

# **EUROPEAN AND EXTERNAL RELATIONS COMMITTEE**

Tuesday 4 March 2008

Session 3

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## EUROPEAN AND EXTERNAL RELATIONS COMMITTEE

### 5<sup>th</sup> Meeting 2008, 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 (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)

\*attended

#### THE FOLLOWING GAVE EVIDENCE:

Colin Cameron (Honorary Consul for Malawi)

Karen Gillon (Clydesdale) (Lab)

Patricia Ferguson (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)

Magnus MacFarlane-Barrow (Scottish International Relief)

Mhairi Owens (Concern Worldwide Scotland)

Ken Ross (Scotland Malawi Partnership)

Deborah Smith (Scottish Government Europe, External Affairs and Culture Directorate)

Lucy Watkins (British Embassy Beijing, Scottish Affairs Office)

#### CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Dr Jim Johnston

#### ASSISTANT CLERKS

Emma Berry

Lucy Scharbert

#### LOCATION

Committee Room 1



## Scottish Parliament

### European and External Relations Committee

*Tuesday 4 March 2008*

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

### Scottish Government International Strategy

**The Convener (Malcolm Chisholm):** We have a very full agenda, so we had better start on time. Good morning, everyone, and welcome to the fifth meeting in 2008 of the European and External Relations Committee.

The first item on our agenda today is an evidence-taking session as part of our consideration of the Scottish Government's international strategy. Lucy Watkins is the first secretary, Scottish affairs, and is based at the British embassy in Beijing—China, of course. She is accompanied by Deborah Smith, the deputy director of the Scottish Government's Europe, external affairs and culture directorate. We will start the session with an opening statement, after which we will move to general questions from the committee. I welcome both witnesses and ask Lucy Watkins to make an opening statement.

**Lucy Watkins (British Embassy Beijing, Scottish Affairs Office):** We would like to start with Deborah Smith giving the opening statement to set the context. I will follow on from that.

**The Convener:** Okay.

**Deborah Smith (Scottish Government Europe, External Affairs and Culture Directorate):** Thank you, convener, for the invitation to speak to the committee on the Scottish Government's activity in China and the role of the Scottish affairs office in Beijing. I returned only on Saturday from my first visit to China. The committee has the advantage of what I say being fresh in my mind, although that will be balanced by my receding jet lag.

The division that I head in the Scottish Government's international division is responsible for advising ministers on the overall shape of our international engagement, managing the office in Beijing and a number of other things. Given that Linda Fabiani and Leslie Evans have spoken to the committee quite recently on the development of our international framework, I will not repeat all that they said. Our work in China is firmly aligned to our wider international work and to the Government's purpose and strategic objectives.

Our refreshed China plan, which we are in the process of developing, is clearly about increased and sustainable economic growth for Scotland. It will look at how our work in China promotes and markets Scotland in order to influence people to choose Scotland as an excellent place in which to live, learn, work, do business and invest. It will promote Scotland as a distinctive global identity. As with our more general international aspirations, we will be realistic in our ambitions in the China plan. We will focus on areas where Government intervention can make a genuine difference and where we in Scotland have a true competitive advantage.

Under the management arrangements that we have in place for our Scottish affairs office in Beijing, Lucy Watkins reports to me. The office sits firmly within the Scottish Government's international division, which reflects that integration. I will pass over to Lucy, who can tell the committee much more about the background to her role, what has been done in China thus far and what we are doing in refreshing our China plan.

**Lucy Watkins:** First, I thank the committee for inviting me to appear before it today to discuss Scotland's engagement with China and, more specifically, my role in China.

I have worked in my role for just over two years. I am based in the British embassy in Beijing, where I head up the Scottish affairs office. My post and the work of my team should be seen in the context of Scotland's increased engagement with China. That process of engagement gathered momentum in 2004 when the then First Minister, Jack McConnell, made a decision to base a Scottish civil servant in the embassy in Beijing. I was appointed as the first secretary, Scottish affairs, and took up the post in November 2005.

Given that China is one of the priority countries of focus for Scotland's international engagement, we developed a plan for Scotland's engagement in China, after wide consultation with colleagues and stakeholders in Scotland. It is a broad plan that contains clear targets and reaches across a range of sectors, including trade and investment, tourism, education, fresh talent and public diplomacy. The plan was launched by Mr Tom McCabe, the then Minister for Finance and Public Service Reform, in September 2006.

Last year, the new First Minister asked us to review the China plan in the context of the new Government's strategic objectives and the developing international framework. We invited a cross-section of Scottish stakeholders to give us their views on opportunities for Scotland to engage with China. We sought their advice on how the Government could offer practical support to maximise opportunities.

A refreshed China plan is in draft and will be issued in April, at the same time as the international strategic framework is issued. It will provide a renewed focus to the work of my office and my colleagues in the international division, and it will demonstrate a clear link between work in China and the Government's strategic objectives. It will also give focus to the work of other colleagues in the Scottish Government who engage with China.

In essence, the role of the Scottish affairs office is to add value in a way that will improve and facilitate the engagement of Scottish stakeholders in China in areas that contribute to the Government's purpose of sustainable economic development. I will summarise our main areas of work.

First, we improve awareness of Scotland among target audiences in China, primarily through print, television and online media via our Chinese language web portal—[www.scotland.cn](http://www.scotland.cn)—and through ministerial visits.

Secondly, we identify, develop and maintain key contacts in China and broker relationships to facilitate engagement between Chinese and Scottish partners. A current example, on which I was working this morning, is the continuing support for the development of a relationship between the Chinese Government agency that is responsible for the promotion of Chinese language learning overseas and Learning and Teaching Scotland, to support the development of Chinese language learning in Scottish schools.

Thirdly, we implement Scottish Government initiatives that support Scotland's wider purpose. An example of that is our sustained promotion of the fresh talent initiative in China to potential students and fresh talent applicants. As a result of that activity, Scotland is well known in China as a place that offers an excellent education and the added benefit of the opportunity to gain work experience post-study under fresh talent.

I hope that between us Deborah Smith and I have given the committee an overview of the Scottish Government's approach to international engagement and how the Scottish affairs office fits into the wider international framework, and that we have provided a little background to our work in China, the refreshed China plan and the role of the Scottish affairs office. We welcome the opportunity to answer questions from members.

**The Convener:** Thank you for that helpful introduction. I will focus briefly on the review of the China strategy—the refresh, as you are calling it. You said that you invited Scottish stakeholders to take part in discussions. What particular role do you have in the revised strategy's development? To what extent has there been wider consultation on the issues?

**Lucy Watkins:** As I said, we brought together a strong group of senior stakeholders who represent Scottish interests across the board, and we had interesting discussions. The next step was to bring together the views of stakeholders and colleagues in departments across Government and to agree on what the Scottish Government should be doing to add value in areas that stakeholders identified as being those in which we should be working. We are pulling all that work together.

We have a draft that will be sent out electronically to a wider group of stakeholders. Initially, therefore, we brought together a small group of stakeholders; a strong draft will go out to a bigger group.

**Alex Neil (Central Scotland) (SNP):** What resources are available to you in the embassy in Beijing and in other parts of China?

**Lucy Watkins:** My immediate team is very small. Two of us—my assistant and I—are based in the embassy in Beijing. We have one full-time person working on the China desk in Scotland. That person has some administrative assistance.

**Alex Neil:** Does Scottish Development International have a presence on top of that?

**Lucy Watkins:** SDI has a presence in Beijing and Shanghai and a person working in Hong Kong. It has eight people across China, including Hong Kong.

**Alex Neil:** Is that sufficient?

**Lucy Watkins:** China is a big country and there are limitless opportunities there, but we do what we can with the resources that are available to us.

**Alex Neil:** That was a very diplomatic answer.

One of the big issues in China is the huge foreign reserves—dollar reserves in particular—that the Chinese Government is sitting on. I am talking about trillions of dollars, some of which must be spent to offset the trade surplus. Investment opportunities are being looked for worldwide. Are you considering trying to persuade some of the investors to invest in Scotland?

**Lucy Watkins:** That is probably more SDI's field than my field. However, I know that Jack Perry had meetings with senior people in Beijing when he was in China a few months ago to consider the opportunities that exist in that respect. SDI is working on that.

**Alex Neil:** Because SDI is in China, do you tend to concentrate on non-economic functions? Do you tend to concentrate on education and cultural links, for example?

**Lucy Watkins:** Yes. SDI works specifically on developing trade and investment opportunities. I work on broader areas.

**Alex Neil:** Is what happens in China similar to what happens in the United States? Does SDI report to you? Are you the overall guru or tsar, or whatever you like to call yourself, in China for the Scottish Government?

**Gil Paterson (West of Scotland) (SNP):** They do not call them tsars in China.

**Alex Neil:** Indeed. That is the wrong country.

**Lucy Watkins:** I do not call myself any such thing. The structure in China is different. I do not have line management responsibility for SDI, but we work in close partnership with each other. The head of SDI's greater China operations is Mairi MacRae, who heads up the office in Beijing. We have a strong collaborative relationship.

**Irene Oldfather (Cunninghame South) (Lab):** In setting the overall context, you mentioned refreshing the China plan and considering it in light of the new Government's strategic objectives. Is that a separate exercise from, for example, reviewing the international strategy and the targets that have been set in it, or will reviewing those targets be included in your refresh exercise?

**Lucy Watkins:** It is all part of the same process.

**Irene Oldfather:** So you are already examining progress towards the targets that have been set. I think that the timescale is that some of the targets should be achieved by 2010.

**Lucy Watkins:** That is right. We are considering the targets to ensure that they were the right targets. If, through experience, we decide that they were not quite right, we will adjust them. We are now able to monitor some of the targets as a result of data that are available to us.

**Irene Oldfather:** Should we expect a report on that in April?

**Lucy Watkins:** Do you mean on progress towards targets?

**Irene Oldfather:** Yes.

**Lucy Watkins:** We did not plan to issue a progress report at the same time as a revised China plan. However, some progress will naturally be reflected in the revised China plan. A lot of progress data are now available to us. Therefore, that would not be difficult for us to do.

**Irene Oldfather:** You mentioned that you might drop some of the targets. Are there any that you want to bring to our attention today? Why do you want to drop them?

10:15

**Lucy Watkins:** We are not planning to drop targets; I said that we might adjust them.

**Irene Oldfather:** Right.

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

You said that the targets might not be the right targets. What did you mean by that? What makes a target right or wrong? Is a wrong target one that you do not meet?

**Lucy Watkins:** No, not at all. The difference between the China plan that we put in place with the previous Administration and the new China plan that we are trying to put in place now is that we are trying to be much more specific in this plan about the particular actions that we want the Government to take in order to improve Scotland's engagement with China. When I say that we are considering adjusting the targets, I mean that we want to ensure that the targets reflect the specific actions that we want the Government to take.

**Deborah Smith:** I can give you an example of that. At the moment, there is a target in the plan that concerns increased exports from Scotland to China. However, the nature of the growth of the Chinese economy is such that, even if we did nothing, those exports would grow. In line with what we are doing in our general international framework, we need to be much more specific about what the Government should be doing, and we should have a target that reflects the impact of Government activity on the growth of exports to China.

