

# **EUROPEAN AND EXTERNAL RELATIONS COMMITTEE**

Tuesday 2 October 2007

Session 3

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## EUROPEAN AND EXTERNAL RELATIONS COMMITTEE

### 5<sup>th</sup> Meeting 2007, Session 3

#### CONVENER

\*Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)

#### DEPUTY CONVENER

\*Alex Neil (Central Scotland) (SNP)

#### COMMITTEE MEMBERS

\*Ted Brocklebank (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

\*Alasdair Morgan (South of Scotland) (SNP)

\*Irene Oldfather (Cunninghame South) (Lab)

\*John Park (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)

\*Gil Paterson (West of Scotland) (SNP)

\*Iain Smith (North East Fife) (LD)

#### COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTES

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab)

Keith Brown (Ochil) (SNP)

Jackson Carlaw (West of Scotland) (Con)

Jeremy Purvis (Tw eeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)

\*attended

#### THE FOLLOWING GAVE EVIDENCE:

Paul Chitnis (Scottish Catholic International Aid Fund)

David Christison (Christian Blind Mission)

Mervyn Lee (Mercy Corps)

Eoghan Mackie (Challenges Worldwide)

George Rawlinson (Solas Educational Trust)

Judith Robertson (Oxfam in Scotland)

Jenny Schwarz (Vetaid)

Professor John Struthers (University of Paisley)

Leo Williams (Scotland Malawi Partnership)

#### CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Dr Jim Johnston

#### ASSISTANT CLERKS

Emma Berry

Lucy Scharbert

#### LOCATION

Committee Room 2



## Scottish Parliament

### European and External Relations Committee

*Tuesday 2 October 2007*

[THE DEPUTY CONVENER *opened the meeting at 10:00*]

### Interests

**The Deputy Convener (Alex Neil):** I welcome everyone to the fifth meeting in session 3 of the European and External Relations Committee. I will convene the meeting for the first two items on the agenda, not because there has been a palace coup, but because Jackie Baillie has been demoted to the shadow Cabinet. We must elect a new convener.

Item 1 is a declaration of interests. I ask our new member, Malcolm Chisholm, whether he has any interests to declare.

**Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab):** I have no relevant interests to declare.

**The Deputy Convener:** I take it that no other member has any additional interests that have not previously been declared.

## Convener

10:01

**The Deputy Convener:** Item 2 is selection of a new convener. I remind everyone that, under the d'Hondt system, the agreement is that the committee's convener will be a member of the Labour Party, so I will accept nominations only for members of the Labour Party. I invite nominations.

**Irene Oldfather (Cunninghame South) (Lab):** I nominate Malcolm Chisholm.

**The Deputy Convener:** I take it that there are no other nominations, so Malcolm Chisholm is elected by acclaim.

*Malcolm Chisholm was chosen as convener.*

**The Deputy Convener:** Congratulations, Malcolm.

## International Development Inquiry

10:02

**The Convener (Malcolm Chisholm):** I thank the committee for electing me.

The main item on this morning's agenda is a round-table discussion involving representatives from various international development organisations. I welcome all our panellists and thank them for taking the time to come and share their views with us. Members will recall that the committee agreed, as a first step in our international development inquiry, to hold a round-table discussion with relevant stakeholders to explore general development issues. It is intended that the discussion will inform the committee ahead of its agreement of the remit for the inquiry.

I intend to proceed straight to questions from members of the committee, from which I hope the discussion will progress. We have about two hours for the discussion, if we need it. Given that we have a large number of panellists, I would be grateful if members could keep their questions fairly short. If it is relevant to do so, I ask members to indicate to which organisation their question is directed, although obviously they may wish to hear from all the panellists. I begin by asking members of the panel to introduce themselves and say what organisation they are from.

**Mervyn Lee (Mercy Corps):** I am from Mercy Corps, whose European headquarters are based here in Edinburgh.

**Judith Robertson (Oxfam in Scotland):** I am from Oxfam in Scotland.

**Jenny Schwarz (Vetaid):** I am from Vetaid.

**Leo Williams (Scotland Malawi Partnership):** I am from the Scotland Malawi Partnership.

**Eoghan Mackie (Challenges Worldwide):** I am from Challenges Worldwide.

**George Rawlinson (Solas Educational Trust):** I am from Solas Educational Trust.

**Paul Chitnis (Scottish Catholic International Aid Fund):** I am from the Scottish Catholic International Aid Fund. It might be of interest to the committee that I am also president of a consortium of European non-governmental organisations.

**Professor John Struthers (University of Paisley):** I am a professor of economics at the University of Paisley and a member of the Development Studies Association.

**David Christison (Christian Blind Mission):** I am from the Christian Blind Mission in Scotland.

**The Convener:** Thank you.

I will set the ball rolling. A good starting point for us is the fact that the Scottish Government is consulting on its international development policy and has invited feedback on thematic priorities, geographic principles and the international development fund and process. I am sure that everyone noticed the announcement about that in August. Are the panellists content with the scope of the Government's consultation? Are the areas that the Government has identified broadly those on which the committee should focus in its inquiry, or would it be useful for us to focus on other areas?

**Judith Robertson:** The Scottish Government's review will consider the money that is additional to the £3 million that has been allocated to Malawi. I would like the scope of the review to be extended to include expenditure in Malawi, so that themes and work in Malawi can be considered as part of it.

**The Convener:** Members will remember that Linda Fabiani told the committee in June that she would consider whether the money that is allocated to Malawi is correctly focused—I was not a member of the committee in June, but I read the *Official Report* of the meeting. I understand that the Government has not managed formally to put the issue out to consultation.

**Judith Robertson:** The current scope of the review is to consider only funds additional to those that are allocated to Malawi.

**The Convener:** Should people be asked to give their views on both funding streams?

**Judith Robertson:** Yes.

**Alex Neil (Central Scotland) (SNP):** The important point, which we discussed during our away day, is how Malawi relates to any extension of support. For example, we should consider whether help for other parts of Africa should be concentrated on Malawi's neighbouring countries. There is a close relationship between what we do in Malawi and what we do elsewhere.

**Leo Williams:** The Scottish Government has asked for a consultation on the Malawi project. We are running a consultation meeting on 12 October, at which we will discuss such issues with our member organisations and formulate a response to the Government.

**The Convener:** Does anyone else want to comment on the scope of the Government's consultation?

**Paul Chitnis:** It is difficult to talk about international development without talking about Malawi, because by far the largest amount of money being spent under the strategy goes to Malawi.

Issues to do with good practice and professionalism need to be brought into the scope of the inquiry—I hope that they will be. That should apply across the board, to the Malawi projects as well as the non-Malawi projects. Members of the Network of International Development Organisations in Scotland—I think that all the witnesses' organisations are NIDOS members—hold professionalism very dear. High standards of development are crucial, not least because we all stand to lose if development work does not go to plan.

The review is perhaps not taking full account of the impact in Scotland of development strategy. During the past couple of years there has been a great deal of activity in schools and the wider community: it is important for the inquiry to consider the extent to which such activity is consistent with the practice and values of development education that are incorporated into the curriculum. Learning and Teaching Scotland has done excellent work and is promoting important values, and we need to ensure that the practice of another part of Government—the international development strategy—is consistent with those values.

**Mervyn Lee:** I would reinforce the point that Paul Chitnis made. Education of young people and the general public in Scotland in development is an important component, because there is a dearth of understanding and knowledge of what “development” means. If Scotland is to continue to invest in development—we welcome the increased investment this year—we need to bring the public on board, in particular young people who are at school.

**The Convener:** The panellists are happy with the scope of the review but would like it to be extended to include Malawi and education in Scotland. Should the committee's inquiry focus on the areas that the Government highlighted, perhaps with the additions that you have suggested, or should we consider other areas?

