to International Development 2021 - 2023”⁷ which was published during the course of this exercise on 17th June 2024.

The report had been promised to stakeholders earlier than this but had been delayed. The latest report is a useful update but did not provide breakdowns by fund (i.e. IDF, HEF, CJF or other), nor outline the proportion of the funding which is competitively awarded, or any changes to these figures over time.

The Scottish Government’s website has a page with the ‘Latest News⁸’ from the International Development team, which at the time of the exercise did not include regular updates detailing when new funding is committed and new funds are launched. Some stakeholders noted however that it could be enhanced by adding an alert system so that interested parties were made aware of changes in a timely way.

During the expert evidence session, it was suggested that more specific scrutiny of spending committed, for example, every three years by the Scottish Parliament’s Constitution, Europe External Affairs and Culture Committee could be useful.

⁶ as noted in the Contribution to International Development Report 21-23
<https://www.gov.scot/publications/contribution-international-development-report-20212023>

⁷ [Contribution to international development: report 2021 to 2023 - gov.scot](https://www.gov.scot/publications/contribution-international-development-report-20212023)

⁸ [Latest - International development - gov.scot](https://www.gov.scot/publications/latest-international-development)

Identifying how money is spent

The Scottish Government's report on funding between 2021 and 2023 sets out different types of detail on international development spend between Section 1 and Annex 1 of the report, making it difficult to analyse exactly how many grants have been awarded under each fund.

The report shows an increase of the value of spending year on year however when pandemic related in-kind donations are taken into account the overall value of grant funding declined. The inclusion of all in-kind donations made in response to the COVID pandemic in 2021 provides welcome additional transparency, although it is not clear how decisions were made on these donations, nor where the equivalent budget represented by these donations originated.

It might have helped the report to make this clearer, whilst acknowledging the nature of the pandemic and the need to respond.

The discrepancy is outlined below.

Report Location	2021 Reported Spend	No. of Grants	2022 Reported Spend	No. of Grants	2023 Reported Spend	No. of Grants
Section 1 Overview	£14,381,156		£15,761,345		£16,397,699	
Annex I Breakdown	£26,325,277	65	£18,737,526	65	£16,397,399	64

Competitive vs. Non-competitive Status

As part of the research, we submitted a FOI request seeking a more thorough breakdown that outlines which fund each allocation came from, as well as whether or not it was awarded competitively. This spreadsheet has been included as Annex 3.

However, without cross referencing each project with the amounts awarded, it remains difficult to verify how much funding was awarded competitively. Additionally, it would be helpful to have a clear definition of what is competitively awarded, as some of the HEF allocations have been marked as being competitive (in that there would have been a competition between HEF members) but these funds are not open to bids from agencies who have not already been selected as members of the HEF Panel.

The Scottish Government says it expects the level of funds allocated through competitive processes to grow, it states: "Over the last three years we have consistently awarded

approximately 57% of our ODA competitively. This figure would have been higher, however spend on humanitarian crises, with multilaterals and in particular the COVID crisis, resulted in a larger number of direct awards ... the competitively awarded share will significantly rise in future years.⁹

There are broadly three types of common non-competitive grants awarded:

- *Multilateral Organisations for Humanitarian Aid:* The Scottish Government report states that providing non-competitive grants to multilateral organisations such as UNICEF is standard procedure for countries. The Scottish Government argue that using established, internationally recognised organisations is common and effective for allocating aid.
- *Match Funding to Public Institutions:* Arrangements for pooled donations with Comic Relief and investment in Police Scotland's Peer-Peer partnerships were opportunities to make donations go further.
- *Grants to International Development Organisations:* The other kind of non-competitive funding is for the networking organisations such as SIDA, Scotland Malawi Partnership, Scottish Fair Trade etc.

However, the document also lists a number of other non-competitive grants¹⁰ with no further explanation or rationale. This includes grants to the Scottish Government's Water Futures Programme in Malawi.

Availability of and Adherence to Current Strategies

The International Development strategy published by the Scottish Government in 2016¹¹ was to focus on four partner countries, Malawi, Rwanda, Zambia and Pakistan and to direct money there. However, the sum total of the money given is spread across 14 countries, not four. The difference is assumed to be due to the response to humanitarian need, but this requires to be clarified.

2024 funding, as tendered in specific tranches for Health and Inclusive Education, seeks to respond to the strategic priorities identified following collaboration with partner countries. This is a potentially important step change to the wide range of grants and donations made over the preceding three years.

⁹ Scottish Government FOI Response 202400431968, dated 11 October 2024 (Annex 5.1 and 5.2)

¹⁰ on page 19 in point 6

¹¹ [Global Citizenship: Scotland's International Development Strategy - gov.scot](https://www.gov.scot/publications/global-citizenship-scotland-international-development-strategy/pages/11.aspx)

Themes Across Findings

Several themes emerged across all three phases of the report, but one emerged more clearly than any others. The majority of this research is encapsulated in point number one, with other accompanying themes summarised in the following points.

Major Theme: Improve transparency and communication

The need to improve transparency was the prevalent theme throughout the exercise. This was true in both the roundtable and the survey.

The roundtable heard from Liz Ditchburn, who previously worked for the UK Government at DfID, and was Former Director General for Economy at the Scottish Government, Liz was also briefly responsible for International Development and is currently a Commissioner for the Independent Commission for Aid Impact (ICAI), the UK watchdog on international development.

ICAI's role is to review UK ODA spending, other than spend committed by devolved administrations. They focus on value for money, effectiveness, and impact.

Liz outlined concerns around transparency in international development spending in Scotland, saying *"I have to say, I was quite shocked by how hard it was to find information."*

Transparency is crucial for accountability and effectiveness, although is not sufficient on its own. Transparency helps donors and recipients, such as in countries like Malawi, understand funding availability and learn from outcomes. Liz explained there are difficulties in accessing and interacting with Scottish Government International Development data. Reports often lack context for expected results and are not in real-time or easily usable formats, like data sets.

Liz recommended that the Scottish Government invest in making international development data more accessible and usable, potentially adopting the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI) format for easier public scrutiny (see: [recommendations](#)). The Scottish Parliament should press for greater transparency to improve accountability and effectiveness.

"I think my take is: given how important transparency is, given how important transparency is to being a good partner and to being a good donor, then there is probably no excuse not to prioritise investing whatever it takes to make that information available in a form which other people can use." Liz Ditchburn, ICAI

The second witness was Gary Forster, CEO of Publish What You Fund, who was joined by Henry Lewis, who leads the organisation's work on localisation transparency. They conducted an analysis of publicly available Scottish aid information using their Aid Transparency Index methodology.

Their main findings were that the Scottish Government makes significant efforts to post aid activity information online, including project details and locations. However, transparency varies across programmes, with key gaps in impact information (objectives, evaluations, results) and financial data (budgets). Procurement information is also inconsistently available.

"The most obvious gaps in information related to impact information so, such as objectives, evaluations and results, as well as financial information, such as project budgets and overall aid programme budgets. Some procurement information was found, but again this was inconsistently available. So our research identified opportunities to improve the consistency, time limits and utility of Scotland's aid information."

Gary Foster, Publish What You Fund

To improve transparency, consistency, and utility, they also recommended that the Scottish Government publish its aid information using the IATI Standard. This format is used globally by many aid agencies and allows standardised, machine-readable data that can be used for better coordination and accountability.

Publishing data in IATI enables visibility to partners, donors, and researchers. Data published in IATI can be repurposed for multiple reports and visualisations, as seen with the UK's FCDO [Dev Tracker](#). It allows governments to improve planning and coordination by learning from others in the field through shared evaluations and lessons.

While current Scottish Government reports are insightful, publishing data in a standardised format like IATI would add significant value by improving

coordination, accountability, and learning opportunities across projects and programmes.

The online stakeholder survey found similar issues with transparency and communication. Their suggestions included:

- Implement an email alert system for all funding opportunities across all funds
- Publish clear criteria for fund allocation, membership criteria for the HEF Panel, and decision-making processes
- Regularly update public information about fund operations, allocations, and outcomes
- Establish a clear and consistent annual timeline for reporting to Parliament – e.g. a 3 yearly review by the Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee
- Regularly review and update fund operations based on feedback and lessons learned and publicise result of evaluations and reviews at the end of project cycles so that others can share in the learning.

While the June 2024 publication of the “Contribution to International Development Report 2021-2023” was a welcome update, the report lacked detail and was a move away from annual reporting.

It is also important to note that some of the information requested by respondents (particularly around the operation of the HEF and aspects of funding criteria), had in fact been made available on the Scottish Government website, while recognising that the individual respondents had not necessarily been able to successfully navigate the site or find the information they were looking for. This speaks to the need to continually strive to make sure information, both about funding opportunities being made available, and how funding has been spent, is easily accessible and published as routinely and transparently as possible.