**Alasdair Morgan:** Is that not a point that could be made about all the targets? Given the general expansion of China, one would expect there to be some movement towards almost all the targets. The question is the extent to which the targets are challenging and how they show the effect of Scottish Government intervention. The one that you picked is the one that I thought had some merit in that regard, because it measures our performance against the European average. You would expect all European countries to benefit from China's expansion, so if we were doing better than average, the case could be made that our actions were having some impact.

You say that you are adjusting the one target that is capable of showing whether we are making progress. Does that mean that you are keeping the other ones, which seem terribly vague and not necessarily capable of proving anything?

**Deborah Smith:** We have recognised the need, in conjunction with our analytical colleagues, to consider whether the targets are sufficiently challenging as opposed to simply reflecting what is generally happening as a result of the growth of the Chinese economy, and whether the targets reflect Government activity that is making a difference.

**Alasdair Morgan:** One of the targets is to increase significantly the number of research projects. Would we expect the adjusted target to

quantify what would be considered significant and also to say that our figure should be higher than that of our comparator countries in Europe?

**Lucy Watkins:** We are discussing that target at the moment. You will probably appreciate that it is difficult to gather that kind of data across the whole of Scotland, let alone across the whole of Europe. I am not sure that there is an easy way to draw the comparisons with other countries.

**Alasdair Morgan:** But if it is difficult to gather the data, why was the target set in the first place?

**Deborah Smith:** Some of that is about what experience has shown us. Our office in Beijing is very new and our initial plan is being refreshed in the light of experience.

**Alasdair Morgan:** If the meeting of whatever targets by 2010 is the basis of the evidence that will either validate or not validate the Government's spending in this area, it does not give members much confidence if the targets are scrapped halfway through the process and replaced. Will the new targets be based on progress so far? In other words, are the new targets already halfway to being fulfilled? You can appreciate that members might think that there is a danger that you might look at some figures and say, "We're doing quite well in that area, so we'll make that one of our targets."

**Deborah Smith:** I can reassure you that we have a co-ordinating role across the Government. It is not in our interest just to say that we will look at things that are already happening and decide that they are exactly what we are looking for. Our directorate's role, and that of Lucy Watkins, is to push and encourage other parts of the Government, where necessary, to set themselves challenges around their engagement with China and to support them where we can to make that engagement happen.

**Ted Brocklebank (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** I am particularly interested in outcomes. Lucy Watkins said that Scotland was becoming well known in China. Will you expand on that for us? I have been to China a couple of times, and it always seemed difficult to differentiate between Scotland and the rest of the United Kingdom, unless you used a caricature of a kilted chap with a red beard or whatever. Please explain how Scotland is developing and becoming better known in China.

**Lucy Watkins:** I mentioned fresh talent, through which Scotland has become well known as a place where people can study and gain work experience. The opportunity for work experience is important to Chinese students at the moment because the job market in China is so competitive and people need something that will give them a competitive edge.

We have been able to market Scotland's education along with the fresh talent initiative as a strong package for Chinese students to consider. That is why Scotland has become well known in that sector. Fresh talent is not offered in other parts of the UK so people can see that there is a differentiation.

**Ted Brocklebank:** So Chinese students come to study in Scotland to take advantage of our educational facilities.

**Lucy Watkins:** That is right. They see Scotland as an attractive educational proposition because it also offers students the opportunity to work here once they have graduated, in order to gain some work experience before they decide what they are going to do next.

**Ted Brocklebank:** I cannot remember whether getting a certain number of Chinese coming into the country per year was one of our targets, but if it was not, is that the kind of target we should have? Should we be looking for X thousand to come to Scotland every year?

**Lucy Watkins:** It is one of the targets.

**Ted Brocklebank:** Are we meeting it?

**Lucy Watkins:** Yes. We are exceeding it at the moment.

**Ted Brocklebank:** That is fine.

Can you remind us why the Executive decided to go into a special five-year co-operation agreement with Shandong province? Why did it pick that area when there are five other areas that we think are also particularly important?

**Lucy Watkins:** We wanted to have a specific agreement with Shandong province probably because there is no other UK Government representation there and it was an opportunity for us to forge strong relations with a province. Before the geographical focus was decided on for the previous plan, a lot of economic analysis was done, along with some assessment of existing Scottish interests across China. Shandong was then selected as one of the focus areas. I should also say that we are reviewing our geographical focus in the new plan.

**Ted Brocklebank:** Yes. Our clerk's paper says:

"When asked whether the reviewed strategy would continue entering into agreements with particular geographical areas, the Minister stated that this was under discussion".

Is there a suggestion that the Shandong co-operation deal has not worked as well as you hoped it would?

**Lucy Watkins:** No. It takes a long time for such an agreement to bear fruit, but some opportunities have developed very well under the agreement.



Collaboration between universities in Shandong and Scotland is strong at undergraduate and postgraduate levels. There is also good collaboration with Scottish schools, a number of which now have links with schools in Shandong. We are also beginning to see the development of business opportunities, particularly in the life sciences sector.

**The Convener:** Sticking with the issue of geographical focus, is the review considering the extent to which the strategy ought to have such a focus? Is that part of the refresh?

**Lucy Watkins:** Yes, we want to examine that. However, our line has never been that our geographical focus should be exclusive. We always encourage Scottish organisations, institutions and businesses to engage where there are opportunities. We put in place a geographical focus because we cannot put resource into developing relationships throughout China, as it is far too big. However, we still encourage people to go where the opportunities are.

**The Convener:** In our round-table discussion on 22 January, it was suggested—I cannot remember by whom—that there are many parallels between Scotland and western China, which is not a focus of the existing strategy. Will the review consider what developments could take place in relation to western China?

**Lucy Watkins:** If opportunities are identified for Scotland to engage more deeply in the west of China, we will examine them, the kind of relationships that we should build and the steps that we need to take to provide fertile ground for those relationships and opportunities to flourish.

**Gil Paterson:** I have a general question on language before I ask about the specific target.

I know that in China enormous efforts are being made to learn English, which is the big language on which people are focusing. One school of thought here argues that, because of that, we should not focus our resources on teaching Chinese in Scottish schools. Given your experience, is that wrong or right? Because resources are tight, should we forget about teaching Chinese and just go another route?

**Lucy Watkins:** The teaching of Chinese in Scottish schools is not necessarily about providing fluent speakers of Chinese: the subject can develop people who have an interest in China's language and culture and who have an interest in communicating in some way with that country. Learning the language can be a broadening experience and opportunity for schoolchildren. We are not suggesting that all such pupils will become fluent Chinese speakers who can go out and strike business deals in China because of their fluent Chinese skills.

**Deborah Smith:** I echo what Lucy Watkins said. In my experience—I am not an expert linguist—learning Chinese is not just about learning the language to be able to communicate on a business footing. It is much easier for people to begin to understand how things work in China if they have some idea of the concepts of the language, which are very different from what we have here.

In addition, providing our school pupils with the opportunity to learn Chinese reflects a principle of mutuality. Even if people in China are increasingly learning to speak English, that does not mean that we should just sit back and let English continue to be the only mode of communication.

**Gil Paterson:** When we talk about the Chinese language, I think that we are, in fact, talking about Mandarin. However, we have large numbers of Cantonese speakers in Scotland and in the UK. The target in the current China strategy aims for

“200 pupils studying for Chinese language national qualifications in Scottish schools by 2010”.

Should that target be split into Mandarin and Cantonese or should we follow the Chinese Government by concentrating exclusively on Mandarin?

**Lucy Watkins:** The choice of whether to study for a qualification in Mandarin or Cantonese is ultimately for the individual student. People might have different reasons for wanting to study a language. Someone with a background in Cantonese might want to have a qualification in that language, but currently qualifications in Mandarin are probably more useful.

10:30

**Gil Paterson:** Are we anywhere near reaching the target of 200 pupils studying for Chinese language qualifications by 2010?

**Lucy Watkins:** I am not sure what progress we have made against that target, but we can provide you with information to demonstrate how we expect to progress.

**Iain Smith (North East Fife) (LD):** The discussion about targets reminds me of the cartoon in which animals with targets strapped to their backs run around to ensure that the king's arrow hits the target.

I understand that you want to review targets to ensure that they are about what the Government is doing and that that can be measured. In relation to the student numbers and Scottish qualifications targets, a number of universities and further education institutions in my constituency, including St Andrews University and Elmwood College, are leading the way in pioneering the use of Scottish qualifications in China. Given that those

institutions were already doing a lot of that work before the China strategy was in place, what difference do the Scottish Government's strategy and the work of the first secretary in China make in assisting academic institutions to forge links with China to encourage students and develop qualifications?

**Lucy Watkins:** One aspect that I can talk about is that we have a memorandum of understanding with the Chinese ministry of education, the intention of which is to create a fertile environment in which relationships in the sector can flourish. Fiona Hyslop will renew that memorandum when she visits China in April. Having a Scotland-China agreement in place at Government level raises the profile of the Scottish education system and provides an opportunity for us to discuss with the Chinese Government things such as approving qualifications in China and creating access to institutions so that the situation is easier for them to operate in. We can provide specific help at Government level to improve relationships.

Although I admit that this is hard to quantify, the other area in which we are doing a lot to raise the profile of Scotland in China among target audiences is online media, as I mentioned earlier. We are also involved in education exhibitions, at which we have a regular presence to promote specifically Scottish education and the fresh talent initiative to large numbers of students. I am not sure what the numbers are, but something like 40,000 students come through the doors at any one exhibition. Those are two examples of where we offer support and make a difference.

**Deborah Smith:** Generally speaking, Government-to-Government access is significant in China when it comes to getting things done. The fact that Lucy Watkins has access to the Chinese ministry of education and can walk through the door as an accredited diplomat is important in developing our relationships with the Chinese Government and it helps in its support of Scottish academic institutions' activities. I found the significance of that Government relationship increasingly obvious when I visited.

**Alex Neil:** How many people are in the Beijing embassy? Do you get proper support from them or do they just say, "She deals with Scotland, therefore we don't deal with Scotland"? What support do you get from the Foreign Office in general?

**Lucy Watkins:** I get very strong administrative support from the members of the management team. Our arrangement with them means that they have responsibility for providing such support. They certainly do not say, "Okay, Lucy, get on with Scotland." They are helpful in a range of areas on which they are focused. For example, the embassy is doing a lot of work on the energy

sector, and it is very helpful in ensuring that Scotland is involved in the discussions. I am also doing a lot of work with the culture and education section of the embassy on developing educational opportunities and ensuring that Scotland is being promoted through the right channels. The UK Trade and Investment team, which is based in the embassy, has strong relationships with Scottish Development International and is very supportive. Overall, we have a very supportive relationship with the rest of the embassy.

**Alex Neil:** Are you a member of the UK civil service or of the UK diplomatic service?

**Lucy Watkins:** No. I am not a member of the UK diplomatic service. I am on secondment from the British Council to the Scottish Government for this job.