**George Rawlinson:** It is important to focus on bringing development education activity to the wider population of Scotland. We should move into more community-based activities—while not moving away from the school aspect—by engaging with trade unions and employers and raising the issues with them. Unless we change public opinion, not much else will change. We can support projects, but we also need to engage with people, so that they know why we are doing those things. We need, for example, to alter how people behave and how they shop, among other things.

**Iain Smith (North East Fife) (LD):** I will expand on the subject of development education in schools. I was convener of the Education Committee in the previous session of Parliament,

so I am particularly interested in that area. How can we bring more development education into the curriculum? In what ways do the panel members see such education as being beneficial, with regard to raising awareness of development issues and ensuring that Scotland's contribution to international development is effective?

**Judith Robertson:** Some of the organisations that are present today are members of a network called the International Development Education Association of Scotland, which has been working with Learning and Teaching Scotland and the education department of the Scottish Government. At present, the curriculum for excellence excellently lays out—only partly by accident—some of the knowledge, skills and values that underpin the structure of the education system in Scotland. Those closely marry up with development education's goals of giving children the knowledge, values and skills that can allow them to assess whether issues are just and fair, rather than simply teaching children about development. The children have the information, and know where to get further information, in order to make such assessments. They can analyse issues critically from a perspective of understanding some of the rights and wrongs and the global power relations that dominate some of the issues.

Oxfam and many of the other organisations have contributed to developing the curriculum for global citizenship, which is concerned not so much with teaching children about development, but with supporting them in learning about a range of issues from a range of perspectives. Rather than just hearing one side of the story, and being fed a line from Oxfam or any other organisation, children are taught the skills that are necessary to make a decent assessment of the information that is put in front of them.

In order to support that process, we have been working with the six development education centres in different regions throughout Scotland, ensuring that they can provide the continuous professional development support that enables teachers in schools to feel more confident when working through development issues. Those centres provide a massive amount of support for teachers, but are seriously underfunded.

We want the process to become integrated further into education. There is a huge amount of support for that at local authority level. We are not talking about something that is bizarre and alien—teachers are demanding it. There is not a huge amount of financial resource going into that process, so our perspective is that we want it to be strengthened and supported. The question whether support comes from the international development education funding or education

department funding—which might be more appropriate—is an issue that the committee might choose to debate.

10:15

**Judith Robertson:** We would be careful about the whole school linking process. I am not sure that such a process is the best way to ensure that children and young people have an accurate perception of life in developing and poor countries. It is one way in which to achieve that, but we are careful about, and often critical of, the ways in which school links are set up.

The power relations between very impoverished schools and schools in Scotland—which in some constituencies may feel impoverished but which are, by comparison, not impoverished—are difficult. Often, the resources that are required by schools in poor communities abroad to sustain those links are extensive and take resources away from provision of education in a country where 60 per cent of young people do not go to school. In a world in which resources for supporting development are scarce, I would rather see the resources being put into ensuring that provision of education for children in Malawi is adequate and supported. The problem is not necessarily that such links are not a good thing; rather, it is that the resources that are taken away from Malawi to support the links would be better used in other ways.

The process needs to be carefully managed and supported in order for the links to be meaningful for both sides. It is good if they are meaningful for children in Scotland, but we must also ask whether they are meaningful for schoolchildren in Malawi. I am using Malawi as an example, but the links are with places beyond Malawi. I think that there is a lot to learn about that.

**The Convener:** Do other panellists want to come in on that?

**Leo Williams:** The Scotland Malawi Partnership agrees with Judith Robertson. The Scottish Government's Malawi policy has led to a huge rise in the number of links between schools—primary and secondary—in Scotland and Malawi. Some of those links are advanced and some are at an early stage. There are also different levels of partnership.

The previous Scottish Executive tried to offer some support, but it was not enough. We established a school partnerships working group to support some schools as best we could, but there are so many existing school partnerships and so many schools that want to enter into partnership with schools in Malawi and elsewhere that—as Judith Robertson said—the process demands a huge amount of support, which is not really available at the moment.

**Gil Paterson (West of Scotland) (SNP):** I understand what you are saying. I wonder how we can tap into the good will that follows children back into their homes, in order to feed in resources that might be available. If we took your strategy to the extreme, we may lose out in campaigning in schools. We need to reach out to parents and Scottish society. How would you square the circle, remembering that, when the fund for Malawi was announced, there was an upsurge of feeling in Scotland and people wanted to do something? Such publicity provides only a small window of opportunity. What would you do to grab that opportunity?

**Judith Robertson:** We deal regularly with such upsurges of opinion. During emergencies, we seek to channel appropriately people's desire to help, which is often quite a challenging process. For example, people want to send blankets to people in need: that is not a cost-effective response because blankets can be bought locally, which does more to stimulate the economy in a time of disaster and emergency. We always attempt to reorient people's enthusiasm towards effective support.

Schoolchildren and their parents are absolutely integral to the process. Schools often generate their own processes for raising money or working within the curriculum to help children understand why the world is as it is—why some economies can afford to educate all their children and why some cannot—and most of the organisations that are represented here benefit from that. There are myriad ways of channelling people's good will: our desire is to ensure that it has the maximum impact. I am sure that others will have other opinions.

**Paul Chitnis:** The challenge that SCIAF has faced for 40 or more years is to sustain the interest of young people, particularly schoolchildren. SCIAF works in most Catholic schools, where there is a high level of take-up of our educational materials and where there is considerable interest in fund raising.

However, we do not offer direct school-to-school links. That is the right approach: we must ask in whose interest it is that such links be established. I understand why people want them, because part of the process is for people to give to and to support other people. However, such links are not an unqualified good. What happens down the line, several years later, when there is a change of personnel in the school and it is decided that the relationship should be terminated? Often that has implications for the jobs of people in the country of the other school concerned. What assessment is made of needs? There is an opportunity cost, in that if a school decides to have a relationship with one place, it cannot have one with somewhere



else. The matter needs to be handled carefully. A lot more thinking and work needs to be done—IDEAS is crucial.

**Professor Struthers:** Although it is right that the emphasis should be on primary and secondary education, there is also a real opportunity in higher education, where I work, because we have attracted hundreds, if not thousands, of students from the developing world, especially since the fresh talent initiative was introduced a couple of years ago. About 250 such students, many of them from Africa, are at the University of the West of Scotland following postgraduate courses. Many of them, who come here for education, go back with ideas for setting up businesses in their countries. The emphasis is right, given that there is a limited budget, but we should not forget that sustainable economic development, which includes entrepreneurship and the setting up of small businesses, is crucial.

Over many years, I have been involved in teaching and researching development economics. I have been involved at local level in Scotland with trade missions and initiatives that try to match Scottish companies with African companies. Often, those initiatives flounder because they are heavily dependent on one or two individuals—the “product champion” problem. There is a great deal of activity at grass-roots level, in universities and the business community, about which we do not know much. Although it is right that the evidence has emphasised primary and secondary education, Scottish universities already have many links and contacts with the developing world at the level of individual academics. There is a need somehow to harness and channel that effort and energy more systematically.

**Jenny Schwarz:** I want to expand on Paul Chitnis’s comments on what has developed from the initiatives in Malawi. Various links have been established, not just at school level, but between higher education and health institutions. We need to consider carefully the impact and value of those links for both sides, as Judith Robertson said. Have the links been effective, and what have they brought to both sides of the relationship?

**Irene Oldfather:** At the moment such projects receive funding. If we decide to do something different, we will recommend a change. Your comments today have been interesting, but it is important for us to be sure exactly what we should recommend in our report.

We have talked a little bit about the schools. How about the skills transfer in relation to teachers? Teachers can spend a year in Malawi, which is seen as a skills transfer. That is linked to the projects we have been discussing. Is such skills transfer appropriate? Would you categorise it

in the same way as you would the school-to-school links with the children? Does it encourage sustainable development in Malawi?