“We feel that there could be enhancements made in how competitive funding opportunities are announced and communicated. For example, the establishment of an opt-in alert system which interested parties could sign up to where they would receive the latest information about new calls.”

Survey respondent

“We would welcome increased parliamentary scrutiny of the International Development Fund and other funds, and regard this as an opportunity to both ensure enhanced transparency and accountability as well as a means of maintaining political awareness of the small yet vitally important work being undertaken through this funding.”

Survey respondent

Further recurring themes

Respondents to the survey raised other issues, as did participants in the roundtable, that would help to strengthen the Scottish Government's international development programme. We have summarised below these themes and ideas suggested by stakeholders, with quotes from respondents in italics.

1. Enhance funding processes

Survey respondents found the funding processes to be sometimes restrictive and hard to access. Their recommendations included:

- Develop clear criteria for when to use competitive vs. non-competitive funding allocations

“Over the last 4 years, there have been at least 3 instances where large grants were given out without a competitive process, meaning that we do not know if taxpayers gained best value for money.”

- Consider reintroducing small grants funding to support a diverse range of organisations

“We would welcome a return to Small Grants Funding. Scotland’s unique offering to international development has historically been bolstered by a vibrant international development community. Removal of this fund, alongside the shift towards larger, long-term grants threatens to lead to this once thriving sector diminishing in Scotland, which in the long term will hurt our overall offering to international development (which benefits from both active charities and government funding)”

- Ensure timely and predictable fund dispersal across all funds
- Extend application timelines where possible, especially for commercial tenders
- Ensure sufficient staffing capacity to manage grants effectively across all funds
- Streamline application and reporting processes to reduce burden on applicants

“Multi-country programming also creates opportunities for learning, with some cost-efficiencies and the potential for new alliances within the Scottish ID sector. However, the additional time, co-ordination and consensus building that result also create obstacles to, at times, more effective single country interventions and have the potential to undermine the idea of locally led initiatives (because of the requirement of multi-national coordination).”

- Ensure an appropriate balance between funding for long-term development, climate action, and emergency response in light of evolving global trends

2. Strengthen strategic focus

This research, in both the roundtable and survey, found that the Scottish Government's dedicated International Development Strategy¹², which dates back to 2016, was unclear and sometimes outdated. Clear strategy helps with stakeholders, especially those seeking funding, to know how best to work with the Scottish Government to achieve its goals.

Many respondents requested that the Scottish Government develop an updated, comprehensive International Development Strategy that encompasses all three funds.

"While the focus countries have remained consistent, there have been significant changes to the Fund's focus and operation, including via the 'Review' conducted in 2020, but there has been no formal replacement of the 2016 Global Citizenship: Scotland's International Development Strategy. Instead, there has been a somewhat piecemeal approach to how the International Development Fund themes/areas of focus have evolved."

Other suggestions from survey respondents included:

- Clarify the funding balance and relationships between the three funds
- Ensure flexibility to support high-impact programmes across all funds
- Align fund strategies with global frameworks (eg SDGs, Paris Agreement, Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction)

3. Promote inclusivity and localisation

One of the strengths of Scotland's approach to international development is the targeted approach to a few countries. This ensures a bigger impact with a smaller amount of money. Some respondents felt that localisation could go further, using more of the local skills and knowledge in recipient countries to maximise the impact.

Their suggestions included:

- Enhance support for locally-led development and local humanitarian leadership approaches
- Consider expanding HEF fund membership or application eligibility to include a wider range of organisations
- Assess fund processes against decolonial principles

¹² <https://www.gov.scot/publications/global-citizenship-scotlands-international-development-strategy/>

- Involve local partners more deeply in decision-making processes
- Consider restricting funding to non-profits or charities across all funds

“We do not believe it is appropriate for profiteering from such tax-payer funded initiatives, and that the most effective and ethical delivery partners for such funding are non-profits and charities who are actively working towards the realisation of the localisation agenda.”

4. Enhance accountability and learning

Tied into themes of transparency and communication was a sub-theme of ensuring that findings are shared and that organisations are able to share knowledge with one another. The thrust of this theme is that schemes should be dynamic and responsive to what works, with clearly measured impact.

- Introduce distinct funding streams within funds (e.g. within the Climate Justice Fund, introduced dedicated funding streams for climate finance and addressing loss and damage) to enable clearer tracking
- Improve methods for demonstrating additionality of funding, especially for new initiatives
- Foster knowledge sharing between funds and with the broader international development community
- Conduct regular, independent evaluations of fund effectiveness and impact
- Regularly review and potentially increase fund sizes to match inflation and growing global needs

5. Enhance collaboration and partnerships

Respondents to the survey found that the Scottish Government could sometimes be difficult to reach, and that decisions were sometimes made without clear communication to relevant stakeholders. The work of Scotland’s International Development Alliance - which provides secretariat support to the CPG on International Development - was commended for a collaborative approach that brought people together and provides space for concerns to be raised and ideas shared.

There was a clear call for availability and accessibility of the Scottish Government to its partner organisations. Suggestions included:

- Increase opportunities for engagement between Government ministers and officials, fund recipients, and civil society organisations
- Foster cross-fund learning and collaboration

- Strengthen partnerships with Scottish-based organisations while maintaining a global outlook and enabling a decolonised approach to development

“Throughout the guidance you state that Scottish expertise should be used. What is the justification for allowing organisations from outside Scotland to apply?”

“We would welcome renewed clarity over the formal engagement opportunities between Government and civil society, perhaps through the establishment of a new group jointly chaired by officials with CSOs, with a commonly agreed and clear terms of reference. Formalising such a space may help with communicating developments of priorities, for example, we were surprised that health & education emerged as priorities for the fund which appeared to be a shift from priorities previously shared by officials, and we would like to understand the process of making such decisions.”

Recommendations to Scottish Government

1. The Scottish Government should publish through IATI

The expert panellists on transparency were unanimous in this recommendation for the Scottish Government. The International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI) is the globally recognised standard of transparency that most major aid organisations and multiple international governments subscribe to as a way of maximising scrutiny and impact. The process for signing up is easy, cost-effective and it would mark an immediate and significant improvement to the Government's reporting on aid spending.

The advantages of signing up to IATI are threefold:

- a. Easily digestible data
- b. Focus on areas of impact
- c. Internationally recognised transparency standard

Easily Digestible Data

Publishing international aid data through IATI means that anybody, anywhere, can see standardised information, broken down into granular data. IATI will outline how much money is going to specific communities, changes over time, and other money going into that area or sector.

Once you publish through IATI, everything becomes much more straightforward as a result. The data is accessible to everyone, ie the Scottish Government, stakeholders, other funders and the public. This increases efficiencies in a marked way, making any upfront costs worthwhile for the result of easily accessible data that can be employed across different departments with ease.

The current method of publication of data is insufficient, with not enough information and in formats that are hard for stakeholders to access. Publishing through IATI would make an immediate difference.

Once the Scottish Government has done the initial work of publishing through IATI, it can then be updated far more regularly with much less work. Some charities even update it daily, which is more than the Scottish Government would need to do, but it demonstrates the flexibility and dynamism of IATI.

Focus on Areas of Impact

IATI data helps to highlight areas of need, trigger actions and measure impact. The IATI data set now includes more than 1,000,000 activities, so funders can use that information to more selectively target which areas will be funded and ensure that the funding is targeted and impactful. The UK Government runs its development tracker off its IATI data.

Gary Forster in the expert panel used an example of IATI being used to this effect. “Just one example, the Global Alliance for Food Security use IATI data to highlight funding shortages and then trigger action relating to food crises in the global South... Scottish Government gains experience and familiarity with the data set, you can then use it when determining and planning and coordinating your own activities.”

“So if you want to go into a new geographic area, you can have a look at who are the main partners there, what kinds of things that they're working on. If you have a specific focus on water and sanitation and let's say water pumps, you can look into what are the main lessons that are being learned by reading evaluations of recent projects in those areas, who are the contractors you might want to partner with, and so on, what are the main challenges that people are experiencing.”

Internationally transparency standard

“In order to address consistency, timeliness, and utility, we recommend that the Scottish Government consider publishing its aid information using the IATI Standard. This is the International Aid Transparency Initiative reporting standard. It's the global standard used by the majority of major aid agencies.” Publish What You Fund

The Scottish Government is clear that it wants its ODA spend to be responsible and impactful, and a model partner - publishing through IATI would help to achieve that. Countries in the Global South are requesting that all funder nations are transparent, and IATI is the internationally recognised format for doing that.

It would also lead to a greater level of positive scrutiny and analysis from members of the public and from parliament. The IATI standard lends itself to analysis in a way that is currently difficult to do, but would demonstrate the Scottish Government's commitment to using the ODA spend well.