**Alex Neil:** I presume that you have diplomatic immunity. Do you have the status of a diplomat?

**Lucy Watkins:** Yes. What I meant was that I have not been brought up through the Foreign Office system.

**Alex Neil:** That is a benefit.

**Iain Smith:** A couple of major events in China are coming up in the near future: the Beijing Olympics and a major world exhibition in Shanghai, which I think is in 2011. What involvement does the Scottish affairs desk have in promoting Scotland at those events?

**Lucy Watkins:** People in China are talking about nothing other than the Beijing Olympics at the moment. The games are at the top of everybody's agenda, so we are obviously thinking about them. August and September will be a busy time in China. We need to consider how we ensure that Scotland can benefit from the Olympic opportunity without spending lots of resources to make little noise in what will be a noisy place. We are considering how Scotland can benefit from the UK platforms that are being put in place during that period. We are also considering how we can engage people from Glasgow, given that Glasgow is going to host the Commonwealth games. There are opportunities to have various meetings and share experiences in the context of the activities that are going on in August and September.

The Shanghai world expo 2010 will be a massive event, which the organisers think will bring in about 70 million visitors to Shanghai. Deborah Smith and I visited the site the week before last—it is huge and impressive. The event will run for 184 days in all, so it is a big opportunity for us. There will be a big UK presence.

The Scottish Government is having discussions with Ian McCartney, who I think is trade and investment minister at the Foreign Office. He is going to meet Linda Fabiani and representatives

of the other devolved Administrations in the near future to discuss how Scotland and the other countries with devolved Administrations can be represented at Shanghai expo. However, at the moment, the Scottish Government does not plan to put additional funding into the event.

**Deborah Smith:** I emphasise that while our ministers have said that they do not intend to put any extra funding into the Shanghai world expo, that does not mean that they do not think that the event is significant. They will be looking to the FCO, which is providing the mainstream of funding for the British pavilion at Shanghai, and to the British Council, which is designing the content, to ensure that Scotland is absolutely represented in the context of the other countries within the UK.

**Ted Brocklebank:** It is worth getting your take on what might be seen as the downside of trading in China. I do not know whether you happened to see last night's ITV programme about the pirating of designer brands. Apparently, major companies such as Nike and Adidas have just given up, because they cannot fight it. Are there any particular implications for Scottish companies? I am thinking of whisky distillers and so on. Would you say anything to them about the possibility of their brands being ripped off in China?

**Deborah Smith:** On whisky in particular, one of the significant benefits that we get from the embassy is access to UKTI discussions with the Chinese Government on whisky and whisky counterfeiting. My understanding is that the Chinese Government has been supportive of the Scotch whisky industry and the Scotch Whisky Association in their attempts to stamp down on counterfeiting. However, given the scale of the issue and the potential for counterfeiting, progress is steady but not always immediate.

We are grateful for FCO support for that and for other areas of Scotland's business aspirations in China. We can take opportunities to reinforce that message. I do not know whether Lucy Watkins has anything to say about business more generally.

**Lucy Watkins:** Again, this is SDI's field, but I think that the intellectual property issue is one of the issues that will constrain businesses from taking big steps in China. However, the Chinese Government is keen to resolve the IP issue, albeit over the medium term.

**The Convener:** You have had various questions about individual targets. I will focus on one that has not been mentioned. Climate change is prominent in policy discussion—rightly so—and one of the Scottish Government's targets is:

"Scottish-based firms to support the installation of 60 GW of clean coal/green power generating capacity in China by 2010".

Are any Scotland-based firms supporting such facilities or are they in the process of tendering to do so? More generally, as first secretary, what is your role in relation to that target?

**Lucy Watkins:** Scottish firms are operating in China in that sector, but I do not know which ones—I have not brought details on that. Again, we want to review that target in the refresh plan to ensure that it is practical.

**The Convener:** Are there any questions about the other targets, or any more general questions?

**Members:** No.

**The Convener:** Okay. I thank the witnesses for an extremely useful session.

## Lisbon Treaty (Correspondence)

10:42

**The Convener:** We move straight on to item 2, which is correspondence on the Lisbon treaty. We do not have a briefing paper on this, but we have four letters: two from Linda Fabiani, the Minister for Europe, External Affairs and Culture; and two from me, on behalf of the committee. I want to focus in particular on the latest letter from the minister, which is probably the briefest response that we have had from her and which raises interesting issues, particularly around the phrase “appropriate level of detail”. I do not know whether members have any comments to make on the exchange of correspondence on the Lisbon treaty, which is one of our key issues.

**Alex Neil:** I have one comment on the reference in the minister’s letter of 26 November 2007 to the analysis of the impact of the Lisbon treaty, particularly on energy policy and marine policy. The minister said:

“It would not be appropriate for all the details of this analysis to be provided to the Committee, as much of the analysis has been undertaken as policy consideration.”

Given that the vital vote on the Lisbon treaty will be tomorrow night, which means that the policy consideration is over, I would have thought that it would be highly appropriate for the committee to consider the analysis, because one of the jobs of this committee and of our sister committees that cover fishing and enterprise will be to monitor the impact of the Lisbon treaty in those key areas. Given where we are, I think that we should write to the minister and say that we should, in fact, get copies of the analysis, as should other relevant parliamentary committees.

10:45

**The Convener:** The other point to bear in mind is that the minister is coming to talk about priorities and objectives next week, so there is an opportunity to raise issues then. Another point that I want to make, without complaining about it too much, is that we waited for two months for a reply from the minister. One option is to raise the issue orally rather than write another letter, but it is up to the committee to decide.

On the minister’s letter, even if we were not given all the details of the analysis, it would be nice to have some indication of its content. There is a midway point between getting every last detail and getting nothing, which is basically what we have.

**John Park (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab):** Before she comes to the committee, we should

flag up for the minister our concerns, so that she knows we want to discuss them.

**Iain Smith:** The committee’s role is to scrutinise the work of the Executive in the areas of Europe and external relations. If we are denied access to information about the basis on which it has made decisions, how can we scrutinise its decisions? The issue affects committees throughout the Parliament in relation to departments. We must be clear about the distinction between factual information on which ministers base their decisions and policy discussions that they have internally. If we do not even get access to the factual information, we cannot challenge the policy conclusions.

**Alex Neil:** I understand why it would not have been appropriate to give us the information during the negotiations and discussions with the UK Government and the European Commission in relation to the Lisbon treaty but, given that we are now beyond that point and that the vote takes place tomorrow night, I do not see how it could conceivably be damaging in an age of freedom of information to give us that information now. We should repeat the request.

**The Convener:** The other bullet point on which we have not had much comeback is the Scottish Government’s contributions to discussions relating to justice and other devolved matters. That part of the treaty is of particular importance to Scotland, but I do not feel that I am much the wiser about the Scottish Government’s input or point of view.

The third area, which we have kicked around a bit more and is a matter of controversy between parties, is marine biological resources. Members obviously have different views on the substance of the issue, but there is still a lack of detail. Although we know the basis of the Scottish Government’s view on the issue, I feel that we have been given an outline rather than a detailed explanation.

**Alex Neil:** The key point is that the UK Government—as I believe and, I think, the minister believes—failed to protect Scotland’s interests as far as marine biological resources are concerned. It is all the more important to consider the potential impact of the Lisbon treaty, given that the UK Government failed to make marine biological resources a red-line issue.

**The Convener:** That is probably moving on to a related but different point. There is—let us put it this way—still an issue for some of us about the precise detail of the Government’s thinking on the matter. I accept that we will not get consensus, but that is the third area on which we might want to ask more questions of the minister next week.

**Ted Brocklebank:** Were we not going to ask for a legal definition of what the Lisbon treaty suggests about marine biological resources? Was

the thought not to get two separate legal opinions? Whatever happened to that?

**The Convener:** We got a Scottish Parliament information centre briefing on the matter. As far as a more detailed legal briefing is concerned, part of the problem is that, since we do not have a detailed legal exposition from the Government, it is hard to get a detailed legal commentary. There are difficulties.

In respect of what we sought, it was the SPICe briefing.

**Alex Neil:** I am not sure about that. I thought that we asked for something much stronger than the SPICe briefing.

**The Convener:** I do not know whether the clerk wants to comment.

**Dr Jim Johnston (Clerk):** We provided a SPICe briefing, which the committee had the chance to consider a few months ago. Discussions with the minister are on-going and we asked the minister for further details on the Scottish Government's position on exclusive competence. An issue for the committee now is the level of detail that the Scottish Government has provided. It is up to the committee whether it wants to take external advice on exclusive competence or take advice from our own lawyers.

**Irene Oldfather:** I vehemently disagree with Alex Neil's position. I do not know whether the committee's position on competence over the conservation of marine biological resources is the issue. We probably need to move on and consider what Lisbon means for the Scottish Parliament.

**Alex Neil:** There is a more general issue. There were supposed to be UK Government opt-outs—whatever the terminology is—but it is emerging clearly that the opt-outs are not worth the paper they are written on, because the European Court of Justice can overturn them willy-nilly. That is why we wanted a legal opinion. The issue was not just conservation of marine biological resources; there was a much wider issue about the so-called waivers or opt-outs.

**The Convener:** I think that we have identified two issues. We agreed to address two of the Scottish Government's EU priorities and objectives: the treaty and the budget review—the budget review happens to be the next item on the agenda. We might have more work to do on the treaty in general, as Alex Neil suggests—members are nodding—so we should follow up the issue during the next few months.

I suppose that that point is slightly different from our starting point, which was about how much detail and information we get from the Scottish Government. I think that we agree that we can raise such issues with the Minister for Europe,

External Affairs and Culture next week. However, we have agreed in general terms that we want to follow up work on the treaty, so the wider question is how we do so.

**Gil Paterson:** Surely another issue that is emerging from our papers and the evidence that we have taken is engagement between the UK Government and the Scottish Government. The rubber-ear effect is implicit in the minister's reply to our letter. We should consider that.

**The Convener:** We need to prepare for our question-and-answer session with the minister next week. Perhaps the clerks will produce a paper on how we approach our more general consideration of the treaty. In doing that, the clerks might take account of what happens at next week's meeting.

**Alex Neil:** At the committee's round-table discussion, I asked the guy from Scottish Development International about the Saltire Foundation, but we have had no feedback on that.

**Dr Johnston:** We will chase that up.

**The Convener:** Have we had enough discussion on the Lisbon treaty for the moment? There will be more anon.

## European Union Budget Review

10:52

**The Convener:** This item might not be quite as controversial as the previous one. We have a helpful paper from the clerk, as ever. Do members have comments?

**Alex Neil:** We could bring the matter up with Linda Fabiani next week, as is recommended in the paper.

**The Convener:** Yes. We are invited to agree to “raise any relevant questions” with the minister at next week’s meeting. Are members content with the recommendations in the paper?

**Members** *indicated agreement.*

## International Development Inquiry

10:53

**The Convener:** We kick off today’s international development work by considering Alasdair Morgan’s report, after which we will hear from two panels of witnesses. Does Alasdair Morgan want to comment on his helpful and detailed report?

**Alasdair Morgan:** I did not draw broad conclusions—it is difficult to draw broad conclusions about Government policy from a visit that, by its nature, enabled me only to consider specific issues.