**Paul Chitnis:** The key phrase, which Irene Oldfather used, is “sustainable development”. This is about sustainability. I strongly recommend that the committee consider in its inquiry whether there is sustainability in the work that has been funded in Malawi or elsewhere. There are different ways of “doing” development, and the strategy has encouraged quite a number of them, although the evidence is that they are not all equally effective. One of the fundamental questions that needs to be asked is what the strategy is about. Is it about eradicating poverty—that is one of the questions in the committee paper—or is it about something closer to home, such as asserting Scotland’s role in the world or promoting Scottish interests? I read something somewhere about promoting Scottish technology. From a development perspective, what matters is that the subjects of development are communities in Malawi, Sudan or wherever.

You asked about teachers and the benefits to schools and to communities in Malawi and elsewhere. I am concerned about the presumption in the strategy that the knowledge and the know-how rests here in the north, and that if we simply plonk it in the south, something will happen and people will move forward. That is not our experience. In fact, if we know nothing else from development we know that people’s ownership and participation is crucial and that inappropriate technologies are often transferred. SCIAF’s experience is that facilitating and sharing between people in the south, by which I mean the global south, for example in sub-Saharan Africa—I am sorry: development people tend to use an awful lot of jargon—is often far more beneficial and appropriate than sharing technology and expertise with the north. That is because the context is so similar. If we consider it from our perspective, is it always appropriate for someone from the south to come here and advise us? It may not be. There are big questions to be asked about whether such skills transfer really is of value.

**Irene Oldfather:** That is very helpful. We discussed some of those issues at our away day. It is important for us to get views from you, as the professionals.

**Eoghan Mackie:** To follow on from what Paul Chitnis was saying, it is better for the committee to focus on the big picture. The specifics about whether we should be sending teachers for a year are more of a discussion for elsewhere. It might be better for the committee to consider what the contribution to international development is supposed to achieve.

I agree with Paul Chitnis. The four points that are outlined in our briefing paper are massively

divergent. I would also come back to the fact that even £9 million a year is a very small amount in relative terms—I think Leo Williams mentioned trying to resource schools in Malawi. Even with what might seem like a lot of money, it is just not going to happen. We do not have enough money to make a significant difference at that level. I recommend instead that the committee take a hard look at where we as Scotland want to position ourselves in the equation. Beyond that, we can come up with the specifics of how to do that.

10:30

**Leo Williams:** I completely agree with Eoghan Mackie—I think that the point was raised briefly at the away day as well. The Scottish Government has never made it particularly clear what the point is of the engagement with Malawi. Is it supposed to be a mini-Department for International Development? Are we supposed to be aiming at poverty eradication in Malawi with £3 million a year, or is it a development of meaningful links between Scotland and Malawi? That has never been clarified one way or the other and, as Eoghan said, it would be useful for the committee to consider that.

**John Park (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab):** I am interested in how attitudes are changing in Scotland, which is perhaps the longer-term vision that the Government should consider. It would be good to get feedback on whether you are seeing a general trend developing from kids who are involved in Malawi projects at school going home, speaking to their parents and involving them. Those children are uniquely placed to influence family life. Is the work starting to feed through, and not just in relation to big campaigns such as make poverty history or events such as the tsunami almost three years ago? Are we seeing more and more people wanting to get involved at a grass-roots level to support your organisations' activity? Is it realistic to consider that, and should it be an aim of the Government's strategy?

**Eoghan Mackie:** The messages are still confusing for the general public. There is enough media focus on international affairs that people want to do something, but international development is still inaccessible for them. It would be relatively straightforward to change the situation and make it more open.

**John Park:** How?

**Eoghan Mackie:** It could take a while.

**Leo Williams:** When I came on board with the Scotland Malawi Partnership in May 2006, it had about 30 or 40 members. Almost 18 months later, we have 240 members, spread between full and associate membership. There has been a massive

growth in NIDOS membership since the Scottish Executive's international development fund awarded it core funding.

The funding and the growth in membership of umbrella organisations such as the Scotland Malawi Partnership, NIDOS and the International Development Education Association of Scotland have demonstrated a rising awareness among the Scottish public. However, I agree with Eoghan Mackie that there has not been a clear message from the Scottish Government about what is happening. There has not been a great public awareness campaign.

**Ted Brocklebank (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** I want to draw a few points together. I seem to have heard this morning a pile of reasons why what we are doing is not right. There is a lot of expertise among the witnesses, who are telling us what we should not be doing. We need to get the policies right.

The fact is that there is very little money for us to spend. Phrases such as "eradicating poverty" are meaningless considering the amount of money that we are talking about. When I visited Malawi, I was shocked by how much needed doing on the ground simply for people's existence—the most basic things, such as getting running water.

An awful lot of people in Scotland have been stirred and awakened and feel that we should do something. We are asking you as the experts what we should recommend be done with this tiny sum of money. If it does not involve sending our teachers, getting schools to twin with Malawian schools or doing the basic things that relate to most people's everyday lives, what can we do with the money? How should we focus it?

**David Christison:** Our experience is on the medical side. The Christian Blind Mission has more than 100 projects in Africa, one or two of which are in Malawi and one of which is funded by the Government. What I have noticed in that project is a multiplier effect: the people in Scottish hospitals who have been working with their counterparts in Malawi have taken to it with great enthusiasm, and they are fundraising on a scale that dwarfs what we can receive from the Government. Staff have been very enthusiastic. All sorts of fundraising activities are going on. The project reaches into the hearts and minds of ordinary people who happen to work in hospitals, their friends, patients and everybody else.

**Judith Robertson:** I will respond to Ted Brocklebank's point. Notwithstanding what Leo Williams said, there are myriad ways in which we could have a significant impact on poverty in Malawi—and not just there, but that is where the conversation is focused—even with the small amount of money that is available. However, that

needs to be thought through and strategically applied.

A significant impact on poverty can be made in different ways; I will give one example. We know from our work in Malawi that if we ensured that all the orphans and vulnerable children who currently have to pay to go to secondary school—because the resources are not available to allow them to go to school free—could go to school free, that would cost about £2 million a year. That would be a fundable, measurable and strategic input to reducing poverty and it would ensure that vulnerable children who have no parents or who live in families that are headed by orphans can access secondary education. That would assume that they managed to access primary education—we would have to manage and watch that—but that would be identifiable as a strategic measure that could have an impact on some of the most vulnerable people.

That is just one example and Ted Brocklebank is right to say that the needs in the country are enormous. We could generate many such significant and strategic proposals to have an impact on poverty and I have no worries about spending funds in a way that has an impact, which is my priority.

I am more unequivocal than Paul Chitnis was about the transfer of skills. I would not undertake that transfer at all, because the money could be better spent. I question who such a transfer benefits most. Malawi's school system infrastructure is very poor and Malawi has a great shortage of teachers and nurses. One problem is that 80 per cent of the population there live in villages that are away from the cities. Supporting teachers by ensuring that they are paid to stay in rural areas and teach children there is a massive priority, instead of their migrating to Britain. We quote the statistic that there are more Malawian doctors and nurses in Manchester than there are in Malawi. That is true. We need to stop the migration of staff—even those who are relatively lowly educated—from rural areas and cities in Malawi to here, where they can obtain better salaries.

Even with a small amount of money in the country, we can have more strategic impacts. My emphasis is on poverty reduction. We are focusing on Malawi because it is one of the poorest countries in the world and not because we want to have a link with it. Having a link is beneficial and nice for us, but it is not a priority for Malawi. We have to consider whose needs come first.

**Ted Brocklebank:** How would you guarantee that the £2 million that you have identified would be spent on the purpose that you would like it to be spent on?

**Judith Robertson:** There is a range of ways to do that. One way is to make a commitment to do something and to monitor the process, which means building into funding the monitoring of the expenditure. If the Government knows that that will happen, there is less chance that money will erode—I presume that you are talking about corruption.

Oxfam funds civil society organisations to do that monitoring, so Malawian civil society organisations do budget checks. They post on schools and in villages how much money the teachers and schools should be receiving to provide education and they monitor the processes.