Publishing through IATI

It should be a straightforward process for the Scottish Government to publish using IATI. Publishing to IATI can be done internally or externally, with specialists in the sector making it relatively straightforward, with the impacts being felt immediately.

Any upfront costs would quickly achieve their value through a greater level of impact and transparency through the Scottish Government's ODA. IATI has a help desk who can help the team at the Scottish Government discuss options and understand what the process involves. Some governments contract open data experts to publish on their behalf, so they provide a big spreadsheet of data and documents to a company and they will make sure it appears in the IATI data set.

The CPG recognises that the Scottish Government has taken some initial steps to sign up to IATI and encourages them to fully implement this recommendation.

2. The Scottish Parliament's Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee should review the Scottish Government's ODA spending every three years

The CPG recognises that all parliamentary committees have packed agendas and limited capacity for extra work. One of the reasons that the CPG took on this work was in acknowledgement of the fact that the CEEACC does not currently have the capacity to review the Scottish Government's International Development Funding.

However, it should still be possible for the committee to review the Government's ODA at a regular enough interval to be useful without being onerous. We suggest that the CEEACC take time once every three years in order to examine and reflect on Scotland's ODA.

Stakeholders in the landscape of Scotland's international assistance would value the reassurance that would come with regular parliamentary scrutiny of government development and humanitarian aid spending.

Member groups in the CPG support the Scottish Government's international development and humanitarian aid programme but recognise that it sometimes receives negative media attention. Introducing a level of parliamentary scrutiny on this financial outlay would help to continue to reassure the public that the impact of the aid is well worth it.

It is worth noting that if recommendation 1, to sign up for the IATI standard, is adopted by the Scottish Government, then recommendation 2 becomes significantly easier to implement. The IATI standard presents data in an understandable and easily broken down format. This would ensure that parliamentary scrutiny is maintained on ODA without adding too much work to the committee's timetables.

3. The Scottish Government should publish a new International Development Strategy to provide greater clarity on their chosen themes and localities, as well as their application processes.

Respondents from the call for evidence clearly perceived a lack of clarity in current decision making. The last SG international development strategy was published in 2016. Since then new themes for international development funding have been set, along with other commitments made, for example, the commitment to a Feminist Approach to International Relations.

The international development community would benefit from greater understanding of:

- The ambitions of Scottish Government funding
- How the international development fund intersects with the Climate Justice Fund and Humanitarian Emergency Fund
- How these decisions are made
- When these choices will be reviewed

Expert witnesses also encouraged regular probing, testing and rationalisation of the choices made. Whilst they do not suggest a regular review of partner countries, there should be more clarity about decisions made. Likewise any new strategy should explain the decisions made around the chosen themes.

Respondents from the call for evidence wanted to see more competitive funding and an explanation in the instances when this is not possible. The expert witnesses supported more openness and accessibility in this area.

Potential grantees should be able to access information about what funds are going to be available and when.

A new strategy harmonising all of the different funds and approaches would therefore be an important step for all stakeholders in the sector.

Annex 1: Survey Questions

1. Name & Organisation¹³
2. Have you applied for Scottish Government international development fund, climate justice fund, or humanitarian funding in the last five years?
3. Have you received funding from the Scottish Government international development fund, climate justice fund, or humanitarian funding in the last five years?
4. If yes, please provide details:

The following questions relate specifically to the Scottish Government **international development fund**.

5. How would you rate your understanding of the funding strategy? [score 1 – no understanding to 5 – excellent]
6. How would you rate how funding opportunities are currently promoted?
7. How would you rate your access and/or relationship with the staff team?
8. Do you have any other comments about how this fund is operated?

The following questions relate specifically to the Scottish Government **climate justice fund**.

9. How would you rate your understanding of the funding strategy?
10. How would you rate how funding opportunities are currently promoted?
11. How would you rate your access and/or relationship with the staff team?
12. Do you have any other comments about how this fund is operated?

The following questions relate specifically to Scottish Government **humanitarian funding**.

13. Are you a member of the Humanitarian Emergency Fund panel?
14. If not, are you aware who is and how to become a member?
15. How would you rate your understanding of the funding strategy?
16. How would you rate how funding opportunities are currently promoted?
17. How would you rate your access and/or relationship with the staff team?
18. Do you have any other comments about how this fund is operated?
19. Do you have any other feedback on how the current international development, climate justice and/or humanitarian funds are allocated?
20. Would you be willing to participate in follow-up interviews about your views and experience?

¹³ All respondents were given an option for anonymity.

Annex 2: Annotated Verbatim Report of Expert Panel

Date: Tuesday 19 September 1000 - 1130

Attendance

Sarah Boyack MSP
Maggie Chapman MSP
Liam Kerr MSP (online)
Ben MacPherson MSP (from 1100)
John Mason MSP
Eddie Nicholls, office of Foysol Choudhury MSP
Louise Davies, CPG secretariat
Nathanael Smith, office of Sarah Boyack MSP
Liz Ditchburn, Independent Commission for Aid Impact
Gary Forster, Publish What You Fund
Henry Lewis, Publish What You Fund

Sarah Boyack MSP introduced the session, thanking the MSPs in the room for attending despite the days busy schedule. Noting that MSPs had received a briefing paper about the research carried out so far as well as a paper from Mark O'Donnell, Sarah noted that this was an opportunity to ask further questions about lessons learnt, best practice from elsewhere etc.

Louise Davies introduced the experts and Sarah handed over to Liz Ditchburn, from the Independent Commission for Aid Impact.

Liz Ditchburn

Introduced herself and then presented some background on the Independent Commission for Aid Impact, its remit with the UK government which explicitly does not include any development aid spending by devolved administrations and the direct relationship with the Select committee in the UK Parliament.

She explained that the commission look at spending through published information, UK government documents and supplemented by interviews and country visits. The commission dives into a particular area of spend and then produces a review which is very strongly evidence based and is then published. The government then, is required by the legislation to produce a report of its response to the recommendations.

She noted that one of the things that ICAI has looked at very much is transparency. And there's a huge body of sort of theory and evolving evidence, though not always completely conclusive, of the importance of transparency for accountability and also for effectiveness. So the accountability lens is of great interest to you as a Parliament. And the mechanism by which transparent publication of data enables accountability is obvious. And that's about accountability in donor countries, but it also enables accountability in recipient countries as well in terms of making clear the funds which are available, for example, in a country like Malawi to support development.

The effectiveness lens is very much around: if you don't know what everybody else is doing, you can't find your best role. If you're not publishing information about what's happened as a result of aid spending, then no one can learn from it. So obviously the effectiveness lens is very much about finding your own role within a bigger landscape, but also learning, and that learning being available to others to implement the lessons from it as well. But I think the international work and experience on transparency is that transparency is very much an enabler, but it doesn't in itself result in greater accountability or

greater effectiveness. It's a necessary but not sufficient condition, rather than something which automatically produces change. But nevertheless, it is absolutely a critical enabler, and without it, accountability and effectiveness is much harder to achieve.

in the context of knowing I was coming here I went back into the website just to remind myself of what was available in terms of information.

And I have to say, I was quite shocked by how hard it was to find information. And I looked at the Publish What You Fund analysis as well. I was really struck by the fact that quite a lot of information is published. I was looking particularly at the 2021/2023 report, and obviously there's been a series of reports, but because that's presented as a report rather than as data, what you can do with it is very, very different, from being able to engage with the underlying data.

And when you read a report, which obviously someone has spent a huge amount of time producing, you're very conscious all the time that you are reading someone else's curation of information, you're not reading the core underlying information, you're reading someone's selection of what they deem to be important. It may be fully comprehensive, but you can't tell that from the way you read it and you've got a lot of text to wade through to find specific information in the form of data and numbers.

So I think that's the first thing to say - when you read a report like that, you're reading someone's selection and that they've chosen it for a reason. And you, as people interested in scrutiny, might choose a different set of things. But you have no choice because the report's been presented to you as it is. The second thing that struck me about the report was that it's not set in a context of expected results.

So for example, there are lots of points during the report where it talks about 9683 people have received X, you know better sanitation or you know, access to a service or whatever. But it doesn't tell me in the report whether that's fantastic, because actually they thought they were only going to be able to reach 6000 people. Or whether actually that's rather underwhelming because they thought they were going to be able to reach 15,000 people. So the number is given to me. It sounds very precise, 9683 people, but I can't see it in a context of what was intended. So I don't know whether that's a good thing or a bad thing. And it's a selection, it's not in the context of expectation and it's also not live or real time data. It doesn't tell me what's going on now. It tells me quite a lot about what has happened over the previous three years.