A person who visits Malawi for the first time can easily be overwhelmed by the scale of the challenges that are presented by population growth and problems to do with the economy, health issues such as AIDS, malaria and cholera, transport infrastructure, education and so on. However, one cannot but come away with the impression that the country has much potential. The people are unfailingly cheerful, despite the circumstances in which they live.

An impression that I got from the projects that I visited was that small amounts of money can make a difference, which is relevant to the Scottish Government’s contribution. It is not necessary to be a big donor and it is not necessary for small donors to spend all their money on one project. Little projects can make big differences to people’s lives. We met people who are very grateful for small amounts of money being allocated to assist them in overcoming their problems. The local economy can also be stimulated through purchase of local products and use of local labour.

The other issue that we considered was governance, which is a subject on which we feel we can give our expertise, if people want it. At the moment, there are problems in Malawi with its Parliament having been prorogued after the budget. I presume that it is not going to be brought back until it is time to pass the next budget. There is obvious tension between the president and the members of Parliament, and the situation raises interesting questions about to whom we should try to pass on our expertise. There is a huge turnover of MPs in Malawi—at least a third of them, if not more, lost their seats at the last election, and it is quite likely that that will happen again. If we want to strengthen the institutions in Malawi, we might concentrate a bit more on the clerical infrastructure that backs up MPs. Nevertheless, as MSPs, we would obviously like to talk to other elected members, so that is a difficulty.

If we wanted to be controversial, we might raise the question of how much of the democratic structure is a luxury in a country at Malawi's stage of development. That would begin to tread on toes, because we might have to say whether the president or the Opposition is right, and I would not like us to go down that route. However, that is the kind of discussion that has been prompted by visits to Malawi.

**The Convener:** That is helpful. Thank you. Do members have any questions?

**Gil Paterson:** I declare an interest through my involvement in a group that meets regularly to discuss adoption. On page 3 of your report, under "Open Arms", you mention an orphanage. Is it involved in assisting children who have AIDS or whose parents have AIDS, or was it set up to find adoptive parents for the children? If so, are we in Scotland engaged with it in any way? You might not know the answers to any of those questions.

**Alasdair Morgan:** Karen Gillon has been much more involved with that orphanage than I have. It was set up to deal specifically with very young children who have been orphaned as a result of HIV/AIDS, and its main focus is on placing the children back with their extended family or with other people in the village from which they came. As time has passed, however, it has found that there are youngsters for whom it is unable to do that, so it has gradually expanded the age range of the children it accepts. It now looks after slightly older children in different facilities, but always with the continuing hope that it can somehow get those children back into their communities. I do not think that the orphanage seeks adoptions abroad to any significant extent.

**Irene Oldfather:** I thank Alasdair Morgan for an informative and interesting report. On page 9 of the report, you talk about the barriers that women still face in Malawian society. Did you find any cause for optimism among the young people? The consulate of Malawi is based in my constituency, and when we receive visitors from Malawi there is a difference in the perceived role of women in any delegation, even among school children. Is there cause for optimism that that will change in the future?

**Alasdair Morgan:** I should state that I owe a debt of gratitude to Margaret Neal, the external liaison officer who was instrumental in drawing together much of the report.

One could not but be impressed by the energy of many of the women we met, whether they were politicians or women who were active in self-help projects in the villages. It was interesting to see that, for certain formal aspects of proceedings, it is the men—who did not otherwise seem to do much—who come to the forefront to get in the

photographs or whatever. I suspect that women are much more active behind the scenes than their position in society would lead one to think.

Obviously, there is hope for the future, but the society is still very patriarchal and men retain their position at the top of the tree, even though some of the other things that they are doing might not justify their having that position.

**The Convener:** That seems a good point at which to close this agenda item. However, we will pick up some similar points in the next two sessions.

We will suspend for a few minutes before calling our next set of witnesses.

11:00

*Meeting suspended.*

11:04

*On resuming—*

**The Convener:** Agenda item 5 is also on our international development inquiry. I thank Karen Gillon, Patricia Ferguson and Des McNulty for coming to the meeting. We have had a round-table discussion on international development, but this is the first panel to give evidence in our inquiry. Another panel will give evidence later this morning.

This is a particularly good time to start taking evidence from panels. We had a debate on Malawi in the Parliament two weeks ago, and we are in the middle of Fairtrade fortnight. We will certainly do a lot of work on international development in the next few weeks.

Karen Gillon is representing the Scottish branch of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association and the cross-party group on Malawi; Patricia Ferguson and Des McNulty are representing the cross-party group on international development.

We will consider two things: international development issues in general and the role of the groups that the members represent. I will start with a question on the latter. What international development role exists for the Scottish Parliament, parliamentarians and the groups that you represent?

**Patricia Ferguson (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab):** Good morning, convener. I thank the committee for asking us to this meeting. It is always a pleasure to discuss international development issues.

It is worth bearing in mind that the cross-party group on international development, which was largely an initiative of George Reid and Des McNulty, was formed very early—back in June 1999. Since then, it has grown to become

probably the biggest cross-party group in the Parliament. The existence of such a large, interesting, interested and vocal group probably influenced the then Scottish Executive's decision that it wanted to be involved in international development issues. I suppose that the group gave us the confidence of knowing that we would have parliamentary backing in progressing such issues.

The group has been and will continue to be influential. It has given members opportunities on a monthly basis to hear about and discuss—with people from around the world who have something to offer—issues that are directly related to international development and issues with other connotations. That has helped us all to form views and progress issues.

The Scottish Parliament has a strong role to play in respect of international issues in general. The work that has been done to date has been interesting and worth while, and perhaps it has allowed other countries to consider the example that the Parliament has set and how they interact with other countries. I hope that the Parliament will continue to have a role. It should take every opportunity to be involved in such work. Individual parliamentarians who have been involved in such work have found it worth while and interesting.

**The Convener:** Des McNulty has been involved with the group for a long time. Do you want to add to what has been said, Des?

**Des McNulty (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab):** Yes. It is worth pointing out to those who have been involved with cross-party groups, the meetings of which tend to have sporadic attendances, that over the past four or five years, the average attendance at meetings of the cross-party group on international development has been in excess of 50 people. A large number of people regularly attend its meetings.

The group's meetings are quite topic centred, so different people tend to go to them—a person's attendance will depend on whether the topic fits in with their interests. In setting up the group, one of our aims was to provide people—particularly international figures who might not otherwise come to Scotland or get a platform in Scotland—with a useful forum in which they could speak about what they do in the international development environment. The group has been effective. The list of speakers at its meetings includes people from the United Nations and senior people from the Commonwealth. We have had a range of high-profile international speakers as well as speakers from the UK.

A lot of practitioners have come along to give us direct information about what is going on in a number of parts of the world. The group has been

a forum for discussing what the role of the Scottish Parliament should be in international development. Patricia Ferguson is right to say that the group was fairly influential, directly and indirectly, in the Scottish Executive's decision to move towards providing a fund and having an international development strategy. We had a forum for members of the group to express their consistent view that the Parliament should be considering such a strategy.

International speakers have addressed the group. We brought Hilary Benn to speak to the group in about 2003. I think that he was the first external person to speak in the new chamber. He indicated at that meeting that he was relaxed about the Scottish Executive and the Scottish Parliament playing a role in international development. He made the point that there is so much to do in the world of international development that there is room for everybody to contribute. That was the trigger, which gave everyone comfort that we could and should engage usefully in international development.

People in the cross-party group on international development were involved in the move towards work on Malawi in particular. However, I remember saying to Karen Gillon and Michael Matheson at the start that we wanted to have a group to focus on Malawi separately, rather than as part of the international development group.

Our activity has been coherent. To some extent, we have been opportunistic. We are there to make the most of the opportunities that arise to get voices heard in Scotland. It is fair to say that we have strong support from the various development groups in Scotland. The group has covered a wide range of topics, from environmental issues to development education, issues of debt and poverty, which were perhaps central at the start, education and other specialist topics. We have discussed a wide range of topics and have heard from a wide range of speakers.

**Karen Gillon (Clydesdale) (Lab):** The cross-party group on Malawi's role is specifically to look at the Parliament's and the country's relationship with Malawi and to provide a parliamentary focus for that. The group developed after various Commonwealth Parliamentary Association visits to Malawi—a number of members around the table are aware of and have been involved in those visits. The cross-party group is made up of MSPs and a growing number of people in wider civic society with an interest in Malawi. We focus specifically on the relationship with Malawi, whether we are considering European Union treaties, agriculture or child poverty. We felt that it was important that that relationship had a parliamentary focus as well as a Government



focus, hence the reason for the cross-party group. I am happy to answer questions.

**Ted Brocklebank:** I want to pick up on some of the points that Karen Gillon made. You are wearing two hats as you are on the CPA executive group and the cross-party group on Malawi. We heard earlier today from Alasdair Morgan, who has just been to Malawi for the first time. It was interesting to hear the views of a first-timer who was seeing everything fresh and to hear about the impact of the place. In a sense, you are more fortunate because you have been there two or three times. Is anything improving? I went as part of the first delegation and I remember that we were pretty much overwhelmed by the scale of the task and the fact that fairly limited funds were available from the then Scottish Executive and the Scottish Parliament. Can you see improvements on the ground as a direct result of Scotland becoming involved?

11:15

**Karen Gillon:** There are improvements—I will give you a couple of examples. We visited Mulanje mission hospital, to which the Scottish Executive gave money to assist primary health care in the area. A range of measures are now in place there to encourage women to attend antenatal appointments, to support families to develop gardens so that they have a more balanced diet, and to encourage people to get HIV and AIDS tests and to be involved in primary health care. On our recent visit we heard that 2007 was the first year in which the maternal mortality rate in that area had fallen—primary health care is part of the reason. Another reason is that there is now access to free maternity delivery care at the hospital, but primary health care is very much seen as part of the solution.

The other example—which I think that Alasdair Morgan saw for himself—is in Chikwawa, where there were no cholera deaths last year as a direct result of some of the environmental measures that are being taken through a project funded by the Scottish Government. The project provides education and information for people on water sterilisation, which allows them to move or treat their water supply. There are, therefore, real and tangible benefits on the ground.

Maternal mortality remains one of the biggest challenges. A number of midwives from Scotland are involved in providing training and information exchange. We did not see that directly, but I know from speaking to folk here and to Malawians who have benefited that that has had a cascade effect with regard to training for dealing with difficult births, so that mum and baby survive at that stage.

**Ted Brocklebank:** I will ask a slightly more difficult question. Given that money cannot solve

everything, have you formed a view on what percentage of our international development money should be directed towards Malawi, whether that should be our main focus, and whether we should learn things from working with Malawi that we want to take to other countries? We know by how much the funding will increase during the current session of Parliament. What is your assessment of how that money should be directed?

**Karen Gillon:** My assessment is that the majority of the money should, as far as possible, be spent on an individual country. Whatever we put in is limited—we do not have the kind of budget that the Department for International Development has. Our contribution is about much more than an amount of money; it is about the relationships that have been built and the skills transfer that has taken place. We cannot do that in a concerted way across the globe. If we are going to change the current model, we should see our work in Malawi through for another couple of years at the very least, in order to learn the long-term lessons from that model and to take it to another country. It would not serve us well, or the countries with which we are working, to take a scatter-gun approach across the globe.