Malawi has systemic corruption, but it also has a systemic willingness to overcome that. We should take more advantage of that willingness to erode the corruption—to corrupt the corruption, as it were—so that we move things on. There are proactive ways in which that can be done, so the situation is not unmanageable.

**Eoghan Mackie:** Although Challenges Worldwide is very grateful for the Scottish Government's contribution to our programme in Sri Lanka, I whole-heartedly disagree with what Judith Robertson said. I do not think that the Scottish Government's role should be to give away money. The amount of money involved is small, so I think that it can be put to far better use.

In trying to answer John Park's initial question about what we can do to help people to become involved in international development, I want to pick up on a comment that John Struthers made about the fresh talent initiative. I do not see a massive distance between the international development policy and the international strategy of the previous Executive. In the future, the two initiatives should be similar. Instead of distinguishing between wealthy countries and poor countries in our trade and international relations—thinking that we will just give money away to the poor countries but try to do business with the rich countries—we should aim to use the opportunities that are presented by the several thousand people who come into Scotland under the fresh talent initiative. We could position the international development fund as a way of creating a much longer-term position for Scotland in international change generally if we could get those fresh talent people—perhaps people who had been proposed by the organisations—into Scotland's workplaces schools and universities to discuss their perspectives. When they then return to their own countries, they will have the potential to create longer-term economic growth. That would be a more sustainable way of spending this small amount of money than spending £20,000 or £30,000 here or there on feeding a few school kids.

**Professor Struthers:** I want to say a bit more about the business community's role, which I think is missing from the briefing papers. We have talked about the good will and continuing good efforts of ordinary citizens and school kids, but I think that we are missing the opportunity that exists for the business community to work with people from Africa—if I can widen the debate for a second. Those opportunities might exist if the Scottish Chambers of Commerce and the Confederation of British Industry could work with the thousands of students who come to this country.

For example, one of my students from Gambia wrote a dissertation on how to set up a stock exchange in that country. That was a massive undertaking. He did not achieve it because it was decided that it would not be feasible because of the existing stock exchanges in neighbouring west African countries. I could list examples of students who have come here to further their education but who also have ideas about setting up businesses in their own country.

I would challenge Judith Robertson—I hate to be the second person to do so, but this is a minor challenge—on the economic effects of migration. There is a lot of evidence to suggest that migration benefits the sending countries as much as the host countries. Many countries in Africa would be in a far worse state if they did not receive the remittances that are sent by relatives. On a business tack, many of those people are able to set up businesses in their own country—or can allow their relatives to do so—through those remittances. However, the issue is underresearched. We could encourage—almost effortlessly and cheaply—businesses to harness the efforts of the large numbers of students who come to Scotland from those countries.

10:45

**Paul Chitnis:** Anyone who has worked in development knows that it is bedevilled with people who want to do good and helpful things but end up doing the wrong thing. Development's history is littered with examples of that—some big and some small, at the level of an organisation such as SCIAF. Within development practice, there is a principle called “do no harm”. It is better to do nothing than to do something that causes people harm.

I do not accept that a budget of £4.5 million, moving up to £9 million in four years—or perhaps sooner—is so small that it cannot have an impact on poverty. SCIAF's budget is of a similar size to the Executive's and, for 40 years, we have been having an impact on eradicating poverty. The work is often small scale, slow and patient, but it has an impact. Therefore, it is not true to say that small

amounts of money cannot have an impact any more than it is true to say that massive amounts of money necessarily have an impact.

It has been asked what we would do differently. We may have phrased it negatively, but some things need to be changed. I have three suggestions. First, we should start the policy with what poor communities need. The focus should be less on

“facilitating transfer of Scottish knowledge, skills and expertise”,

as it says in the international development policy, and more on a really good assessment of what people in developing countries need.

Secondly, the original international development strategy said that it would support the work of indigenous Scottish NGOs. To be frank, NGOs do not come more Scottish than SCIAF, but two of our applications last year were turned down. The reply to one of the applications said that

“The aim of the programme is important and the services that would be provided would add value”

but that

“it is not clear how Scotland's expertise will make an added difference to the delivery—apart from funding”.

Well, I guess that that is the difference that it makes—it provides funding. Without funding, that project, which was working with some of the most vulnerable people in one of the most dangerous parts of Africa—northern Uganda—would not get whatever was needed. Support the work of indigenous NGOs.

The third suggestion is that we should regard the work that is being done in Malawi as a pilot project. It is a pity that a statement was made a few weeks ago in which a minimum of £3 million from the budget was earmarked for one country. The minister was open about the fact that she felt under pressure to make that statement. It is odd for a strategy to be proposed and funding to be earmarked before the Parliament and the Government have conducted the evaluation that they propose and before learning has been captured and lessons have been learned. That seems to me to be the wrong way round. In SCIAF—and, I am sure, in all the organisations that are represented here—we would start with the review, capture the learning and learn the lessons, adapt and amend the strategy and then earmark the funding based on that.

Those are three things that could be done differently.

**Leo Williams:** John Struthers mentioned sustainable economic development. That is one of the four strands of the co-operation agreement between Scotland and Malawi. It has not been

focused on so far, but the Scotland Malawi Partnership encourages the committee to consider it within the review. There are a number of potential projects that the Scottish Executive could fund, such as the Scotland-Malawi business group, which is just getting off the ground. The Scottish Institute for Enterprise also has various proposals, not only for Malawi, but to harness African talent that is already in Scotland. Projects such as those could make a difference.

**Jenny Schwarz:** I agree with Paul Chitnis and Judith Robertson that the amount of money in the international development budget can make a difference to the eradication of poverty. However, as they said, the key is that the strategy is clear and that whoever then assesses the bids that come in or the proposals that are made is knowledgeable and informed about what can make a difference and therefore takes into account all the impacts of the funding that is allocated and takes the right decision. Paul Chitnis gave us an example of a good project that was turned down for the wrong reason. That has happened repeatedly over past funding rounds. Conversely, projects about which the development community was sceptical have been awarded money. The assessment process must be seen to be informed and transparent.

**Mervyn Lee:** I have listened with great interest. The conversation keeps returning to Malawi. I would like to broaden it out a bit, as we are talking about money that is not earmarked for Malawi and which may be available elsewhere. There is not much money, so it is a matter of prioritisation and focusing on what the money can be used for and what use will bring the greatest benefit.

We have talked a lot about various forms of education—both education in Scotland and the different ways of sustaining or building the capacity of education in countries overseas. At the end of the day, if you were to ask a 16-year-old youth in Tajikistan, Nepal, Malawi or any of those countries what he or she—I am afraid that it is usually “he” in those countries—wants to do, they will say that they want a job. The issue touches on economic opportunities and sustainable economic development—an area that is often overlooked even by the DFID, which places emphasis on education at the lower levels. I think that the DFID missed a trick when the World Bank’s report on youth came out a few months ago. That was an opportunity to say that the greatest problem that the world population will face in the future is youth unemployment. Worldwide, hundreds of millions of youths will never get the chance of a job. At a recent conference, an African minister asked, “Why is it that other countries have jobs but we have livelihoods?”

**The Convener:** Alasdair, do you want to ask a question?

**Alasdair Morgan (South of Scotland) (SNP):**

Unfortunately, each time somebody speaks the question changes. I was interested in what was being said about students coming to this country and I was going to ask how much leakage there is—how many of them do not go back. Someone then commented that perhaps that was not a bad thing and that the remittances would cure it all anyway. The problem with following that line of logic is that we would just leave it to the market to cure it all, and I am not sure that I am happy about that. Using that logic, one could justify the Highland clearances on the ground that people sent money back from the United States.

Leo Williams said—I paraphrase—that the purpose of the Executive’s programme is not clear. Can anyone tell me what the purpose of the Executive’s programme should be? I suspect that I am going to get 10 different answers, judging by what I have heard so far.