So I then sort of thought well, OK, can I get hold of the underlying data really easily? And you know, I confess, I didn't spend days and days doing this, but I couldn't find it easily. And understanding what Publish What You Fund have talked about, actually some of it is not published. So I thought I must be able to just get easy lists of all the projects that have been funded through these various mechanisms and what's happened as a result of them. And I searched on the website and actually couldn't find that very easily.

I then found Gary and Henry's report actually has some very helpful links to some of the country data that says here's all the grants that were given in Malawi or here's all the grants that were given in Rwanda, although they can talk more to the gaps, of which there are still many. But even when you look at the website and the navigation, A: they didn't come up when I searched, and B: they're not actually on the International Development page, they're sitting under publications.

So it's not easy. there's information there.. And it's just in a PDF, so you can't actively work on it. You can't kind of go, let me look across Rwanda, Malawi and pull out all the reports, all the work on water and sanitation, for example. So it seemed to me that there are very significant gaps in the information

which is provided to the public and that that will have significant consequences for how easy it is to scrutinise Scottish Government expenditure on International Development and how easy it is to use that data for more effective work.

And I suppose the question is, is that a reasonable place for the Scottish Government to be? It's a fairly small portfolio. There's also a small team that's managing it. And I think you know, you could go either way. I think my take is: given how important transparency is, given how important transparency is to being a good partner and to being a good donor, then there is probably no excuse not to prioritise investing whatever it takes to make that information available in a form which other people can use. I would encourage the committee to press for that and I would encourage the Scottish Government to think about all of the different ways in which they might be able to make that as easy and low cost as possible.

Again, Publish What You Fund may know more about what tools are available to support that, but they really should be publishing all the underlying data in a format. I don't know if you've heard about the IATI format, the International Aid Transparency Initiative format, which means that anybody anywhere can see standardised information. So if you're in a community in Malawi, you can look at what your community has received from the Scottish Government alongside everything else that's coming into that same area. So I think I would encourage the Scottish Government to really try all means possible. There may be good conversations to have with the UK FCDO about whether there's any other systems that can be utilised, but I would certainly encourage that.

Sarah Boyack MSP

I'm sitting here thinking as somebody who used to be on the Constitution committee, which covers International Development. The capacity for our actual Scottish Parliament committees is very difficult to do this kind of level of work because culture is top their agenda alongside constitution. So actually quite difficult to have that capacity in here. So that's partly why I think the work of the cross party group is really important. So thank you for that.

That leads us very nicely into Henry and Gary. You've been name checked already – Publish What You Fund and I think have been in existence since 2008. So this will be quite interesting as you've got quite a lot of oversight on this, and you've already helped us by doing some work which is available to us to read on the Scottish aid inquiry.

Gary Forster

My name is Gary Forster, I'm the chief executive officer of Publish What You Fund. I'm joined by my colleague Henry Lewis. Henry leads our work actually on localisation transparency. So how much money ends up in the hands of local actors in the Aid and Development space? But what made Henry perfect for undertaking this analysis that you've seen, of which he did 99% of the work, is that he's worked across a lot of our projects, including our Aid Transparency Index. The Aid Transparency Index is a report which produced every two years, which ranks the top 50 aid agencies, development banks and philanthropies on their transparency.

So we reached out when we saw this inquiry announced, we reached out to see if we could offer any support and we were asked to do a brief analysis of the information that we would find publicly available. We used our aid transparency index kind of methodology as a framework to go out and look and a couple of important things. One before Henry took on this work he wasn't familiar with Scottish aid and, two, he hadn't seen the content of the inquiry, so he was coming at it as fresh as a user of Scottish aid information might be expected to be.

The other important factor that we know in the document is we actually undertook this work between the 9th and the 11th of July. There have been some updates since then. So while some of the detail might be slightly off, we think that the findings are largely applicable. As Liz said, our main takeaway is that the Scottish Government is clearly putting considerable effort into ensuring that information about its aid activities are posted online, including individual project titles, comprehensive descriptions and locations. And those are mostly found in reports as, as Liz said. However, it's evident from the different funds and programmes that they have varying levels of transparency and it's sometimes difficult to understand the overarching objectives and strategy for the aid programme as a whole.

The most obvious gaps in information related to impact information so, such as objectives, evaluations and results, as well as financial information, such as project budgets and overall aid programme budgets. Some procurement information was found, but again this was inconsistently available. So our research identified opportunities to improve the consistency, time limits and utility of Scotland's aid information. This will help improve learning accountability and aid coordination. In order to address consistency, timeliness, and utility, we recommend that the Scottish Government consider publishing its aid information using the IATI Standard.

This is the International Aid Transparency Initiative reporting standard. It's the global standard used by the majority of major aid agencies. It allows the publication of data and, importantly, documents in a standardised, comparable and machine readable format. The IATI data set now includes more than 1,000,000 activities and the data is increasingly used by donors to coordinate their activities. Just one example, the Global Alliance for Food Security use IATI data to highlight funding shortages and then trigger action relating to food crises in the global South. We ourselves do a huge amount of research on the data set and, of course, at this moment, if we were to do research on the data, looking for specific areas where the Scottish Government is actually involved we wouldn't see that activity because that information isn't present there.

By publishing data into this standard, the Scottish Government's efforts would be visible to country partners such as CSOs and governments, but also other donors, researchers and academics. So publishing to IATI can be relatively straightforward. Some aid donors have internal teams who do this work. Some use their own bespoke reporting processes and tools, but others use off the shelf products, such as aid stream or IATI's own publisher tool. IATI has a help desk who can help the team at the Scottish Government kind of discuss this and understand what is actually involved. Some government's contract open data experts to publish on their behalf, so provide a big spreadsheet of data and documents to a company and they will make sure it appears in the IATI data set. So there's a whole different bunch of ways that this can be done.

The benefit, of course, is that once you've got this data in this format, you can then use it for all sorts of purposes. So one purpose you can use it to do is to populate your own data portal so the UK's FCDO dev tracker currently runs off of its IATI data. So you can use the same data set to do multiple different reports and illustrations and visualisations. And so on.

The other advantages as the Scottish Government gains experience and familiarity with the data set, you can then use it when determining and planning and coordinating your own activities. So if you want to go into a new geographic area, you can have a look at who are the main partners there, what kinds of things that they're working on. If you have a specific focus on water and sanitation and let's say water pumps, you can look into what are the main lessons that are being learned by reading evaluations of recent projects in those areas, who are the contractors you might want to partner with, and so on, what are the main challenges that people are experiencing.

So then it becomes a two way system - you're contributing to the data set, but you're also learning from it to improve your own activities. So to conclude, and this mirrors a lot, I think, what Liz was saying - a lot of effort is clearly being put in, these reports are fantastic to read and insightful. But by diverting some of that effort towards standardised publication of data, we think a lot of extra value could be realised. Now if those documents that we've seen are still required for some stakeholders or constituents these can still be maintained and they can be attached to the activities in IATI, so they're not lost, they'll be there visible to data users. So those are our findings. We're happy to take any questions. Thank you.

Sarah Boyack MSP

OK, thanks. So there's quite a lot in there. Can I just kick off the question? I'll kick off to Liz and then to Henry and Gary. Is it an expensive thing to do to have that data up there online? You made the very smart point right at the start that there aren't unlimited staff resources, although you've got people with huge experience and knowledge, but would it be an expensive thing to do just to have all that data available online that could be scrutinised? And if you got other examples of where it does actually work?

Liz Ditchburn

I mean, I think as Gary said, there's lots of people have been at this for a few years now. So there's a sort of ecosystem of support. IATI gives phenomenal support. I mean, as Gary said, the help desk that's supported by a whole range of organisations that ensure that support is available to everybody. I think I couldn't give you a cost figure. I think what I would say is it's a question of prioritisation. If you can prioritise producing a 70 page report, you know, which I'm sure was the work of many, many hours, you can prioritise making your data available to everybody.

And I think for me, it's a statement of what you care about, what do you value most? What do you think your role and responsibilities are? And of course you can argue well, the Scottish Government has a small expenditure on International Development. It's, you know, it doesn't matter whether it's available or not. But I think because the Scottish Government is very clear that it wants to be responsible in its work on International Development and it wants to model being a good partner to the Global South, then I think it's really important. Because these are standards which the world has basically agreed to, and which developing countries are asking for that transparency.

So I think it's really a question of prioritisation. I don't think it should be prohibitive. It's just a choice, you know, it's a choice that you need to make as government as to where you put your efforts. And once you've got it actually, as Gary said, I think the really interesting thing is and this has happened in the UK Government as well, it's actually the UK Government officials and ministers themselves often, you know, are major users of this information because it enables them to look at things that otherwise they would have had to ask somebody to go away and look at this.