The other factor concerns trust and confidence. There is now a relationship between our two countries—if we walk away, what does that say about Scotland and the wider world? What does it say about who we are and about our belief in support for the developing world and for the countries with which we have a relationship? It is not about holding a gun to anyone's head and saying that the relationship must last for ever. It is about seeing the work through and ensuring that we bring what we have started to a logical conclusion, rather than saying, "Oh well, we have had a change of government, so we will have a change of country." I was heartened that the Minister for Europe and External Affairs commented when she was in Malawi that she wanted things to continue and set aside a minimum of £3 million from the fund to continue that work. I do not know if that answers your question.

**Patricia Ferguson:** I still have an interest in Malawi, and I am a member of the cross-party group on Malawi and the Scotland Malawi Partnership. The reports that I have read certainly indicate that a tangible benefit is beginning to come through in all four target areas on which the previous Executive and this Government have been involved with the Malawi Government. That was always intended to be the way—it was meant to be a partnership focusing on the areas that the Malawi Government had identified.

With regard to the statistics on maternal mortality, a big dilemma that was discussed quite widely in the Parliament at the time concerned whether it is better to bring Malawian nurses here to train to be midwives and hope that they will go back to Malawi, or to facilitate trainers going to Malawi, where they will be able to train more people and also help to build the infrastructure that will encourage more Malawians with skills to stay in their own country. It is good to see that work coming through the system, because all of us with an interest in Malawi debated those issues at the time. We were all finding our feet, to an extent.

On the broader question of where our focus should be, Scotland and the Scottish Parliament are committed to Malawi for the moment. That focus is probably right, as it enables us to have the kind of relationship that we have with Malawi for the reasons that Karen Gillon outlined. It is important not to lose sight of the bigger picture, however. It is important that we also look at other countries, as that will enable us to see whether the work that we are doing in specific areas is effective. Further, we must recognise that there are many Scottish non-governmental organisations that are doing a good job around the globe. We must not lose that wider international focus and should have an awareness of and an interest in it as well, but that does not have to be at the expense of our relationship with Malawi.

**Alex Neil:** I agree with what Karen Gillon said about continuing to focus mainly on Malawi. However, if we are going to spread our wings to some extent, would it not make sense to spread our wings in the adjacent countries, rather than moving to Latin America, central America or parts of Asia? One of the good reasons for doing so is that Malawi's borders are very open, which means that, if we have a successful project near those borders, there will be an influx of people from adjacent countries anyway.

Obviously, in global terms, £3 million—or even £9 million, if we treble it—is petty cash, although we should not underestimate the impact that it could have in a country like Malawi, particularly if it were concentrated in a certain area, given that Malawi's gross domestic product is about £500 million a year. However, it strikes me that more effort should be made to mobilise non-governmental money. Malawi is full of business opportunities. For example, fruit falls off the trees and is left to rot rather than being harvested, tinned and exported. I know that the business group is working on some of those issues, but I think that more energy in that area, which would not require any great degree of public money, would go a long way towards helping the wealth creation sector, which, in turn, would allow the Malawians to help themselves more.

Would anyone like to comment on those suggestions?

**Patricia Ferguson:** I think that Alex Neil is absolutely right about where the focus should be. I am aware that I am not speaking as a minister with responsibility for this matter; I am merely someone with an interest.

**Alex Neil:** You can come and join us, Patricia.

**Patricia Ferguson:** Oh gosh, no. It would take more than an international development policy for me to do that.

The previous Administration's policy focused on sub-Saharan Africa. We widened that focus to include countries affected by the tsunami, and Pakistan, following the earthquake there. In both those cases, Scottish NGOs brought specific needs to us and asked for our help.

Alex Neil's first point is right. Because Malawi is landlocked, it can be argued that work that is done on the periphery of the country has an impact. As he said, the borders are fairly fluid and Malawi tends to absorb and help people from surrounding countries when those countries are in times of crisis. However, our advantage in Malawi was that a lot of Scottish NGOs that understand and know the country were already working there so we were not starting entirely from scratch. There was also a good attitude in Malawi towards Scotland, which is a country that the people know and understand. For example, the second most popular girl's name in Malawi is Margaret, because of the missionary impact of 150 years ago. The relationship between the countries already existed. When you are starting from scratch in another country, you should not underestimate what has to be done to build up capacity. However, Alex Neil is right in principle.

It is fair to say that the business sector has been involved for a long time. When I was in Malawi, I was struck by the number of Scottish business people whom I met. There are now more opportunities for fruit growers—you can go into the Co-op and find Malawi peanuts, or groundnuts, as they call them, being sold. I would like most of those products to be produced in a fair trade way, although I recognise that there can be difficulties in that regard, particularly with some of the tea that comes from Malawi.

It is often said, and it is undoubtedly the case, that Malawi would be a great tourist destination because it is a beautiful country. However, I would not want investors to go there if their sole purpose was to make money and take it back to their own country. Such investment has to be about building the capacity of Malawians to be able to exploit opportunities in their country. Fruit is a good example; avocados grow wild, but the Malawian population do not particularly like avocados. So

there is an export opportunity there, if they get it right, and that is just one opportunity.

We always have to be careful about opening up a country for business. Much of what the country does has to be about building up the infrastructure that supports its own people and it is to be hoped that tourism and other opportunities will come along with that. Malawi is very open to such opportunities, as well as aware of the pitfalls, which is reassuring.

**Karen Gillon:** As regards moving and expanding into other countries, Zambia and Tanzania are obvious candidates that fit into that model. Scottish connections in those countries could be developed and built on.

In recent months there have been a couple of good examples of how to deal with not all but some of the business issues mentioned—the establishment of the Malawi Youth Business Trust, which is based on the Prince's Scottish Youth Business Trust model, and the new microfinance scheme for women in the south. Alex Neil is right that opportunities are waiting to be developed and I hope that, through schemes such as those that I mentioned, such opportunities can be realised by Scottish business people sharing their knowledge and expertise, particularly through the mentoring side of the youth business trust—which has been so successful here in Scotland—and in encouraging and supporting young Malawians to take a stand for themselves, be entrepreneurial and take risks. I see mangoes as offering the best business opportunity—they are the best, tastiest mangoes that I have ever had.

Alex Neil is right about moving into Zambia. When the cross-party group began, we debated whether we should focus specifically on Malawi or whether we should move slightly wider, into the surrounding region. At the time, we thought that the focus should be on Malawi and that we would keep it that way, but there is a natural empathy in Scotland for sub-Saharan Africa and work can be done there.

**Des McNulty:** The decision to focus on Malawi was probably not taken systematically; I think that it was based on historical reasons, rather than on an absolute analysis of where might be the best place to go. There are some issues about the fit between Scotland and Malawi because historical issues, or cultural empathy, do not necessarily drive the link.

Karen Gillon is right to say that the relationship between Scotland and Malawi is a unique model. We need to be more systematic now and say, "Right, how do we get the best out of that model?" The way to do that is to recognise that Scottish Government investment should be a lever to try to get other Scottish organisations, whether private

companies, non-governmental organisations or development agencies, to get involved and use their own resources to take these issues forward. My response to Alex Neil's question is that we need to focus on the advantages of the Government-to-Government relationship and on how we get the multiplier effect.

11:30

Another dimension that is worth bearing in mind is that particular groups in Scotland have close links with Malawi. In 2000 or 2001, I talked to both Peter West from the University of Strathclyde, and the then moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, specifically about what they were doing in Malawi. For historical reasons, a wide range of Scottish aid and development-linked organisations have evolved links with different places in sub-Saharan Africa, including Malawi. We do not want to create a situation in which some development agencies feel excluded, or feel that the mechanism is not one with which they can involve themselves. In taking the issue forward, we must be sensitive to whether we are maximising the contribution that non-governmental agencies in Scotland, particularly development agencies, can make.

To that extent, I do not think that it should all be about Malawi. We must be able to react to and focus on what is happening in surrounding areas, such as Darfur and northern Uganda, in which the circumstances in which people live require to be addressed and where Scottish agencies do valuable work. We should not close our eyes to the possibility or necessity of doing something in such places.

**Irene Oldfather:** I want to ask about the review of school-to-school and community-to-community links. Ted Brocklebank said that one of the issues with which the committee is grappling is how to maximise the impact of limited funds and resources. It seems to me that good partnerships can be created by small amounts of pump-priming money. In my area, St Matthew's academy and St Michael's academy have a good partnership with St Peter's school in Mzuzu, which is not just about raising awareness, but about delivering practical improvements, such as improving the water supply and sponsoring educational equipment and materials. However, the NGOs' view is that money should be focused entirely on AIDS and eradicating poverty. In the light of the panel's experience, are those two views contradictory? If not, how can they be set beside each other?

**Karen Gillon:** It depends on what you want Scotland's relationship with Malawi to be about. If it is just about aid, the money should be focused on AIDS and poverty reduction. However, if the relationship is genuinely about a partnership, there

must also be benefit on the Scottish side, which is about bringing up a generation of global citizens who understand much better the world in which they live and whose choices are more informed. That means, for example, that they buy fair-trade products when they go to the supermarket and that they understand that the impact of climate change in countries in sub-Saharan Africa is far more severe and catastrophic than it is for Scotland.

For me, the school and community links are vital. It is not about taking away from anything else; it is about saying that this is about far more than the traditional developmental aid that countries around the globe have been providing for generations. It is something new and different, which other countries have seen and are beginning to use as a model for themselves. It is about our children and communities learning from the relationship.

The village of Stonehouse in my area is twinned with a village in Mulanje. Stonehouse businesses pay in £100 a month, schools link by e-mail with schools in Mulanje, and health care professionals share expertise with health care professionals. It is a whole-community approach. That initiative has had no money from the Scottish Executive. It came about because of what the Scottish Executive and Scottish Government were doing. The community said, "That's a good idea. How can we get involved?" It got proactive—it linked up with another community by itself, and started to work on a sustainable development model, not just by throwing money in but by asking how the approach could develop and become self-sufficient.

I understand where the NGOs are coming from and why they want the money to go to the areas in which they are working; that is only natural. However, we are talking about something different and schools and communities are also involved.

**Des McNulty:** To add to that, but not apropos of Malawi, one of the international development group's most interesting meetings brought together small organisations—some very small—and individuals who had been working for 20 years with victims of the Chernobyl disaster. It was humbling to see the amount of support that had been given to individual families and schools, and by giving people opportunities or bringing them over here for respite from their environment. None of that was organised by the Government in an obvious way.

Social citizenship in Scotland needs to be directed towards the contribution that can be made here and elsewhere. Mechanisms exist that we can use to go forward through volunteering, as well as using the international development fund. We should identify and celebrate the contributions

that people make off their own bats to tackle problems. We should also identify opportunities or mechanisms through which people can take up such work. It is amazing to see the amount of time, expertise, knowledge and commitment that individuals are willing to contribute—moving further in that direction would enrich Scotland.