**The Convener:** That seems a pretty good general question.

**Judith Robertson:** The Executive’s programme should be the one area of Government policy that is not about Scotland. It should be about the country that we are seeking to assist. We embarked on the programme because of the make poverty history campaign and a movement—not just in Scotland and the UK but globally—to say that enough is enough and to try to commit the G8 leaders to deliver on their promises. The process of having an international development policy was an appropriate contribution by Scotland to that process.

The programme should be about poverty reduction and growing awareness in Scotland of the causes of global poverty. It should also be about growing an understanding of how Scotland both contributes to global poverty and can contribute to the solutions to it. However, the principal focus should be on poverty reduction.

**The Convener:** It would be useful for as many of our witnesses as possible to answer Alasdair Morgan’s question. You may have covered what you want to say, but it is a key question for us.

**Eoghan Mackie:** As a small country, Scotland has a unique opportunity. We can invest a decent sum of money in setting ourselves up as an example of a country that can change its own population’s attitudes to and understanding of international affairs and the affairs of wealthy and less wealthy economies. Picking up on Mervyn Lee’s point, I think that with attitude change people can start to question the distinction between livelihoods and jobs and whether they are not all the same thing. They might ask, for example, “Why does my Gap T-shirt cost £10? Should I stop buying from there?” I should point out that I am not

criticising Gap—although it got into a bit of trouble earlier this year—but a conscious decision to stop buying T-shirts there could have, in the long term, a knock-on effect on how the world works.

The committee should certainly consider Scotland's position in the global big picture and find out how we can promote a constructive approach to societies of the future instead of throwing money willy-nilly at small-scale projects. Perhaps my earlier comments on that point were somewhat harsh. I did not mean that backing projects here and there will not have any impact whatever; I am simply saying that we could do an awful lot more.

**George Rawlinson:** I was about to make the same point.

The Scottish population is very willing to support overseas development and, along with the members of the diaspora, has raised a sum of money that is massive compared with the money available from grants. However, there are two measures that we could take that would cost only a small amount of money yet have great benefits. First, we need to extend development education into the general population and ensure that it addresses all issues. Children might well learn all about overseas development issues at school, but what happens when they leave and enter the workplace?

Secondly, we should ensure that the NGOs in Scotland operate best practice. After all, the number of NGOs has increased, and not all of them are working to the best of their ability or within the best framework. Given that resources are limited and that we are using public funds and individual donations, we must ensure that the money is used in the best possible way and that all NGOs adopt best practice.

**Paul Chitnis:** The fresh talent initiative raises some interesting issues that the committee might have a role in examining. As John Struthers said, there is a lack of evidence about that area, and it would be interesting to find out whether Scotland is giving with one hand while taking back with the other.

I agree with Judith Robertson about ending poverty and growing awareness in Scotland of the underlying causes of poverty, and I feel that the strategy should facilitate non-financial methods of contributing to a more just world. Of course, one of the most important elements in that regard is fair trade. However, the issue is not just how individual consumers practise fair trade—which is what Eoghan Mackie referred to—but how the Scottish Government, with its £8 billion budget, can procure according to fair trade principles. I have been told that the Government has been prevented from procuring in that way because of

European obstacles. As that issue obviously falls within the committee's remit, it might well be able to examine it.

11:00

**Jenny Schwarz:** I agree that the strategy's key aim should be poverty reduction. However, returning to the question of how we grow awareness in the population, I think that the key issue is how any strategy is managed and communicated. A huge headline that said that development is about our skills going over there could wipe away years of development education that has been plugged away at in schools and would send out the wrong message. Scottish Executive policy should use best practice in development, and it should be communicated in a way that reflects and focuses on poverty reduction.

**Professor Struthers:** I will specifically address Alasdair Morgan's question about the direction of the inquiry. We can argue all day about whether the money is a large amount or a small amount. The issue is whether to spread it thinly over different countries and activities or to do another Malawi, as it were, in another country. I think that there is some mileage in targeting an individual country. That is where multiplier effects can be achieved and where learning by doing can be practised—everybody has been referring to that—whether on the business side, which is my hobby-horse, or on the education side.

I am a great believer that, if something is successful, it should be spread around. There is a lot of success around. We tend to focus too much on the negativities of developing countries. The rate of economic growth in Africa last year was 5.4 per cent across the whole continent, according to the International Monetary Fund. South Africa contributes disproportionately to that figure, although there are other growth points in Africa. There is a growing middle class in a number of African economies, for example in Nigeria, where I used to work and live. That has to be tapped into somehow, although I do not know how. I think that it was Paul Chitnis who said earlier that we must spread good practice.

The spending of taxpayers' money must be justified but, if we or you can point to successes, that will win the public over. You might get accused of picking winners, but I do not see any way to avoid that. A well-known economist, Jeffrey Sachs, who was advising the World Bank a couple of years ago, came out and said—rather provocatively, I think—that if he had control over the World Bank's overall budget, he would focus on three or four countries in Africa and forget the rest. I am not saying that that is the right approach, but we must sometimes bite the bullet

and make difficult decisions, focusing the use of limited resources.

**Mervyn Lee:** The phrases “ending poverty” and “poverty reduction” have been used several times. People might well think, “That sounds good, but I wonder how we can do that.” In its inquiry, the committee needs to think carefully and strategically about its approach to the question of ending or reducing poverty and how far down that road it is possible to go. There are as many approaches as there are ways to skin a cat.

The committee needs to decide whether to go down a more conventional, traditional route, such as we have been discussing, with traditional forms of giving development help, education and so forth; or whether it should use more innovative, brighter entrepreneurial ideas, touching on the things that John Struthers and Eoghan Mackie have talked about. If you get it right using that approach, you can make your money go much further. Poverty will be reduced in developing countries only through the Government and politics of that country. The economic situation also has a great part to play. If the economic situation is improved, that is a start down the road to poverty reduction. That is achieved through people, through training and development and through bringing corporations and businesses onside.

We in Mercy Corps strongly believe that we can effect change only if civil society, the Government and the private sector work effectively together. There is a lot that can be done in that regard. We have a great knowledge and history of this area in Scotland. Alasdair Morgan mentioned the Highland clearances. We know exactly what it means to have to migrate from one place to another to find a job, and we know exactly what it means to have to invent things, to motivate people and to uplift their sights. We could be doing much more on that side.

We must consider carefully where we put our resources. I happened to be in Burma two weeks ago, just as the monks were beginning to protest. I was with Mark Canning, the British ambassador, in his office when they protested outside the embassy. He said that Burma is the country with probably the greatest needs in the world, yet it is completely unknown to most people and is getting the least amount of international help and support. We need to consider carefully which countries we support. We should consider not just a country's needs, but who else is giving it support. We must also be innovative and, I hope, imaginative in the method that we use.

**Leo Williams:** I agree with Mervyn Lee. Although one of the aims should be poverty reduction, we think that further aims should be to foster links between Scotland and other countries,

in line with best development practice, and to act as a pump primer. The Scottish Government's money can go so far, but if we foster links between the relevant organisations and the relevant people, the money can go a lot further. We have seen that happen in Malawi, through the involvement of Tom Hunter, Tom Farmer, the Prince's Trust and the CBI. Such involvement can be a spin-off.

**Alex Neil:** We have been round the houses a few times this morning. On the Government's strategy for international development and the committee's inquiry, let us go back to something that Paul Chitnis mentioned earlier. A good starting point would be for the committee to write to the minister, asking whether an evaluation has been undertaken of our involvement in Malawi to date as part of the Executive's international development programme. If an evaluation has been carried out, we should ask whether we can see it. If it has not, can we suggest that the Government do that? Such an evaluation should inform us about where we go from here.

I also suggest that we ask the minister to give us a summary of, or easy-reference guide to, best practice in international development. I am not asking her to reinvent the wheel, because the World Bank, the United Nations development programme and, I am sure, the organisations around the table have that information. Some people have mentioned some underlying principles—I think that it was John Struthers who said that “do no harm” is an underlying principle. I am sure that there is loads of material on best practice. A good starting point for us all would be to get a handle on what good practice is from organisations that have years of experience—organisations such as SCIAF, in Scotland, but also the UNDP, the World Bank and others. If we wrote to the Executive on those points, that would be a good starting point for its strategic review and for our inquiry.