You have to make an investment upfront and getting the systems working, but then you do get some efficiencies yourself.

So I think I would say it's not prohibitive and it is very much about what you think matters. It's an expression of your values and your intent as a government, whether you choose to invest in doing this or not.

Sarah Boyack MSP

Yeah, this feels like a no brainer.

Liz Ditchburn

Absolutely. I was really shocked. I actually thought, you know, I thought it probably had been fixed years ago. I was quite surprised to find it hadn't. And when you Google, you know, does the Scottish Government publish to IATI? You get some weird things up. So it does sort of imply that, I think, as Garry's report says, or Henry's report says, you know, the Scottish Government is represented on IATI as a publisher. But then there just doesn't seem to be any data.

So I think there must have been thoughts or attempts, you know, attempts at times to think about it. But the bottom line is it's not there and I thought the keyword that actually again comes out from the Publish What You Fund report is invisibility. This support is invisible to people, unless you happen to read the document on the government website.

It's invisible to those who might want to hold you to account and is invisible to those in the country to which it goes. It's invisible to others who are working in that same country. It's invisible to the citizens of that country. Unless they go onto a Scottish Government website and read a Scottish Government report which is lengthy and three years after the event.

Sarah Boyack MSP

Yeah, and framed as a report.

Liz Ditchburn

Framed as something which is, you know, I'm not trying to suggest that people are being, you know, have any bad intent. Of course. It's a report. It's a publication which is intended to show a set of things rather than data, which is more neutral.

Sarah Boyack MSP

Yeah, thanks for that. And Gary, you've got your hand up as well.

Gary Forster

Yes, I agree with Liz. It shouldn't be a prohibitive cost, but it's going to be a factor of two things. One, it's going to be a factor of how much information we're talking about and then probably more importantly, it's going to be a factor of how much of that information you already have at your fingertips. We often engage with relatively new owners who have not set up their financial and reporting systems and their project management systems to produce the kind of data that you would submit to IATI. And that means there has to be some process and system change.

So if you look at governments like the United States and and like the FCDO and the European Commission a lot of their financial management systems and project management systems and internal learning systems are based around IATI data, so they're able to they know that their systems on a daily basis are producing the kind of data that they will then publish in the IATI standard. If you take for example, when we started working with, before FCDO, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, they were not a publisher to IATI, or at least they were, but very niche and very little information.

And one of the biggest learnings, we spent about 18 months working with them to improve their publication. And one of the biggest learnings for them was how it improved their internal efficiency, because it took a huge amount of effort to redevelop processes to make sure they had this information. You know their evaluations were in one place, their financial information is in another, their objectives and project descriptions were in another. But when they brought it all together, and we have a quote somewhere on our website that I should have looked at before this, but they essentially say before this process we didn't know what we were doing internationally. We just didn't have in one place all this information.

So I think it shouldn't be really heavy. You should be able to look at the IATI standard, start by prioritising fields - there are approximately 270, I think, data fields that you can publish to, but let's be smart about this. Let's say what are the priority fields that we already have information for and then what's the process to gather that info? And then then let's figure out how we're going to get onto it. Whether you're going to contract a third party to do it, whether you've got a technical specialist internally who can do it, there's a whole bunch of different ways of doing that. But it's important that the first step comes first to understand what information you have and whether you need to do any re-plumbing internally to provide that information to you in a timely manner.

You would want to be aiming as a minimum to update your information every quarter. Some institutions, because their financial management systems are linked to their IATI publication, actually update on a 24 hour basis. So every night their data is refreshed and that's the case with the UK and with the US government and many, many others. But I think given the size of the portfolio, given your position on this journey, I would suggest you aim for quarterly publication and yeah, it shouldn't be expensive even if you are contracting external support for it.

It shouldn't be over the £50,000 - like £30,000 or something. I'd be really surprised because it's not the biggest aid portfolio. It's not the most complex. You focus your money on a few activities which you know feel smart, so it shouldn't be too onerous.

Sarah Boyack MSP

OK, thanks. That's really good. I mean, I kind of feel we've dived into the transparency section of the report, but actually how you scrutinise this, is probably pretty fundamental to this. I should also say if anyone who's online wants to come in like Liam or our other speakers and Gary just put your hand up. Look, I have got a live hand in the room, which is John Mason wants to follow up on this issue I think. And I should have said at the start, Eddie Nicholls is sitting at the back and he's in my colleague, Foysol Choudhury's office. If Eddie, you want to ask the question, you are allowed to come to the table when you will ask the question. Perfect. Over to you, John.

John Mason MSP

Thank you. My mind is going the same way as Sarah's, about the cost of all this, so there's been some reassurance that way. I'm just wondering too, well, first of all, I'm wondering, has anyone actually asked the Scottish Government why we're not doing this?

Liz Ditchburn

Well, well, I certainly haven't. I certainly wouldn't.

John Mason MSP

You haven't asked them. And I guess, you know, she's seen her shaking head. So I mean, nobody actually asked them. So, I mean, I think I'd like to know, I don't know, have the Scottish Government been sent a presentation or, I mean, my first question would be to ask them why we're not doing it.

Sarah Boyack MSP

I think that's a really good question. I mean, I've seen Government from the other side to being a Minister and one of the other things is this is not a huge team and you do get people move on in different departments. So there's something about history and a resource that is there for everybody externally. And internally in the government to actually process how effective the system is. So it's really useful to get your clarity on this. There's not a lot of money, but maybe nobody's asked about it before internally. And it's a no brainer to us who are coming to look at the question from the transparency front, so yeah, I mean. I think that.

John Mason MSP

It does seem a sensible thing to do. But what are the counter arguments? I'm not getting them.

Sarah Boyack MSP

Did we not have one of the government ministers at one of our previous meetings and we did talk about this?

Louise Davies

we had Christina McKelvie when she was Minister. I don't think we asked specifically about this..

John Mason MSP

And I mean, to kind of pin it down a little bit more of what we are actually looking for. Because I mean we've got these lists, these annexes at the end of the pages 21 to 23 of the report, which I think add up as far as the way I haven't checked them. I mean some of the figures are pretty tiny as it is I mean: £12,806 for African Alliance HR strengthening. Well, I mean that is the data. I don't think I would need, I can't imagine, any further breakdown.

Beyond £12806, on the other hand, we've got some big round figures like £2 million. Since 2022 £2 million to Ukrainian humanitarian assistance DEC appeal.

The DEC appeal, as I understand, it is a big pool, which lots of people put into and truly they account for the money they spend. So I'm also just wondering, I mean, what else could we or would we need to know about that £2 million. You know, do we need DEC to then come back to us and say, where did that £2 million go? Or do we just assume that DEC spent 10% on this, 20% on that, so that's our share. So, maybe a little bit of explanation as to what's the data that we're missing at the moment.

Liz Ditchburn

Should I have a first go at it and Gary will have thoughts as well. I mean I suppose the bottom line is, the benefit of open publication, proactive publication in a standardised format is that anybody can look at it and do different things with it. You know, so you guys will have one particular set of interests, but the point is the data is out there, people can look at it through all sorts of other lenses as well.

So it you know, you can look at everything that's. happening in a particular area within a country. I think the point about data being available is that lots of people can do lots of different things with it. From a parliamentary point of view, I would have thought you'd want to know why was that money given? What did it achieve and did it achieve what we thought it was going to achieve? the level of detail you want for £2 million might be very different from the level of detail you expect or want for £12,000. But the sort of fundamental questions are the same. Was this money, did we allocate it in the right way, are we making the right choices about how a relatively small pot of money, and then the way that money was used? Did it actually result in the change that we wanted? That's very difficult to find from the current available data.

John Mason SP

And can I question? That I mean I can understand well. Why did we give £2 million to Ukraine. Why didn't we give it Sudan or somewhere else or why wasn't it £1 million or £3 million? So that kind of question. But once it actually ends up in DEC, which is, as I understand it, it's a kind of amalgamation of different organisations, do we not trust them to spend it for Ukraine? Do we need to know, you know, how much was food and how much was medical?

Liz Ditchburn

No, so that it's not about breakdown. So then if you're giving money into a pot, then the answers about what that pot has achieved should come from the kind of collective management of that pot. It's not that you would expect the Scottish Government to set in train separate mechanisms or to give you a false breakdown. But you still want to know. OK, I put in my 5% did that, did that bigger part achieve what was expected from it and that information should still be available to you as the contributor of that 5%.

Sarah Boyack MSP

And Maggie next, I can see you've got your hand up there.

Maggie Chapman MSP

Thank Sarah. And following on from John's questions and comments, I guess there's a there's a question around transparency and responsibility, rather than accountability and, I suppose where responsibility lies and how would you view the transparency elements supporting responsibility?