**The Convener:** Some of the people at our round-table discussion said that although some of the schools links are good and have been done well, others are harmful. That will probably come up in future evidence sessions. Is there anything in that point of view? You must have quite a lot of experience of schools—is there a right and wrong way of making the links? Should we consider the things that we need to be aware of in how those links are made, or were some people just being overly critical?

**Des McNulty:** There are examples of people exporting materials that are not relevant to those who receive them, and of there being no appropriate engagement between both parties about real needs. We can advise people and provide information. We do not have to make that advice up because it can be taken out of the expertise that exists in the NGO sector.

The approach is crucial. When we engage with Malawi, or in any international development activity, we have to think that we are benefiting from it, and we have to learn from other people's experience as well as contributing to their development. It has to be seen as a two-way flow—otherwise it is a form of colonialism, if you like. We are not talking about a gift relationship, but about engagement. Provided that we can accept the laws of that engagement and give due attention to what both sides want, it can be effective.

Organisations such as the International Development Education Association of Scotland can provide us with lots of information about what we can get out of such engagement. Perhaps we need a better spread of such information and to create better understanding of it by the people who become involved.

**The Convener:** Are there any more comments? You do not all need to comment on every question.

**Patricia Ferguson:** Sustainability is important. If we provide help and assistance but suddenly pull the plug on it for whatever reason, that can be hard for the people who had been receiving it. Des McNulty is right to say that there must be engagement and that we must understand what people need and want: we must understand what the partnership is about. If the partnership can be established in that way, it will be beneficial to both sides.

However, I have seen computers being sent to a school that does not have electricity. That is no good and it is a waste of money because the computers had to be shipped. I have also heard stories about volunteers. I met, on one occasion, volunteers who went not to Malawi but to another country, where the situation is more critical, without having been well briefed about the country. They did not have a proper idea of what they were going to face when they got there, and they found it emotionally difficult to deal with. The main issues are support, encouragement and the exchange of ideas, but there must be partnership, as well.

**Karen Gillon:** As in anything, there will be good examples and not-so-good examples. In Malawi, people are also critical of the role that NGOs play and the work that they do. Sometimes, the NGOs come in and do things without consulting people, which means that they do not do things as effectively as they could. For example, they might install a water supply that is 10 minutes away from an existing water supply because they did not consult anybody. Nobody has got it absolutely right. There is a need for dialogue between the partners.

Several schools in my constituency are involved in partnerships with named schools in Malawi, but they are also involved with all the other schools in the cluster through the teacher development centre, so that all 14 schools benefit from whatever resources go there. If the schools buy sports equipment or new textbooks, those are shared among the schools in the cluster in the same way as our active schools partnership works. One school gets one thing and another school gets another—the resources are shared. They have learned that overloading one particular school with lots of resources is not the way in which to produce a balanced education system in a developing country. It has, however, made sense for us to establish relationships between particular named schools.

Obviously, there are bad examples that we need to learn from, but we will not learn through not investing in the schools programme: we must invest more in it to ensure that people get the right information before they embark on anything. More schools in Scotland want to participate than we can cope with at the moment. We must, therefore, beef up the programme rather than say that it does not work and just forget about the good things because there have been a couple of bad examples.

**John Park:** My question is on the same topic. I know from experience that children—especially children of primary school age—learn from a change in the attitudes of adults and from increased awareness of issues such as the

situation in Malawi. That will have an impact later on, in the development of a generation of citizens who have a wider global understanding, but it is changing attitudes now in houses across the country. It is a key area of work. In the dialogue that we have had—particularly the round-table discussion—the view has emerged that awareness raising needs to be supported more. It might be time to analyse some of that activity in Scotland to see exactly what it is achieving. Do we need to analyse where we are and get evidence to support the allocation of extra resources? Is there a rationale for ensuring that wider international development issues—particularly what we are doing in Malawi—are included in the national curriculum? Has the cross-party group considered that?

11:45

**Karen Gillon:** It has not, but the answer to your two other questions is yes. I do not think that there is anything wrong with trying to get the information base and the evidence base on which to take forward a programme.

On the point about children, who are our future citizens, not buying fair-trade products is not an option for my household any more, not because of what I am involved in but because of what my two sons are taught at school. It is part of their life now. They look for the Fairtrade symbol and they buy those products.

However, the issue is also much bigger than that. How can someone go into a shop and buy a t-shirt that costs £1? What does that mean? Who produced it? How could it possibly be produced in a country 5,000 or 10,000 miles away and cost only £1? How is that sustainable, fair or just? If we are trying to build a better Scotland and a better world, then of course international development issues should be part of the national curriculum and part of what our children learn.

**Des McNulty:** Two points arise from John Park's questions that are germane to development education and apply more broadly to what we are trying to do with the international development fund.

First, we are not clear enough about what we expect for the money we put in. When the international development strategy and fund began, there was a steering group that assessed organisations' bids and recommended how the money should be spent. I am not clear about the current mechanism through which resources are allocated to projects. I have spoken to people in the development organisations—they, too, are unclear about how decisions are made. We need to sort out that basic issue of transparency.

Secondly, it is all very well to say that we want to support Malawi, or international development in general, but we have to be hard nosed about exactly what we want to achieve both there and here, and we need to link that with other things that we do. How does our international development work fit in with our education policies? In what ways does our work add to those policies? Are we clear about who is responsible for ensuring that things are joined up? At present, I do not think that we are. There is a lot of good will and a lot of good practice, but it has not been brought together in a clear framework.

We are three years into the international development strategy and we need a tighter focus on how the money is spent and what we expect to get for it. As in any other area of government, we need to ensure that we are spending money effectively. The fact that the work is a good thing to do should not mean that we suspend the normal practices for managing money and getting the best out of it.

**Alasdair Morgan:** On Karen Gillon's point about moving on, to some extent, after a while, there is clearly a philosophical argument that we could have about whether or not we should move on. I want to explore that a wee bit more because, even when we have addressed the problems that Malawi and some of the other poorest countries in the world face, and even when their economies have begun to grow, the problems will not stop—there will just be different problems. Countries such as Brazil have huge economies but also huge areas of deprivation, such as shanty towns and so on.

We can see that the issue will arise in Malawi in the future. The country is already densely populated, and it will continue to be so, particularly if we address maternal and child mortality. The birth rate will take a considerable time to fall. There is already a tendency for urban populations to increase.

Given that Malawi will have different problems to solve in 10 or 15 years' time, the question is how long we should stick in. Other issues might arise during that time because, once the country's Government structures are better developed, the relationship that its Government might wish to have with outside agencies will become different. For example, if the problems are seen more as the Government's fault, there will be a need for us to be much more sensitive. What are people's thoughts about that?

**Karen Gillon:** My personal preference is that we stay there for the long haul. I do not know whether that view is generally held, but I would prefer our involvement not to be for only the short term, although we might want to review the situation in three years. As Alasdair Morgan said, the number

of street children will grow and increased urbanisation will put greater pressure on rural areas and on those who live in the shanty towns. We have begun something in Malawi and we should stick with it. However, I appreciate that others may not share that view.

**Patricia Ferguson:** As far as I can see, a significant amount of partnership working still needs to be done between the two countries. I do not see that ending in the foreseeable future, unless we were just to withdraw, but we would need to be confident about doing that at a particular point in time. My preference is for the relationship to continue but with constant monitoring by both Governments. I am sure that there will come a point when both Governments agree that the time is right to change the relationship and bring its current format to an end. However, like Karen Gillon, I cannot see that happening very soon. It might cause more harm than good if we moved away in the next three to five years. The problems are so immense that they will take longer than that to solve. The relationship might change over time, but it needs to continue for a little while.

Before moving on to other countries, we would need to be conscious of the work that is carried out by the DFID, which has not been discussed so far. The DFID is active in many other places. One reason why it made sense for us to be involved in Malawi was that our involvement could supplement—complement is probably a better word—the work of the DFID. We would want to work with the DFID before deciding where else to get involved: such discussions would be required. I agree with Karen Gillon that the relationship needs to continue for some time.

**Des McNulty:** An interesting issue in our involvement with Malawi is the idea that we have an engaged relationship not only between Governments but below that level, between non-governmental organisations. I hope that those relationships are developing. In other African countries, development has been characterised by replication of the same model with limited variations. By and large, UK, American and Swedish development organisations do not have an example that provides a close parallel with what Scotland is trying to do in Malawi. We should follow through on Malawi to see what the advantages of that model are and whether our engagement secures added value, above what would be obtained simply by giving a development organisation £3 million to spend just as it would spend any other amount of money. The hard questions that we need to ask ourselves are whether we can make the model work and whether we can prove that it delivers more than would be the case if we invested the money in a different way. If we come up with positive answers

to those questions, that will be great because other people might want to pursue the same model. We need to allow time for that.

**Gil Paterson:** I want to get a measurement of whether we are doing it right. If we decided today that there would be no more contributions and no more engagement, would anything be left that would be sustainable and which would work as a result of what we have already done?

**Karen Gillon:** Yes. There are examples of things that would continue. Scots will continue to be involved in Malawi: they were there before we went and they will be there after we leave. However, it would destroy trust in Scotland and its Government if we said, "Thanks very much, but cheerio. We've done our bit and we're going to move on to our next pet project." That would send completely the wrong message.

**Gil Paterson:** I am not suggesting for a minute that we should do that; I am just trying to gauge whether what we are doing is effective. The long-term aim is to enable people to get on and do the job themselves, so I was looking for a measurement of our success in that regard. You said that something would be left on the ground. That suggests to me that effective work is being done. It might not be as good as we want or as much as we want, but at least we are on the right track.

**Karen Gillon:** There are projects that are coming to the end of their three-year life. Not all of them will continue to be funded by the Scottish Government, but my experience tells me that communities will continue to run a number of them. Perhaps they will not be as well resourced as they are at the moment but, given the experience that has been gained, they will continue and the principles will remain. In the cholera project, people were given goods at a subsidised rate but not for nothing, so they began to understand that they had to pay for some of what they were getting. It is not about our just coming in and giving people something for nothing, but about developing a sustainable model, whereby if we all pay a small amount, we will be able to do similar things again next year and the year after. That is a good model.

**The Convener:** Do either Patricia Ferguson or Des McNulty want to have a last word?

**Patricia Ferguson:** I have always believed that the work that we are doing should be monitored and evaluated not just by us but by the Malawians. Signs that I have seen suggest that that is the case. Where it was not, we did something about it, which is the right thing to do. What has been really interesting in recent times is that a couple of Scandinavian countries have been looking at the model and are considering adopting a similar one.

The National Assembly for Wales is also considering whether it might take on board a similar model for another country. In five or 10 years, it will be interesting to see an evaluation of whether the model has worked from our point of view and from the Malawian point of view, and whether other spin-offs have been successful.

**Des McNulty:** In the development community, there is always a tension between what might loosely be called disaster relief support and development support. Both are essential in certain circumstances. Most organisations will argue that, wherever possible, we should be moving towards development support, because we want to help people create conditions that they can recreate for themselves, whether by improving sanitation, removing the causes of disease, giving people the basis on which they can build an economically sustainable way of life, or providing something of which they are short, and which would allow them to market their products more effectively.