On the money, we must get the situation in perspective. Ted Brocklebank got it right when he said that we should realise that we are talking about £4.5 million a year, rising to £9 million over four years. In the great scheme of things, compared with the DFID's budget in Malawi, that is not a huge amount of money. However, considering that the total gross domestic product of Malawi is about the size of the budget of Scottish Enterprise—and probably as efficiently distributed—that £4.5 million to £9 million takes on a significance. It may not be significant to us, but it is significant to Malawi.

The focus of our inquiry and the Government's strategy should not be just how we spend the £4.5 million or £9 million; it should be how we use that money to leverage additional resources into the country and how we use our involvement to mobilise the private sector, in particular.

I have been an economic development consultant, working mainly in eastern Europe and the middle east. When I was in Malawi, I was struck by the fact that loads of fruit was lying on the ground around the villages. Nobody harvested it—nobody picked it up, canned it and exported it. There are huge economic development opportunities in Malawi in that area. There are also huge economic development opportunities in tourism. Those opportunities do not necessarily require a lot of taxpayers' money; rather, we could make an impact by mobilising people with the help of the Tom Hunters of this world. The expertise of the likes of the Prince's Scottish Youth Business Trust could be involved in helping young people to set up in business, which would not cost a lot of money. We must consider how we can use the £9 million to leverage in substantial additional resources and mobilise private or voluntary capital that is not currently being mobilised.

With respect to poverty reduction, two or three strategic decisions have to be made about that £4.5 million to £9 million. Judith Robertson said that the aim of reducing poverty was motivated by the make poverty history campaign, which is fair. The debate is about whether we should go in for short-term amelioration measures or for capacity building so that people can reduce their own poverty. Mervyn Lee alluded to that. Poverty can be permanently reduced by creating jobs and wealth. We must decide where we can get the biggest bang for our buck with the £4.5 million to £9 million and what we can leverage out of that money.

The other big strategic issue is whether we should continue to focus on one country—Malawi—or broaden our horizons to other areas. John Struthers alluded to that. If we want to broaden our horizons, on what basis should that be done? My instincts are like those of John Struthers. Given the money that we are talking about, we should stick to Malawi and try to make a real impact there. That is a major issue for debate and it must be addressed.

Finally, we must be clear about what we are trying to achieve. The Scottish Government must produce a mission statement on the purpose of its international development policy. The committee could have input into that.

**The Convener:** Many strategic issues have been raised. People do not have to comment on all of them, although they may do so if they want to.

**Paul Chitnis:** A review of the Scottish Executive's Malawi project would be a good thing. Who would conduct that review—I am sure that it would be conducted outside Government—is important. There are plenty of development practitioners available.

The Titanic could probably have been sunk with the tomes on good practice that have been written. I am sure that we would all be happy to share our good practice with the committee—

**Alex Neil:** Make it a two-page summary.

**Paul Chitnis:** I suggest that NIDOS co-ordinate things, otherwise you would drown under the weight of the good practice that is available.

**The Convener:** How much consensus on good practice exists among the leading players in the field?

11:15

**Paul Chitnis:** A lot more than you think and probably less than I imagine.

Capacity building is a key issue. Mervyn Lee properly made the point that the solution to poverty will come from within the country that is affected by it. However, we should not ignore the fact that there are huge extraneous pressures on countries and reasons for their not developing. Perhaps one reason why people did not pick up fruit from the ground in Malawi, can it and ship it off was that the terms of trade that rich countries have set on Malawi meant that they did not want that fruit. We must have bananas of a particular shape, colour or whatever. Bigger issues must be considered.

That leads me to the final point that I want to make. Being strategic is important. One thing that the DFID has learnt in recent years is that an important way of leveraging change is through the strategic funding of organisations.

In the past, the DFID's approach would have been to give project funding—that is the largely the approach of the Scottish Government. Now, the DFID has moved towards much more strategic funding of organisations, with unearmarked funds that are about leveraging high-level outcomes over a longer period of time. The Scottish Government could develop a more strategic relationship with organisations using an approach that focuses on outcomes, not projects. Such an approach would involve looking at the whole picture, which might include the terms of trade and some of the other issues that we have been discussing. It is important to recognise that the capacity of the Government to manage this work is limited, because only a small number of officials are involved. It is important to have not just the numbers but the knowledge and the know-how. Perhaps a more strategic approach would lend itself to that.

**Leo Williams:** The Scotland Malawi Partnership would certainly welcome a letter to the Scottish Government asking for an evaluation of the Malawi project and the international development



strategy as a whole. We have raised the matter with the Executive in the past. The joint commission reviews the action plans every six months, but the results of those reviews are never made public. As far as anyone is aware, there has never been much of an evaluation of the Malawi project. I know that, under the terms of the bids that organisations have to make to the Scottish Government, they are supposed to be obliged to make six-monthly and yearly reports, but I would be surprised if anyone here has been asked to submit such reports—we certainly never have.

**Judith Robertson:** I have.

**Leo Williams:** Okay, but we know that a lot of projects are just not asked to provide such reports. We suggest that the Scottish Government should enforce that requirement robustly so that it makes proper evaluations.

**The Convener:** Does anyone else want to respond to the points that Alex Neil made?

**Jenny Schwarz:** Alex Neil made a distinction between the short-term amelioration of poverty and capacity building and said that we would have to focus on one or the other. I do not think that that is necessarily the case.

**Alex Neil:** I am sorry, I did not mean to suggest that. I think that you have to ride both horses at once.

**Jenny Schwarz:** Yes. I think that my colleagues would agree that, in projects, it is best practice to ensure that there is always an element of capacity building at lots of different levels.

**Judith Robertson:** In the past two or three years, while the policy has been running, I have seen a lack of expertise in Government in Scotland in relation to development. That has manifested itself in various ways.

Paul Chitnis made a point earlier about making it a condition of funding that Scottish expertise is applied in projects. We have been campaigning for years against what we call tied aid, whereby Governments give money on condition that it is spent on British industry. British Government aid used to be tied to expenditure on British industry, which made us question who it was designed to help and whether it should have been part of the then Department of Trade and Industry's budget, rather than the development budget.

Another aspect is the timescales for decision making. If the decision is not made within six months, the development process in the country in which one is trying to work has moved on, things have changed and the money has to go elsewhere.

The final aspect is the question of what is considered to be reasonable, effective

development practice. I can see good in each funding process, but there are opportunity costs in funding one thing rather than another thing that might be more effective. When one has a small amount of money to spend, the choices become stark. I make this appeal, which could form part of the letter to the minister: whatever outcome the Government goes for, it must ensure that it is focused. The Government needs to build expertise in this area. We cannot cover economic development, health, education and governance issues at the same time, as we do not have enough money to do that. There are too many areas in which to build understanding and expertise, regardless of whether we are working in one country, six countries or 10 countries. I appeal for expenditure to be focused.

You will have noticed that there is a range of opinion around the room. You are seeing the fault lines in the development debate that have existed for more than 60 years, or for however long development has been discussed. If Jeffrey Sachs and his peers had been in the room, the conversation would have been similar. The same line of argument is to be found in the report of the commission for Africa. Should the priority be economic development, health or education? You can enter that circle almost anywhere, as long as your intended outcome is improving the lives of poor people and the focus is on eradicating poverty rather than on creating wealth.

No one would expect me to argue that countries should not develop economically, but if economic development is not focused on poverty reduction, you develop the lives of the people in those countries who are already rich. It is incredibly hard to target poor people who are not educated, because they do not participate in standard economic development processes, as we perceive them. However, there are cases of that working. Bangladesh, where women have gone to work in the export processing zones, is a good example, although many people have questions about the conditions of their labour. There is an interesting debate to be had about economic development versus more essential service provision; it is valid for the committee to consider that. However, after you have done so, my plea is for you to make a decision. Do not try to do everything, because we do not have the resources and would not do it well.