Because I think some of the challenges are that in Parliament we rarely talk about these issues. But the public discussion is, well, how do you know the money's being used and that I think it is a different point to accountability. There's something about responsible use of public funds and then for me there there's a question then around political judgement and whose judgement, who has the right to make those kinds of political judgements on how money is used in different countries whose political situations may be very complex may be very fluid and change very quickly

I'm just asking about how we can use these kinds of processes and the IATI tools to better understand those kinds of things or can't we?. Are those political questions still things that we go on the basis of information on the ground on journalism, on a whole range of other information coming to us, that's not actually about fund data, but maybe about other relationships.

Sarah Boyack MSP

I can see Gary's got his hand up and he's been nodding to your questions, Maggie.

Gary Forster

So in response before Maggie and the gentlemen's question about don't we have quite a lot of information here already. Yes, there is quite a lot of information in the documents that we identified when it comes to finances, the value of IATI is that the information is in a much easier to analyse format. So once it's in there you can track all sorts of information, so you can track what the original budget for a programme was. You can then track the disbursements against that budget and then the final expenditure by the recipient organisation. And then that can be downloaded in the form of spreadsheets and so on.

So if you get a Parliamentary question that comes in and somebody says, are we on track with our spending in Ukraine? You can see that you've allocated £40 million and actually £20 million has been dispersed at a point where it should have been the whole 40. You can ask questions about that. So it lends itself to analysis, which isn't necessarily possible in the documents that you currently have. And I would imagine you have a lot of the underlying information that would be required. From a financial perspective, the question about the transparency through the delivery chain varies depending on what your philosophy of transparency is.

So if you look at someone like the Dutch Government they require their recipients of aid to publish to IATI as well, so you can see that for example the government gives Save the children Holland €5 million and then you can see that Save the Children Holland then publishes and the information is connected in IATI. So you can follow it. And Save the Children publishes to say, well of the £5 million we used £2 million but we gave £3 million to these three civil society organisations in Kenya to do this

work. So you get more visibility. The UK Government does instead of asking its grantees to publish to IATI actually publishes that information itself in terms of who the main actors are and where the money is going and what it's being used for, because they have that information, because their grantees publish that information or provide that information through their reporting to the donor and so on.

So, it can be complex or a bit more simple and there are people who could help you think about what do you want out of this. What's the right level of complexity, what's the right level of timing for this, what works for you? Some of the institutions you already give money to may well already be active publishers, so they may already be publishing what they do with your money.

And then to Maggie's question about how can you use IATI to understand what's happening on the ground? Again, there's people that can provide, and we can provide, a crash course on if you had a question such as who else is working on water and sanitation in Kenya right now? That is a question that only takes 2 minutes to answer. Using the existing portals and tools that exist. So you don't have to be completely techie. I'm certainly not, but there are ways of using the data to give you real insights and looking at your own grantees and saying hang on, we're giving this grantee a huge amount of money. Who else is funding them? Oh OK. So maybe we should focus on an organisation that has less funding, or maybe we want to go with an organisation that's already trusted by the US and the Germans and the French because they've done the due diligence and you know, we can support them. As well so, there's a whole bunch of ways it can be used.

Sarah Boyack MSP

OK, thanks. And did you want to come in on that?

Liz Ditchburn

To just add a couple of thoughts, I suppose as this conversation is evolving, I'm quite struck by how pro data publication the Scottish Government is in many fields. So it's a government that likes to think of itself as digital, as publishing proactively, as enabling people to use data and it feels like this is just a little corner that's got lost in all of that, probably because it's relatively small. But I mean, I think those same sort of reasons why you might want to be proactively publishing data in a form that anybody can use, and the benefit of the IATI standard, is that you know lots of people have spent years developing this and bringing it to a point where you can just be part of something much bigger.

So I suppose I'm struck by how this has got left behind. In what's otherwise a government that is keen on data and digital and publishing. the government would need to make, really clear choices about how it prioritises where it starts, how it goes forward but even a partial view would be better in a standardised format than what we have now.

So how you choose to use the data to ask what kinds of questions about impact or responsibility or accountability, you know, is for discussion. I think some of the questions that you might want to ask a government about how it uses its money, the choice is about where you spend your money and how you make choices about. Do I do climate related money or do I do health for example, you can use data to illuminate those questions, but they fundamentally remain political choices.

because the Scottish Government pot of money is a relatively small pot of money, it's going to make very different choices from the UK, which is sitting with a very large pot of money. So, you know, there again, there's no right or wrong answer. It's about what you decide to prioritise. But those prioritisation choices should be tested on the basis of one version of the truth - data and that's exactly the space you know that parliamentary scrutiny here is probing and testing those choices.

Sarah Boyack MSP

On one level, it should be more straightforward than the UK. It's not just the scale of the money, it's also the number of places, because it's quite focused in Scotland and it has been for a long time. I've got some more thoughts, but I'm going to let you come in first Liam.

Liam Kerr MSP

Yeah, very grateful. Liz, let me take that exact point that you just finished on there. And what do you think, bluntly, about Parliament, this Scottish Parliament's, ability to scrutinise the Scottish Government on this spend and hold it sufficiently to account both on the actual level of funding and the choices that are being made and the related question, of course, is that we would all, knowing the MSPs reasonably well on this group, we would all look for practical ways to move forward. So are you able to offer this group, let's say, three things that this group could be recommending that could be put in place either by the Scottish Government and or the Scottish Parliament going forward, that would enable that scrutiny to properly take place.

Liz Ditchburn

So I was really struck by your points there around the Constitution Committee has not really looked in detail at International Development spending, although it sits within its purview.

Sarah Boyack MSP

I hope that's fair. It's about a year and a half since I was on the committee.

Liz Ditchburn

I accept that committees attention is spread across a very broad set of areas, but it wouldn't seem unreasonable to say, whatever the relevant committee is, although it's a small amount of money, we'll look at International Development spending, at least once every three years

And I suppose that matters because, particularly, I think in Scotland, International Development spending by the Scottish Government sits in a broader landscape of very engaged civil society and very active activism, campaigning, charitable giving, etcetera, and particularly the advantage is this small number of focused countries. So, obviously the Malawi Partnership is the deepest one, and is extraordinary in so many ways. You know that there's no single partnership relationship between the UK and a country in the same way that there is between Scotland and Malawi and the partnership as you know is deep and broad and of long duration.

So again, it doesn't seem unreasonable for a parliament to say, well, actually, because that is an area of work which touches so much of not just Scottish expenditure, Scottish Government expenditure but so much of civic Scotland that we look at it once every so often. And the great thing that committees have the opportunity to do now, or APGs is, you know, video links enable you to get evidence directly from people in Malawi who could speak to you about what it's like to be a recipient, of being on the other end of that partnership. I mean, obviously there are many people who are often in Scotland as well, but you know you can get the voices of the Global South as part of an inquiry or as part of evidence gathering in a way that would have been unthinkable 20 years ago.

, in terms of what the committee might want to do or what the group might want to do, I think pushing for the publication of data, pushing for starting that process and then also looking at the formal mechanisms that the Parliament might want to use whether that's the committee or the group to look specifically at, for example, one country would be a very easy way to start.

Sarah Boyack MSP

Thanks. I mean you're right in a way. Existence of a cross party group is that opportunity. It is about empowering and enabling third sector organisations to have that conversation. We've also got a cross party group on Malawi where we do have a lot of those kind of discussions as well. But I think what we've been focusing on for the first hour or so is about that scrutiny process and about the data and how you do that.

And yeah, just even looking at the Constitution, External affairs and Culture Committee, they have been pretty busy recently, so we could both do a report to the government as John has suggested in terms of questions, but we could also copy our report to the parliamentary committee as well. But I think the idea of doing this inquiry was actually, we don't think this has been done. So this is a gap that we are filling in the cross party group. With the resources around the table that you can see. Gary, can you come in on this issue?

Gary Forster

, if you're talking about scrutiny, there's obviously a number of ways you can come at it. But I think the thing that struck Henry and I looking at the available information was the lack of impact information. You know, the Scottish Government is investing this money to make change happen. I mean, you're doing this to tackle whatever challenge and try and make lives better for people, right? And without impact information, it's actually very difficult to scrutinise whether that's happening or not.

And obviously we could talk about scrutiny from a procurement perspective and many other ways. But I think fundamentally there needs to be a discussion about how do we ensure impact, and I'm sure that many of the grantees that receive this funding have pretty good impact measurement processes in place. Most organisations now have pretty thorough methodologies for how they determine this stuff. It could be a mixture of quantitative and qualitative approaches, but they should be able to feed you information that allows you to say we spent £20 million. What did we get for it?

it's a genuine conversation because the Scottish Government should be thinking do we want to do bilateral programmes like what we're currently doing and making sizable impact by focusing money in a poor country? Do we want to contribute some of that money to multilateral initiatives such as GAVI, the Global Vaccine Initiative that have been proven to be really effective, and there's a whole bunch of dynamics you need to think about around that? But I would argue that without the impact information coming from the programmes you're currently funding, it's hard to have those conversations and balance out those various priorities.