When I was in Ghana, which can grow fantastic amounts of rice and vegetables, I found that the Ghanaians could not sell some of the rice that they produced because of unfair competition from American rice producers. A particular problem for them was not having the machinery to polish and package the rice as their American competitors do. If they are provided with equipment and packaging materials so that they can be competitive, they will be competitive.

Our getting rid of the pressure that is caused by disease through poor sanitation would give people the opportunity to move into more economically productive activity. It is all about freeing people up from constraints that prevent them from reaching their full potential. I would like such sustainability to be in the forefront of our minds when we consider what support we seek to provide.

**The Convener:** I am afraid that we will have to move on now, since it is after 12 o'clock. I thank you all for coming along. You have made extremely useful comments and have given us the benefit of your experience. I suspend the meeting for a couple of minutes while we change over to the next set of witnesses.

12:01

*Meeting suspended.*

12:05

*On resuming—*

**The Convener:** It is five past 12, so we need to carry on with our second panel of witnesses, all of whom have a specific focus on Malawi. I welcome Colin Cameron, the honorary consul for Malawi; Ken Ross, who represents the Scotland Malawi

Partnership; Magnus MacFarlane-Barrow, who represents Scottish International Relief; and Mhairi Owens, who represents Concern Worldwide Scotland. We will go straight into questioning, and I will begin with a general but fundamental question. What does the panel think should be the aims and objectives of the Scottish Government's international development policy? I do not know who wants to start with that.

**Ken Ross (Scotland Malawi Partnership):** I am happy to start by giving the perspective of the Scotland Malawi Partnership. We represent a segment of civil society in Scotland that has very much welcomed the Malawi focus of the international development policy. That is not to say that the focus has to be permanently and exclusively on Malawi. However, we thought that that was a good place to start under the previous Government, and we welcome the current Government's commitment not to reduce the level of commitment to Malawi during the exploration of a possible widening of that commitment to other places. If the commitment is widened, we see a rationale for keeping it within the same region as Malawi, rather than ending up with a policy that is dotted around the world, which might overstretch our capacity.

The Scotland Malawi Partnership is conscious of the strength of community enthusiasm for the Malawi connection. I had a small experience of that on Sunday. Like a few of us, I suppose, I was being a good son and visiting my mother on mother's day. My two young nieces, who are 12 and 14, came in and said, "Guess what's happened to us, granny. Our school's going to have a visit from a group from Malawi and we're going to have pen pals from Malawi." We may have international development on a big scale and DFID, which has probably given excellent grants for splendid projects, but I wonder whether we would find 12 and 14-year-olds bouncing with enthusiasm as a result of that alone. We have such enthusiasm in Scotland for our Malawi connection.

The Scotland Malawi Partnership has asked—and we are grateful for the Government's support in this—"How can we harness the enthusiasm and affection that exist at community level in Scotland in order to make an impact?" I believe that the important aspect is that we are doing something different in Scotland with our vision for international development. It is not just a miniature version of what is done through the British Government; it has a different basis and a different way of working because it mobilises resources that we have in our communities. What the Government has invested has been multiplied many times by what people and organisations throughout Scotland have given freely, particularly for the Malawi connection.

**Mhairi Owens (Concern Worldwide Scotland):** From our perspective, the strategy should focus firmly on eradicating poverty. There is a great history and tradition of links between Scotland and Malawi, and the funding from the Scottish Government has enabled fantastic work to be done in Malawi. Concern Worldwide Scotland has received funding from the Scottish Government that has helped to roll out a nutrition programme in 28 of Malawi's 32 districts—it is a new way of dealing with malnutrition that has been piloted only in the past six years, in three different countries. Concern Worldwide Scotland is helping to implement the programme through an advisory service, so that it is leaving the skills with the Malawian Government, which can then take over. The programme has had a great success rate in reducing mortality by about 13 or 14 per cent in comparison with traditional feeding programmes.

Such real impact can, with concentrated and strategic application in the areas in which there are gaps, have an effect on a country that is as resource strapped as Malawi. From what I have seen in the country, there is great intelligence, will and capacity for implementing development work, but resources are restricted. A real focus on where the gaps are and on getting the money where it is needed on the ground can, with the amount of money that is available through the international development policy, make a big difference.

**Colin Cameron (Honorary Consul for Malawi):** I appreciate the opportunity to say a few words. I declare an interest on behalf of Malawi.

Ken Ross and I have been involved with Malawi for a long time, and I have set out in my submission my views on how the policy should move forward, in principle and in a little bit of detail. I believe that what is happening in the relationship between Malawi and Scotland is unique. It is very important that the relationship is sustained and carried through as it is now, because it will be a blueprint for other countries, whether they are ex-colonial partners or not, and offer a way to lift people in sub-Saharan Africa out of poverty.

The input from Scotland in monetary terms is relatively small, in comparison with the input from the World Bank, DFID, Germany and so on, but the impact on the people in Malawi—and on Scots, too—is out of all proportion to that. A relationship is developing, and the two countries are working well together. That is possible only because the Scottish contribution complements the very substantial monetary contributions from DFID, the World Bank, Japan and various agencies. It is what we are doing with the resources that we are able to galvanise from Scotland that makes the partnership unique. Without others' contributions, it would not be the



same, but with the Scottish dimension, something is happening in the relationship between Scotland and Malawi that has not been experienced before. As I have moved around Malawi—I have done so quite a lot, at times—and Scotland, visiting schools and so on that are setting up partnerships, I can see that this is unique. I sincerely hope that the new Scottish Government will allow the concept to be sustained and developed, and perhaps we can create something that is unique. There have been unique people and projects throughout Scotland's history; the relationship between Scotland and Malawi is a 21<sup>st</sup> century project in which Scotland will show the rest of the world what can be done. I firmly and genuinely believe that that will be achieved with all our help together.

12:15

**Magnus MacFarlane-Barrow (Scottish International Relief):** I agree with Mhairi Owens that the fundamental point underlying any strategy should be the eradication of extreme poverty, and it should be aimed at people living in the most extreme poverty. I would also like the focus to remain on Malawi. Although I am happy for the fund to develop and help in some of the world's other poorest countries, we have a special link with Malawi where effective work has been done over the past two or three years. I would very much like that to continue.

The fund should be able to respond to the immediate needs of the poorest people, whether in emergency situations or not. Sometimes schemes can do both at once if they are well thought through. I will give as an example our work in Malawi, which takes the form of Mary's meals—a simple school feeding project. The whole point of the project is to meet the immediate need of the hungry child by providing them with daily meals in school. It also tackles the underlying causes of poverty by getting children into school and enabling them to gain an education, which will allow for sustainable development in Malawi in the long term.

The funding that we have received from the Scottish Government has played a huge role in the growth and success of that project in Malawi. When we first received the grant just over two years ago, we were feeding about 40,000 children every day. The programme has grown to the point at which we are now feeding more than 300,000 children a day in primary schools. Our vision for Mary's meals is that no child in Malawi should have to attend primary school without anything to eat all day. Our goal is to reach every child and we think that that can happen.

The project is a good demonstration of the partnership between Scots and Malawians. The

vast majority of our work relies on our 8,000 volunteers in Malawi, who give up their time to do the daily work of cooking the meals and so on. However, they would not be able to do that work without the help of thousands of volunteers and donors here in Scotland. That is a good example of the partnership working at a level at which it meets immediate needs and tackles the underlying causes of poverty. Eradicating poverty, with the focus remaining on Malawi, should be the development fund's strategy.

**Alex Neil:** I am aware of Mary's meals and what you do throughout Malawi—it is an excellent example of what we should be doing. We all share your ambition that the primary motivation—although not the only motivation—should be the eradication of poverty in Malawi, which is on a completely different scale from even the most extreme poverty in our country.

How do we get the balance right between the remedial measures that can help people with their immediate issues, such as getting a decent meal every day, and the more medium to long-term issues, such as developing the capacity of people in Malawi to become self-sustaining as regards the provision of school meals, a health service or education? Do we have the balance right at the moment in supporting programmes that deal with immediate relief and those that are engaged in medium to long-term development, or should we put more emphasis on one over the other?

**Mhairi Owens:** It is difficult to assess that at the moment, because there has been no evaluation of overall international funding. It should be a priority of the policy to put review mechanisms in place. In working towards eliminating poverty, the policy should work with the Government of Malawi—or the Government of the country concerned—to identify the gaps in its national strategies. There are set millennium goals—you will be aware that quite a lot of people agreed on working towards them—and there are national strategies in place for different aspects of development. Scotland's international development policy must link into those, and proper assessment and evaluation should help with the balance.

**Colin Cameron:** As the involvement of Scotland and other countries in Malawi develops, the balance is coming through. There are projects that Scotland obviously could not contemplate but DFID or another agency can, perhaps with more emphasis on the longer term.

However, it is important that, at some point, we examine where our moneys—even those from Scotland—go. I feel strongly that, when a group wishes to apply for assistance from the Scottish Government, part of the criteria should be that a certain and substantial proportion of the money will be spent in Malawi. It is easy to spend it in

Scotland and I accept that it is necessary to spend some of it here but, if money is allocated to a small group in Scotland that is set up to undertake development in Malawi, a proportion of that money should be allocated to the counterpart in Malawi.

If many of the development groups in Scotland need Government assistance—and they do—how much more need is there to ensure that there is a counterpart group in Malawi to receive the money and work with the Scots in implementing their projects? That is fundamental. I could draw an analogy with the Government giving aid by way of a capital sum to build a hospital but not giving the recipient country any support for the recurrent costs that will follow on from that, which should be built in. The point that I am trying to get across is that, when we Scots are involved here and in Malawi, we should build into the money provided by the Scottish Government an element to enable the Malawians to respond as they can—if we need support here, they certainly need it a bit more there, and they do not have the same resources as we have.

**Alex Neil:** It is worth while making the point that £1 spent in Malawi will go much further than £1 spent in Scotland.

**Colin Cameron:** I accept that. It will go much, much further, but I am trying to get at principles so that other things follow. The principle is that we should build into Scottish projects in Malawi an element of money to enable implementation of the Malawian side. A good organisation in Scotland could fall on its face in Malawi because, although the people are there and can do the project, the resources to implement it are not made available. It would not be reasonable to expect that the Malawian Government will automatically equal what Scotland is doing.

**Ken Ross:** We will be living for a long time with the question of how to strike the balance. From what we see in the Scotland Malawi Partnership and in the work that our members do, it must be a both/and situation.

There is a need for immediate relief work in Malawi—would any of us want to rest while children come to school who have had nothing to eat? At the same time, we would be disappointed if some of the strands in the co-operation agreement that have been difficult to deliver on concretely, such as the governance strand and the sustainable development strand, were to fall. Those strands are building for the long term. The aim is that Malawi should be a well-governed country and that there should be increasing sustainability in its economy. That ambition in the current policy must be sustained and must receive its share of resources.

**Irene Oldfather:** I want to follow up on Mr Cameron's point about money being spent in

Malawi. You state in your submission that 80 per cent of the funds should be allocated to Malawi. Have you discussed that figure with others? Is there a lot of support for spending 80 per cent of the funds in Malawi and for ensuring that costs are met for Malawians who participate in projects?