We are planning for the future. In 20 years' time we may have a massive budget for international development. However, if we are to sustain the policy, which may or may not grow in the long term, we must implement it well, so that internationally we have a reputation for doing development well, rather than badly and in a way that does not help people.

**The Convener:** The subject priorities and geographical principles of international development are big, general issues. Alex Neil suggested that Malawi should remain the principal focus of the policy.

**Professor Struthers:** I will not comment specifically on whether the policy should be restricted to Malawi, but I want to return to the issue of capacity building. Alex Neil was right to say that economically countries are often held back by the existence of bottlenecks—a lack of warehouses in which to store crops or no decent feeder road system. With the budget that is available, we will not improve the infrastructure of many countries overnight. However, there is a lot of academic research into good practice. The Development Studies Association, of which I am a member, is an academic group that operates across the United Kingdom. Paul Chitnis has been involved in conferences that we have held. In 2003 we held a big conference in Glasgow that involved all the Scottish universities. The association is a long-established research body that is based mainly in universities but also in the DFID and other organisations. There is already a lot of evidence of good practice, so the committee does not need to reinvent the wheel.

I will qualify my comments to an extent. The committee's focus is on Scotland, whereas the evidence to which I refer is UK wide and worldwide. Judith Robertson referred to the efficacy of projects in places such as Bangladesh, where microfinance schemes have been successful. Those schemes are spreading to other areas, including countries in west Africa, which is my main area of expertise.

My final point relates to civic governance, which is one of the four areas that are specified in the co-operation agreement with Malawi. We have not said enough about that today, but there is a lot of mileage in the area. From my experience in Africa, I know that what holds a developing country back is often an inefficient administrative system of government. There are ways of rectifying that. Education is one of them—mainly higher education, because we are talking about higher skills. We can bring civil servants over here for short courses or one-year courses so that they can learn how a civil service department runs. It can be as simple as that. It can make a great difference to a developing country if the civil servants and administrators are efficient.

The issue is not simply about eliminating corruption, although we could talk all day about corruption in developing countries. Some economists say that the corruption in some developing countries is what lubricates the economy, and that if it was not for minimal levels of corruption, the plight of some people would be

much worse. I am not advocating corruption as a solution, but I just wanted to make the point.

It might be useful to spend some time today talking about the civic governance aspect of international development initiatives. We have not really touched on that yet.

**Paul Chitnis:** I want to say a word in praise and support of the officials who have worked on the policy over the past two or three years. Our criticisms are absolutely not criticisms of them individually; I have been enormously impressed by their commitment and conviction. For anyone involved in development, the learning curve is steep. From SCIAF's point of view, the officials have always been supportive and helpful—withstanding my criticisms when our projects have been turned down.

Earlier, somebody used the word “experts” to describe today's witnesses. I would like to exclude myself from that category. I know a little about a few things, but I do not know very much about anything. Anyone who claims to be an expert in development clearly has not been doing it for very long.

SCIAF's view is that the strategy should not focus just on Malawi. As I have said, the Malawi project can be seen as a pilot project, but that is not to say that we should have the same kind of relationship in many other countries—that would not be sustainable either. All the points made about budgets and resources are right.

There are different ways of considering the issue. We could take a regional approach. For example, we could consider southern Africa, not just Malawi. However, I say clearly and on the record that I do not think that the Executive should row back from any of its existing commitments to Malawi—it should meet those commitments, but a regional approach could involve other southern African countries. Alternatively, we could consider the great lakes or Sudan. Sudan is just one country, but it is the size of western Europe and it needs massive support from the international community. Scotland could have a disproportionately large effect on such an area.

Mervyn Lee spoke about employment. Other issues to consider could be income generation, HIV and AIDS, and food security. In Malawi, food security is a huge problem: 80 per cent of the population depend on agriculture for their existence, and 20 per cent of the population do not have enough food to eat each day. I am not aware that the Scottish Government funds projects that are connected with food security, although I may be wrong.

**Leo Williams:** On the thematic priorities, the Scotland Malawi Partnership has said over the past couple of months that we do not have any

problem with widening the fund to support areas other than Malawi—we fully support that. It has been demonstrated that the amounts of money going into Malawi over the past year or two have led to lots of good work being done. Over the coming years, that good work will continue.

We met the minister in August and we suggested that, if support is to be spread out, it would make sense to spread it out to the countries surrounding Malawi. The expertise that has been developed within the Scottish Government is most likely to be appropriate in those countries. We therefore support a focus on southern and sub-Saharan Africa.

**Jenny Schwarz:** I echo Paul Chitnis's point that food security, which is a key issue in poverty reduction, is a big gap in the thematic priorities. The danger with the priorities is that people will put together projects that tick the boxes rather than projects that meet people's needs.

11:30

**The Convener:** If there are no further comments on that issue, let us start on a new tack.

**Ted Brocklebank:** To pick up on a point that Paul Chitnis made, it might be useful to have people's views on whether the Scottish moneys should be more strategic or more project based. When some committee members visited Brussels the other week, the European Union people who deal with overseas development gave us a paper that explained how the EU's emphasis is moving away from funding individual projects towards providing strategic funding in various countries.

My thought—I am interested in other views—is that, with the kind of money that we can put into countries such as Malawi, we are better spending it on projects rather than handing people a bundle of money and saying, "You get on with it." It seems to me that we get a bigger bang for our buck by getting involved in a series of projects rather than simply handing over the money. I am interested to hear people's views about how they think the money could best be spent.

**Mervyn Lee:** I will comment while colleagues think of something to say.

The approach of giving strategically is being taken not just by the European Commission but by DFID and many major donors. There are good reasons for taking that approach. Part of DFID's thinking is that, when a Government ticks certain boxes and is deemed to be demonstrating good practice, that is the right time to hand over money for it to administer and handle. We can all understand that policy.

With strategic giving becoming an increasing trend, many agencies such as those around the

table today will receive less from the overall general pot. Also, the policy works in only some countries, because corruption—various aspects of which we touched on earlier—is an underlying factor in most of the countries, regardless of whether the Government ticks several boxes.

From our point of view, it is unfortunate that many agencies that now have the experience to scale up their programmes and activities—including some agencies that are represented here—may be unable to do so. For example, we would like to address a country's youth problems by engaging, as I said earlier, with that country's Government and businesses. Doing that on a national scale might require £50 million or £100 million of funding, but we believe that we could implement such a programme effectively. Along with Oxfam and others, we are now able to do bigger things, but we have reached that stage at a time when institutional donors are making less money available to us.

**George Rawlinson:** I will speak up on behalf of the small organisations. There is a difference between the activities of large organisations and those of small organisations—such as the one with which I am involved—which basically are set up by members of the diaspora who want to do something in the countries from which they came. We are involved in community-based projects. If we were to move towards strategic funding, small organisations would be excluded.

Although there are benefits in having big organisations, the benefit of small organisations is that they engage people on a personal level both here and in the communities in other countries. The small organisations provide people with a connection that is not available to people who just have a standing order with Oxfam. The relationship is different, but it is equally valid. I speak up in favour of projects for smaller organisations.

**Judith Robertson:** When I spoke about taking a strategic approach, I was talking not simply about giving money to Government or even to large organisations, but about a shared purpose. This sounds almost callous, but let us pick a theme for the strategy—say it is HIV. If we were to work with communities experiencing the effects of HIV and AIDS, we could support the Government approach, local government support, large-scale NGO support and small organisation support for the strategy. The Government would learn a huge amount about different levels of activity, because each of those contributors has a different role to play in the process.