Sarah Boyack MSP

OK, thanks. I'd like to follow up on a bit about the finance and data and I'm conscious we've got other things that we do want to cover in the Scottish governments approach to International Development.

And I'd like to just draw on the comments that Mark O'Donnell had made and use his paper to ask to ask a couple of questions to Gary, Henry and Liz. His comments about data were about making sure that we encourage and build on strengths rather than discouraging people with a misplaced emphasis on pre-compliance, risk averse bureaucracy. And he talks about practical support to NGOs.

if we would require more online data, would there be an opportunity or a responsibility for the organisation to deliver on the ground to be supported, to make sure that data is clear . He says that there's 59 spending lines totalling \$19 million. But there seems to be more expenditure reported than is programmed. And kind of two interesting comments there, picking up the data issue in terms of the need to be transparent on the website and not on a PDF, so that people can pull it out abstract, going into year on year, granular topics or areas. But does that require support for charitable organisations, community organisations on the ground to actually deliver that data to make sure it's available?

Gary Forster

So it really depends on which organisations you're working with as to whether they'll need capacity building. Most, given the amount that you're spending, most organisations of that size will be reporting to other donors in pretty comprehensive ways. So the first thing to do would be check what information they're already providing to you. Often, and we have this with a lot of governments, they say we don't have that information. And then because myself and Henry used to work for organisations that actually were grantees of these big donors we know that we've provided it to them and that they're in possession of it.

So the first thing is what are you already in possession of from your grantees about the projects, about the finances, about the impact and so on. And then if you're not in possession of it already, can they provide it? They might be providing it to others. I mean, some of these donors are extraordinarily demanding in their requirements. I'm sure you've heard the reputation of some, including the European Commission particularly, are, you know, they need an awful lot of detail. So it could be that your grantees are ready to provide you with the information they just need to know what you want.

And then the third bit is this figuring out again, how big do you want this to be? What are the priority bits of information you want from these organisations and they provide that to you in a reasonably timely manner? Does that sync with your reporting process that you already have? And I completely agree, we don't want to be overwhelming organisations with burdensome reporting if we can avoid it.

So I think just some basic analysis of those three things. What have you got? What are they able to provide and then what extra do you actually need? Should give you a sense of how much burden you're going to put on them and whether they need support with that burden. In forms of capacity building or coaching, or often just an extra person to do some administration and recording of things and sending some emails.

Sarah Boyack MSP

Yeah, I suppose I'm just thinking that just adding that extra person, that actually might be quite a big deal for some organisations. So that's why I quite like Mark's question about is there support required to enable this to happen? I mean that could be sharing best practice.

You talked a little bit about that it could be practical support, but he says it could be practical support for small NGO's that address gaps in their capacity. And he talked about mentoring an advice system just so that you've got the basic level of regularity compliance. I suppose what we could do is ask the government about what data they've got and if what we're recommending would require more work in country on ground or by smaller NGO's. Could we have support to enable that to happen?

Liz Ditchburn

I think the right starting point is to ask those questions. But I think it's important to ask those questions knowing that this type of public creation has been achieved by many different actors in many different places, and also knowing that most implementing NGOs or other implementers have this information. You know, if you've ever received a lottery grant, you know exactly how much, how many questions you have to answer about. What your expected impact is, what then happens, how you're tracking it.

And the other thing I think in this, is never to let perfection be, you know, the enemy of getting started. more data is better than no data.. You know 80% is still an awful lot more availability of information than nothing in these standardised formats. So I guess, ask the question, but ask the question knowing and being confident that what you're asking for is not something which is unachievable or unreasonable. But yes, of course you would not want the government to become an unresponsive or irresponsible

partner loading its requests onto others who are less able to bear it. So I think you know that's in the spirit of what you'll be, how you would be asking it.

Sarah Boyack MSP

I was thinking we might just look at the Scottish Government approach on International Development funding, because there's some interesting issues there. Do you think they've got it right? It is a limited programme if you compare it with the UK, but it is picking those countries and trying to have a key impact and using the relationships Scotland had historically with different countries and trying to have an impact.

And what are your thoughts on it? I mean there was that point that Mark raised with us that there seems to be more expenditure reported than is programmed whether that's emergency money, whether that's an issue about disaster money. But it again comes back to transparency, so I don't know any of your thoughts about the overall strategy, what do you think about it?

Liz Ditchburn

if you're a small donor, the key generally is to focus on a relatively small number of areas and to build on where you have strengths of the country. And I think in many ways, the Scottish Government's programme fits with that. It feels right that it's a small number of countries which are targeted for a deep relationship. I think that feels right. I was then struck by the fact that although that's the sort of stated aim, it feels like actually, the expenditure ends up going to quite a lot more countries.

I don't know whether that's right or wrong. I'm just saying given that the overall focus is very much on small number of countries, it does then seem actually to end up in quite a lot of different places. So focus. and building on strengths and where you have relationships. Because you're always going to be a relatively small player, your value is not from the size of the pot. Your value is the nature of the relationship, the kinds of interconnections between your country and the other country. If you're talking about bilateral aid and where you can build on strengths that Scotland might have in particular areas of expertise to facilitating partnerships, which I've always thought was a really good way for the Scottish Government to think about its work.

Actually, you know, if you can, if you can facilitate a partnership between an Academic institution or a public institution or private sector, whoever it is that you kind of go, these people are at their the forefront of their field and it's what they do is very relevant to country x with whom we have a relationship. Let's support that peer-to-peer learning. Let's support that knowledge exchange. So I think certainly in the past the Scottish Government has done quite a lot of that and I think that's very, very sensible because you kind of get more than just the money in a sense, you're getting more value than just the sort of actual money that you might be putting into it. Mark encourages us to think about that in the context of public sector policy administration, public finance, management, all that.

So I think that concept of how do you support partnerships where there is expertise. Respectful partnerships, mutually beneficial partnerships, partnerships that deepen and strengthen relationships beyond just giving the money I think is sensible and feels like a good way to use the money. He also suggests using multilateral arrangements more. And I think there the question is if your monetary contribution is fairly small it potentially just gets lost in the in the big pot and then you have to question whether actually you could offer more value through other ways.

So there's a set of choices for a small donor. You've always got to make those choices and think about keeping the focus and think about how you really get the most out of what is a relatively small amount

of money in the scheme of things, but where you're trying to facilitate greater value beyond just the money.

But, I think the Scottish Government doesn't do a bad job of those questions, but those are the questions to keep on checking in, probing, testing, challenging. It is striking that the expenditure is happening in quite a lot of different sectors now. I did wonder whether it had become more dispersed than it used to be but I don't know. But again those are the kinds of questions you could illuminate by looking at the data if you had it.

Sarah Boyack MSP

Gary, have you got a thought on that, having looked at the publications of what's been spent?

Gary Forster

So I'm not particularly qualified to talk about the kind of strategic approach and so on. I guess the only thing I'd come back to is this point on impact and learning. You know the Scottish Government has been undertaking these kinds of programmes for quite a long time. We certainly didn't find anything in terms of, and we may have missed it. We didn't find anything in terms of evaluations or analysis of impact data and so on, which would then inform whether to continue or to course correct with the current strategy.

Regardless of the course you take, you want to be able to check your effectiveness in achieving those goals, and at the moment based, and again, there may be documents that go internally that are discussed and there may be internal learning meetings and you may also speak with other actors in the countries and in the thematic areas that you work. But if that is happening, that isn't evident from the outside and I think that would probably be important regardless of those strategic choices you make.

Sarah Boyack MSP

OK. That's really helpful from both of you. John, did you want to comment on that?

John Mason MSP

So I tend to agree that focusing a small number of countries is a good idea. Presumably you don't want to change that too often, and I was wondering if you had any thought about the time scale for reviewing that? Because I mean you're right and having schools in my constituency linking with Malawi and the kids are back and forward, the teachers and the nurses and all these things. But you know, we also have other people from other countries coming in and for example, Jamaica would be one, whose flag is based on our flag as I understand it, and there's the whole, slavery history and all that. And they're not included as one of these countries. At what point should we be looking at the four countries and thinking about it again?

Liz Ditchburn

Oh, it's a really difficult question, isn't it? Because I think there's so much value in the longevity of some of these partnerships, you know, things can happen as a result of that. You know, you've sort of got second or third generation or kind of relationships in some schools, for example. And there's huge value in that it would be very hard to imagine kind of going, let's not do Malawi., Just now you know, let's move on to something else. But do you look at any of the others, do you add a fifth? Do you take one out?