**Colin Cameron:** Yes, there is—certainly in Malawi, obviously.

**Irene Oldfather:** I meant in Scotland.

**Colin Cameron:** Let us not forget that in Scotland, the ordinary person—the taxpayer who enables such work to go on—expects that to be the case. As I say in my submission, they are unhappy if they feel that a lot of money that is earmarked as aid for Malawi is spent on expensive air fares for people going out to visit Malawi. Scotland is devolved, and there are responsibilities that do not belong to it, but there are times when we must enter into the arena on behalf of Malawi and on behalf of Scotland.

For example, Malawians must now have visas to come to Britain—that is new. The visas are very expensive by Malawi standards, and the application forms, which are complicated, are checked pedantically by the British high commission. Applications are refused on the slightest grounds. I have been dealing with that issue for some time. In a case last week, a teacher who was funded by the Scottish Government was to come to Falkirk high school—everything was supported—but when a phone call was made from Africa to Falkirk high school to establish whether there was sponsorship for the teacher, for some reason or another the person who was involved was not available and a suitable reply was not provided. The call was not followed up, and the teacher's application was rejected. If Scottish Government money is not good enough to sponsor somebody to get a visa, I ask why not?

We should make representations to London about the fact that, believe it or not, Pretoria deals with all Malawi visas and investigations. It beggars belief that a man in Pretoria is expected to understand the difference between Nsanje and Chitipa. In the case of the teacher that I mentioned, I had to make phone calls to Pretoria and the British high commission. I had to push the British high commission to intervene and say, "Look, Scottish Government money is sponsoring the man. How can you refuse the application?" The decision was overturned, so that was okay.

I have laboured the point, but it is important that we recognise the difficulties that our counterparts in Malawi face. The teacher was coming here in response to a teacher who had gone out there. He had to travel from Bandawe to Lilongwe, and each time he did so the case was referred to Pretoria. Surely we could approach whoever is responsible

in London and ask them to adjust the system in the interests of the individuals involved and Malawi's special relationship with Scotland.

12:30

**Irene Oldfather:** You suggest in your submission that the Scottish Government should appoint a Scot to Lilongwe to represent, assist and support the multitude of Scottish interests. Have you received much support for that suggestion?

**Colin Cameron:** As you probably know, I have advocated the idea for a long time, and to me it is fundamental. The British high commission in Lilongwe can deal with DFID, Germany and the World Bank, but it is not geared up to deal with the multitude of small but important issues that arise in Malawi. The high commission has said that it cannot even scrape the top of the problems.

If we want to avoid people having to traipse to and from Lilongwe to sort out relatively small problems, the answer is to have a Scot there who is prepared to go around sorting out the problems. They could liaise with the British high commission, the Malawi Government and others, including villagers. It need not be an expensive exercise. Indeed, the amount of time, effort and money that such a person would save would make them worth their weight in gold.

As far as I understand it, such a person would not cause a problem between the British high commission, which represents the Government in London, and the Scottish Government. The person would be responsible to Edinburgh but would liaise with the British high commission. Together, they would provide a tremendous service and input to what we are trying to achieve, including the Mary's meals programme and the Scotland Malawi Partnership. We are dealing with numerous small issues, which no high commission can deal with, or exists to deal with.

**Iain Smith:** I will not go into my views on the British high commission in Sierra Leone, but there was a similar issue regarding visas for people who were fully funded to come to a project in the UK. The issues are not unique to Malawi.

I want to ask about a point that is raised in the Concern Worldwide Scotland submission, although it has been made by other organisations as well. We all agree in principle that the most effective way to raise awareness of the needs of developing countries is to allow those who need development most to speak for themselves whenever possible. My concern is how we ensure that we hear from those who need most rather than from those who shout loudest. Does the panel have any thoughts about how we ensure that we hear from those whose needs are greatest when we develop our strategy?

**Mhairi Owens:** One way to do that is by using examples or raising the standard of best practice in development NGOs. It is about assessing the design of programmes. Organisations should not go to communities without an introduction or knowledge. They should employ local staff, and there should be proper assessment procedures and community participation in the design, implementation and evaluation of programmes. There are ways of doing that. Development organisations in Scotland can share best practice, and the Network of International Development Organisations in Scotland is currently doing some work on helping to develop best practice in the sector. The way to hear from those who are most in need is to ensure that there are proper procedures and community participation.

**Magnus MacFarlane-Barrow** I agree wholeheartedly. The projects that work best are those that are instigated and owned by local communities. Through them, we hear the voices of those who carry out the projects.

**Ken Ross:** Committee members who were involved in the conference that was hosted in the Parliament a couple of years ago will remember how eloquently Malawians who came here represented their views, perspectives and aspirations. What I will say echoes in some ways what Colin Cameron has said. In the Scotland Malawi Partnership, we have become aware of an imbalance. We have benefited greatly from having an office and staff here in Scotland, through the support that we have had from the Scottish Government. We cannot overestimate the value of the co-ordination and promotion of best practice that has been achieved through the Scotland Malawi Partnership office. However, the office has no equivalent in Malawi. We have identified that as a key challenge for the future.

There is a civil society in Malawi, but it is often underresourced and there is little co-ordination. Rather than having a Scottish Government representative in Malawi, perhaps another route to explore is giving the Malawi end of the Scotland Malawi Partnership the function of ensuring that we have effective come-and-go between the two countries and the critical ability to listen to each other with understanding.

**Colin Cameron:** I will finish what Ken Ross was saying. It is important that we understand, appreciate and listen to what Malawians feel about what we are trying to do. I know only that when I go to Malawi, I always stay with Malawians, whether in villages, towns or elsewhere. Hotels are not part of the exercise. All that I am saying is that we can get a feel from people. If we sit with a family in their home at night and we just talk away, we understand their views—some are critical and some are supportive. We are trying to put across

to the Scottish Government how Malawians feel, so that both sides can be listened to and decisions can be made.

**The Convener:** I will focus on two other features of Concern Worldwide's submission. We are interested in what is happening in schools in this country. The submission states:

"uninformed awareness raising can be counterproductive and perpetuate false and negative stereotypes of North v South."

What would be good practice and bad practice in schools?

I have not seen before the suggestion in the submission that

"the Scottish Government's current Health Action Plan for Malawi focuses much on treatment with very little on prevention".

There is general discussion about whether the focus in Malawi should change slightly—the minister has said that that will happen. Do you have comments on shifting the focus onto health or other areas that would help in Malawi?

**Mhairi Owens:** I did not hear what the minister said about shifting the focus.

**The Convener:** The remark was just general, but I connected it with your comment on the health plan.

**Mhairi Owens:** The comment in our submission came directly from our field workers. Most people in Malawi live in poverty; to be comfortably off is not the norm there. The statistics show that most deaths in children under five are caused by malaria, which can be prevented quite easily. If we examine such statistics and ask how we can make a big impact with reasonably small amounts of money, we see that we can do quite a lot on prevention, not just in relation to malaria, but in relation to malnutrition, livelihood security and food security.

**The Convener:** What is your view on the point that was made about schools?

**Mhairi Owens:** We are not experts in development education, but we understand that it works best when it is embedded in the school curriculum. There is scope for development education to be included in the Scottish Government's international policy, but a lot of work on formal development education in schools has already been done. The Scottish Government could do more work on informal development education by putting out stories of good development practice—perhaps initiatives that are unique to Scotland—through the media and other forums outwith schools.

**The Convener:** The media are another interesting dimension. Would other members of

the panel like to address the two issues that were raised previously or to offer thoughts on how the media can be engaged in a positive way around this agenda and the extent to which that is already happening?

**Colin Cameron:** Given Scotland's special relationship with Malawi, it should not be frightened—that is the wrong word, but it conveys what I mean—to enter into an area in which there is real need but which is fraught with problems. At the moment, local democracy in Malawi is weak, because the arrangements for new local elections and all that goes with them have fallen way behind schedule. I do not know whether those arrangements will be in place in time for the next presidential election. There is an opportunity for Scotland to provide assistance in that area, after the matter has been discussed with the Malawian Minister of Local Government and Rural Development, who is well known here, and he has agreed that such assistance is needed. I propose that Scotland's main towns assist and work with—without dictating to—Malawi to set up a structure that will enable local government to develop. Everyone in Malawi accepts that adjustment in local government is needed, but someone must take the initiative on providing assistance. Scotland should not back off from the issue—it is fraught with problems, but the achievement would be well worth the effort.

**Ken Ross:** We must acknowledge that media coverage of the first phase of the initiative has been mixed. There have been excellent examples of fair and balanced coverage, but there have also been less inspiring media episodes. Our membership strongly affirms the policy. It is widely felt that the co-operation agreement is well constructed and offers a good programme, but there is not the same confidence that it has been well communicated in Scotland. Perhaps some of the 20 per cent of funding that would be left in Scotland under Colin Cameron's proposal should be used to meet the challenge of improving communication in the future. If we do not carry the community with us and foster confidence in the policy and its delivery, we will pay a price for that in the long term.

12:45

That ties in with a point that was made at the tail-end of the discussion with the previous witnesses. When we have asked our members what they think about the delivery of Government policy, they have wanted stronger monitoring and evaluation—not because there is suspicion that there is a lot of poor work, but because they believe that the policy should have its own robust monitoring and evaluation so that, when we face the media, put material on a website or

communicate through the partnership, people can have confidence in the high quality of the work that is being delivered with the funding that has been made available.

**Magnus MacFarlane-Barrow:** The question about the media starts with some of the issues that we have already talked about. If a strategy is in place, if we are clear about what we are trying to do in Malawi and if we have ways of measuring progress and the outcomes of funded projects, there will be lots of good news stories in which the media will be interested. In that regard, Colin Cameron made an important point about the percentage of funds that is spent in Scotland as opposed to Malawi. The media will always be interested in that, so it would be good to have a clear policy on that. I agree with Colin Cameron that a low percentage of the funds should be spent in Scotland. However, it is most important that we can clearly evaluate the projects, show what their outcomes have been and communicate that to the media.

**Iain Smith:** There is a strong implication in Concern Worldwide Scotland's written submission that the current Government health action plan for Malawi is focused too much on treatment and not enough on prevention. How should that be changed? What needs to be done to change the focus and how can that be done without unnecessary damage being caused to existing projects on the ground?

**Mhairi Owens:** That comment came directly from people in the field, who probably were not aware of the whole Scotland international development policy. They saw the health action plan. I cannot tell you how you could change the focus to prevention without causing damage to existing projects that have been funded from Scotland. I am not sure what those projects are or when they will come to an end. The sentiment behind that is that we can spend quite a lot of money on dealing with problems when the same amount of money could be spent on preventing those problems from arising in the first place. How the Scottish Government would choose to implement that and cut off the money for other projects, I do not know. I am sorry, but I cannot answer that.

**The Convener:** We have had a good range round lots of the important issues. I thank you all very much for coming to give us the benefit of your wide experience in the area.

*Meeting closed at 12:49.*



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