When we met the minister Linda Fabiani after she announced the doubling of the international development fund, one of the things that we told her was that the approach builds capacity in the

Scottish Government to comment on such issues on the global stage. We will never eradicate poverty with £3 million, £9 million, £55 million or whatever DFID's expenditure is. If DFID increased its expenditure to 0.7 per cent of GDP, we would contribute significantly to eradicating poverty, but we will not do that with the kind of money we are talking about. We can, however, build expertise to be able to lobby and support global institutions to take decisions that are more beneficial to developing countries.

Paul Chitnis mentioned trade rules. One of the reasons that countries do not invest in Malawi is that there is so little opportunity for economic come-back that it is not profitable. Ask Ann Gloag, who made a serious effort to work well in that country and who now tries to support the process to develop it. Currently, global trade rules are a real barrier.

I would like the Scottish Government to be in a position to advocate on some of those issues, based on experience on the ground. A strategic approach can mean many things. It is not just about giving money to Government; it is about supporting activity and then having a global impact that makes a much bigger difference, based on understanding and experience.

**Paul Chitnis:** We need both project and strategic funding. I agree absolutely with George Rawlinson about small organisations. It is important to have project funding. In a sense, the Scottish Government already has a strategic agreement with Malawi, although it could be more strategic.

To repeat what I said earlier, I do not suggest that there should be a similar strategic agreement with other countries; we could have a strategic agreement with organisations in Scotland that deliver aid with higher-level outcomes. That would be to the Government's advantage, because within its resource constraints it would be easier to manage such an agreement than 58 individual projects. We heard about the constraints under which officials have to work. We need both types of funding. It is worth thinking about developing a more strategic approach.

**Professor Struthers:** You face a real dilemma. I can see the situation from both angles. The problem with specific projects is the transference of the benefits to other projects in the economy, although that often happens anyway. We have to think about the point that people in developing countries often look enviously—if I can put it as honestly as that—at other people who benefit from a benevolent Government in Scotland when they do not. We have to remember the political context in which the process operates.

That said, if we are looking for a bang for our buck, our approach should be mainly project

based. The two forms of funding are not necessarily mutually exclusive. As long as the projects that are approved are open to proper scrutiny, can be justified and are transparent, and that is communicated to the countries concerned—which is important—as well as to members of the Parliament, much of the evidence suggests that a project-based approach is the most beneficial.

In a sense, it is a false dichotomy to talk about strategic funding as opposed to project funding, because project funding is strategic as well. If by a strategic approach Ted Brocklebank meant showering countries with money, that is not the way forward—I think that everyone round the table agrees on that.

**Ted Brocklebank:** Yet that appears to be the model that the EC is following.

**Professor Struthers:** That surprises me, I must say.

**Eoghan Mackie:** I find myself agreeing more with Judith Robertson, who said what I was trying to say earlier, but succeeded in putting it a bit better than I did. I am interested in a more strategic approach. As John Struthers says, projects have their place, but we should be extremely careful about what they are. They should all contribute to a wider, quite focused purpose. Judith Robertson cited the example of HIV. There must be hundreds of topics or themes that Scotland could focus on.

The benefits for Scotland at the international lobbying level of development done well could be strong. The population would gain a better understanding of international development work and of how they could engage more with it. Focusing strategically on what we are trying to change or be involved in would mean that readily available, coherent knowledge on a topic could be made accessible to the population. If the population in this country changed their behaviour as a result, we could take that to the world stage as an example of best practice for larger countries that take longer to change.

**The Convener:** Judith Robertson mentioned a meeting with the minister in August. To what extent have you had dialogue with the Government on how resources should be channelled? Was that a one-off meeting or have you had continuing dialogue with the Government or with officials?

**Judith Robertson:** From my perspective, that meeting was a one-off. I think that other panellists share that view. There is no obvious process for consistently engaging in shared dialogue. There are two bodies: one is an advisory group on Malawi, the membership of which seems to shift, and the other is called an expert panel which, as

far as I understand, does not meet any more. Moreover, I think that no one from the NGOs was part of it. It is fair to say that there is no formal and consistent dialogue.

**Leo Williams:** The Scotland Malawi Partnership has regular meetings, but with the team rather than with ministers. We very much agree with Judith Robertson's comments about the steering group: it meets sporadically; there are membership changes left, right and centre; and no one knows what the point of it is. That could be a subject of inquiry.

**Eoghan Mackie:** NIDOS can channel feedback.

**Judith Robertson:** That is what I was referring to—a more systematic shared process with NIDOS.

**The Convener:** As my colleagues have no further questions, do any members of the panel want to make a final comment? Do you want to tell us about any issues that you have not had the opportunity to mention?

**Professor Struthers:** I have a very quick comment. As someone who has worked in this field for 30 years, I think that we should be less pessimistic about how far we have come. I remember lecturing students on the pros and cons of aid versus trade, and on whether tied aid was a good thing or a bad thing or something that could be justified. The issue of aid and development has come a long way in terms of the honesty and frankness with which we can now discuss it.

Twenty or 30 years ago, talking about project-based aid would have been anathema to many developing countries, because it would have been viewed as a sort of extension of imperialism. That is no longer the case, which is good, as is the fact that we are having this debate today and that many other people are discussing development. It is good for the countries concerned and it is good for ensuring that the debate is public and open. In some ways, it is a luxury to be deciding whether a project-based approach or a strategic approach should be taken, because 20 or 30 years ago the money was just given—and often wasted. That is what has given many developing countries a bad reputation, which has made it hard for people who work in this field to persuade others that they should get involved.

11:45

**Mervyn Lee:** Scotland has an opportunity not only to give a limited amount of money but to take an holistic approach. As has been touched on slightly in the discussion, we could give in kind as well. For example, East Timor—not that we would want to go there; I am using it as an example—is a young, fledgling country whose Government is still

learning how to govern, starting from square 1. The Australian Government is very much involved in East Timor and is embedded in East Timor's departments, training people how to create and implement national budgets. It is step-by-step work. There are countries in the world that could benefit from Scottish assistance in that way. The committee might consider taking a rounded approach to that issue.

**George Rawlinson:** I have a small comment on what John Struthers said. There are still elements of imperialism in some areas of work. You would need to be careful about the projects that are supported, what the motives are and whether they use good practice. Imperialism is not dead yet.

**The Convener:** I thank our witnesses. I have found the meeting useful, as I am sure have my colleagues. We will carry this work forward at our next meeting, and we look forward to having a continuing dialogue with you over the next few months.

I suspend the meeting to allow the witnesses to leave.

11:48

*Meeting suspended.*

11:57

*On resuming—*

## **Scottish Government's European Union Priorities**

**The Convener:** The final item on our agenda concerns the Scottish Government's European Union priorities. Members will recall that, at our meeting on 18 September, we took evidence from the Minister for Europe, External Affairs and Culture on the Government's current EU priorities. At the same time, the minister presented the Government's key political objectives. The paper from the clerk, which members have before them, considers the issues arising from that evidence session and proposes action to take the work forward. Do members have any comments on the paper?

**Irene Oldfather:** It is fair and representative of the discussion that we had. I am happy to agree to the action that it proposes.

**The Convener:** Are members happy to agree to the paper's recommendations?

**Members indicated agreement.**

**The Convener:** Do we also agree to flag up the EU budget review to the Finance Committee as something that it may wish to consider?

**Members indicated agreement.**

**Irene Oldfather:** I am interested in the EU budget review. We did not discuss it much with the minister, but it is important. Are we talking about the whole EU budget or structural funds?

**Alex Neil:** The whole budget, I think. Most of the funds that come here will be non-structural funds to do with research and development and stuff like that.

**The Convener:** Do you want to comment on that, Jim?

**Dr Jim Johnston (Clerk):** The European Commission has just published a communication and a public consultation paper on the 2008-09 budget review. That consultation will be open until the middle of April, so the committee may want to consider it. We will circulate the Commission's communication to committee members.

**Irene Oldfather:** Good.

**The Convener:** Okay. That is everything. Thanks very much.

*Meeting closed at 11:59.*

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