I would be very reluctant to look at those relationships too often because I think the damage you do to a relationship when you as a donor make a decision. I mean, we saw in the work that the one of the things that ICAI has been doing with the UK Government is looking at the impact of both the aid cuts and the merger between DFID and the FCO and some of the biggest impacts of the cuts was to

relationships. You know, relationships never recover from, or they take a long time to recover from, an abrupt cut from one day to the next.

So I think relationships are really valuable and should be interrupted only with great care and thought. And as a result of discussions with people in those countries about whether change was necessary, whether the relationship had outgrown itself, whether things had moved on.

Sarah Boyack MSP

Thank you. Yeah, I mean that's a that's a good question. At the Tuesday night meeting of the International Development Cross Party Group, we were focusing on the history of colonialism and reparations and you know quite a few places would be in the queue. I think that would give a reality check on it. So it's quite a big issue.

Louise Davies

Thanks. . One of the points that came through from our member that did a bit of a comparison about being a recipient from Scottish Government and UK Aid Direct funding was around effective and impactful ways of managing a small budget, and having open competition for funding. And I wonder what you think of the importance of making sure that funds are allocated through competitive processes

Sarah Boyack MSP

OK, either if you want to come in first? Thinking about it, it's about procurement, isn't it about what's a fair process? And again, how do organisations feel they can engage?

Liz Ditchburn

I think the real thing that competitive processes do is they should be able to be about accessibility and openness, so there's no back room deals. This is the money we've got. This is how we've decided to use it. I think focusing on the word competitive is almost the wrong way round. I think it's about openness. It's openly saying this is the choices that we've made as a government and now these are the kinds of partners that we're looking forward to implement this. Are you such a partner and what would you do?

So I think openness is really important. You know, different mechanisms work depending on what you're trying to do. So if you know if you're trying to do something which is much more about knowledge exchange and you're looking for a set of organisations who are not necessarily NGOs but might be technical or academic or in different institutions, then you might run these processes slightly differently. But the key for me is openness and that is generally achieved by what turns out to be competitive mechanisms.

But in a way that's the most important thing, the fact that it's open and accessible, and of course accessibility is important. You've always got to keep testing yourself and checking. am I excluding people without realising it? Am I excluding people who should be coming forward but something about the way I've run that process is excluding them? So I think that's the way to think about it.

Sarah Boyack MSP

Can I also say to those who are online, we're now joined by Ben MacPherson MSP. We were just saying what can we do in the last 10 minutes, but appreciate you've actually made the effort to turn up and are busy.

Sarah Boyack MSP

We have Liam online as well, and in the room we've got Liz who has lots of experience from Scottish UK government transparency organisations. It's a pretty big CV. And then online we've got Gary and Henry who did a piece of work called Publish What You Fund.

we've referenced the Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee and the fact that they are busy all the time. And just thinking about coming up with some questions from our inquiry, and sending it to both to the Scottish Government and to the committee. So that we help increase the transparency, because that's kind of been a big issue since we started the discussion. Anything else?

Ben Macpherson MSP

So that's the International Development Fund, just for clarity?

Liz Ditchburn

Not, not just the International Development Fund, but all the International Development expenditure.

Ben Macpherson MSP

Right by Scottish Government and Scottish agencies, for example, Police Scotland.

Liz Ditchburn

Where, wherever that ODA is being spent.

Sarah Boyack MSP

And we talked about, there's a kind of global standard that we currently don't adopt in Scotland. So we discussed the pragmatic nature of that would be really good. What it would be is a win win, a no brainer, but it would need a small amount of money to do it but it would benefit both the government and the organisations that are involved. And we've talked a bit about sharing best practise and transparency and sticking with both the parliament and organisations on the ground so that you see that transparency in terms of delivery and outcomes. And I'll just ask Louise because we got very few minutes left because we dived into data, I think for a very good reason, then transparency. But we were just talking about the overarching limits in terms of where the Scottish Government spends money for very good reason. We've agreed it just again, just thinking about anything we've missed out in terms of questions about the work that the government does and we've got the written briefings. Mark O'Donnell couldn't be with us because he's in a plane coming back from Bangladesh. So we've used his report.

Louise Davies

And again, I'm not sure this is necessarily best use of the expertise in the room, but just the other question we had which is that Scottish organisations have many strong partnerships which they've invested over many years and ideally the Scottish Government can reward and utilise such strong partnerships by funding Scottish applicants and not making them compete with large agencies from rich countries such as the US, whose NGOs are well developed due to their government's investments in them. And I wondered if that's something you would agree with and whether you think the shift is towards needing to track the data that might skew things towards a preference to those bigger agencies?

Ben Macpherson MSP

I mean, is there a difficulty there about procurement law? I mean, that's the challenge there. And just on the focus point, I mean one of the many things I remember from having the responsibility of being International Development Minister was the Scottish Government identified the four priority countries. But even other aspects of the Scottish Government, like Police Scotland, were operating in more than those four countries and I don't think we've ever collectively cohesively aligned the resources.

Liz Ditchburn

So I think your question is a really good question. I think everybody will probably agree that a country like Scotland should just focus on a small number of areas. Small number of countries. Then the question is how tough do you want to be on that? How hard do you want to go after that? Do you want to say, well, we'll primarily focus, but actually there's a bunch of other good things that we want to do in other places and we're quite happy to do them. Or do you say no actually we really want to focus and we're just not going to tolerate more than a certain amount of humanitarian funding going somewhere else, for example. So I think that's a choice, you know. And I could make arguments in favour of both directions, but that's definitely a choice. Even if you decided to focus how focused do you want to be? How much do you think there's value in aligning everything behind those countries?

Ben Macpherson MSP

I was just going to say, that is a question for the NGOs in Scotland as well. I mean part of the breadth of Scotland's footprint, so to speak, is things like Mary's Meals want to expand and do things in other places. Just as an example, yeah, I think it's a bigger question than just for the Government.

Sarah Boyack MSP

In a way, that's why we're doing this inquiry, though, isn't. Because we've got people who have given us some thoughts and your capacity in terms of SIDA, as an overarching organisation is to get that conversation going. Did you have a follow up there either Louise or Liz?

Liz Ditchburn

So the other place I wanted to go is another of these key choices is sort of how, and I agree with you that there's a broader choice for more actors than just the government in country relationships. The other question is how much emergency humanitarian aid does the Scottish Government want to do from its budget? Because there's no simple answer to that question, and it is fundamentally a political choice.

But it is an interesting thing to look at, I think, because, you know humanitarian aid by its nature is only the sticking plaster. It's responding to absolute appalling immediate need. But it is not changing the long term trajectory of those countries. And the world's resources are increasingly sucked into more and more humanitarian aid, and therefore less and less development aid. And in a sense that just paints a picture of, you know, you're never gonna get off that treadmill. And of course conflict is a very big contributor to that.

So I think there's a there's a real choice now. Clearly, you know, Scotland, whenever it makes that emergency response pledge is doing it on the basis of need of solidarity, of a sense of responsibility. But there is an interesting question about how much you know. I mean Mark's figures, it's sort of up to 35%. So every pound that you spend on humanitarian response, you are not spending on development. And that's an interesting question and choice. And especially when there's a lot of humanitarian support and giving from the broader population as well.

Sarah Boyack MSP

That's an interesting question because at the Cross Party Group on Pakistan, one of the things we debated was the crisis in terms of the flooding, what money to support people then was actually about adaptation or resilience going forward. And it wasn't just about saving somebody's life or getting them food to survive. But it was when they moved back what would be the support so it didn't happen again. I'm conscious we have now overshot our time. Have you got a brief comment on that Ben?

Ben Macpherson MSP

Just extremely quickly on that point, there was a review of the Humanity Emergency Fund in 2020, published in 2021 and it would be worth looking at what the conclusions were for that, to refresh myself. But I do think these are really pertinent points about what is the impact of that £10 million which is then split up into different parts of the year and activated by the Humanitarian Emergency Fund Committee? Could that be better utilised for development. I think it's a perfectly reasonable question.

Sarah Boyack MSP

You have totally justified turning up today. Ben, thank you. Can I thank everyone for coming on the call today because it's been really good being able to get people's different perspectives and just to think through the research we've had in advance of today's session, it's been really useful. And Gary and Henry, thanks for letting us pick your brains and for the work you've done. And also for Liz, giving us your range of experience, that has been absolutely invaluable

We will seek to share a draft report with the MSPs here as well as government officials So that gives everybody in the room a chance to add some more comments. Because I suspect Ben if we had another half hour, you would ask more questions or give us insight? But we don't have that time so we've had general questions to kick things off. So, thank you everybody for coming in and we're looking forward to the next stage.