

Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Affairs Committee

30th Meeting (Session 5), Thursday 3 December 2020

Review of the Scottish Government's International Development Strategy

Written Submission from Scotland's International Development Alliance (SIDA)

ABOUT THE ALLIANCE

The Alliance is the membership body in Scotland for everyone committed to creating a fairer world, free from poverty, injustice and environmental threats. Our membership brings together a diverse range of over 200 international NGOs, faith-based organisations, companies, universities, charitable trusts and individuals that operate in over 100 countries.

Overview

Has the Scottish Government consulted in a meaningful way and with an appropriate range of stakeholders in Scotland and in partner countries when informing the review of its international development programme?

The Alliance welcomed this review and its broad aim to enhance Scottish Government international development programming. However, Alliance members have raised concerns that the Scottish Government did not set out a clear process for consultation and stakeholder engagement at the announcement of the review in September. Similarly, the status of the review was ambiguous in terms of not being a full consultation, yet considering higher level strategic issues of international development. This ambiguity does not help judge the proper and appropriate level of consultation and stakeholder engagement.

After the initial announcement, stakeholder engagement meetings were publicised, but it became clear that the Scottish Government intended to use existing fora, such as Cross Party Groups meetings in the Parliament, or pre-arranged roundtable meetings organised by the Alliance, as the opportunities offered to stakeholders in Scotland for engagement. This was not adequate to give all stakeholders equitable opportunities to feed in their experiences and their views to the review.

After concerns about the process were raised in a Parliamentary debate in October, the Scottish Government then announced two more workshops (one specifically for those engaging with Malawi and one for all others) which provided stakeholders with additional more useful means of hearing about the review and contributing their comments and opinions.

However, the main concern at the outset of this review, and one that still stands, is the lack of a formal avenue for stakeholders to submit written feedback to the Scottish Government. Our members have pointed out the trepidations that some organisations and individuals may feel, if only offered verbal communication. Grant-holders, for example, might feel it was counter-productive to offer any comment that could be construed as critical. The opportunity to offer anonymised written comment would have

overcome this barrier to participation. For other organisations and individuals who may have useful insights to offer, especially partners in other countries, events like those organised may not be accessible or the most appropriate way to give their views. This could be because they might wish to express views that they do not feel can be expressed in public fora, or because of digital connectivity problems or because timings of events may not have suited. It should be remembered that many small organisations in Scotland are run entirely by volunteers who may have employment or other commitments which do not allow them to join day time events advertised at short notice.

We very much welcomed the decision to hold civil society events in partner countries. This was vital to ensuring Scotland's international development is led by the communities it seeks to support. However, feedback from our members' and their principal partners showed concern that not enough notice was given to provide adequate time for civil society to engage. Furthermore, documents for these events were provided in English only, which meant the review is not fully accessible to all.

The impact of COVID-19 on digital and online working has reinforced the need to ensure equity in digital connectivity in order to break down barriers of participation and ensure those voices are heard directly by decision makers.

Overall, we think the stakeholder engagement process has been ad-hoc and lacked adequate planning to be properly open, inclusive and transparent.

Do you feel confident the review of the programme will allow for fair and efficient resources and funding allocation?

The review of the ID programme has been framed in terms of the impacts of COVID-19. While it is clear that COVID-19 will impact massively on sustainable development outcomes in low income countries for years to come, it is unclear how the review will improve the fairness and effectiveness of the allocation of funding and resources.

The current programming is widely regarded as having positive impacts across different locations in partner countries. The Alliance has consistently made the case that review should not result in the removal of current support for civil society organisations in Scotland nor in any partner country. The pre-emptive statement that the desired outcome of the review is to move funding from Scotland and into the partner countries has probably inhibited the value of the review.

The devastating and highly differentiated health and socio-economic impacts of COVID-19 emphasise the need to commit more resources to sustainable development. Re-allocation of existing resources and funding is tantamount to the proverbial re-arranging of the furniture.

The pandemic has also highlighted valuable lessons in adaptive programming to ensure that funding reaches those who need it the most. Other major donors to international development (such as Swedish SIDA and Irish Aid) have initiated increased flexibility of grant budgets to allow projects to adapt to changing need, maintain partner-led working practices and allow funding to respond quickly and

efficiently to emergencies. The Scottish Government should be encouraged to take a similar approach.

Furthermore, the Scottish Government has set out a number of draft principles that will frame the review and future programming. These have been positively received by the Alliance and our members. We see these principles as entirely coherent with the pre-existing Mission and Values explicit in the Alliance Strategy.

The draft principles have been updated in line with feedback received, and are now more in line with those of Alliance members. However, the principles are not new in term of underpinning how international development should be done. Therefore, questions remain on how useful they should be to 'future proof' the Scottish Government's approach to international development programming.

Do you feel confident the funding allocated will reach the right stakeholders in civil society directly to allow for a partner-led approach and avoid a Government to Government approach?

In the draft principles, commitments to amplify voices of people living in lower income countries and to partner-country-led development are of particular importance. Alliance member organisations already have a commitment to the localisation agenda and have been working for decades to build up the capacity of local organisations to benefit directly from international funding. Some are also signatories to the Charter for Change which is an initiative to implement practical changes to the way the humanitarian system operates to enable more locally-led responses.

From the Alliance's perspective it is clear that Scotland-based civil society organisations engaged in international development are committed to empowering their partners.

Furthermore, the role of Scottish civil society in promoting the value of needs-led international development across the world should not be under-estimated, especially when it comes to promoting active global citizenship here in Scotland. This is a critical part of building international solidarity and support for the Scottish Government's principles.

It is not clear from the review process that the Scottish Government is committed to the role of civil society in Scotland as being a valued partner of government to ensure a partner-led approach to its programming.

Taking into consideration the barriers to engagement the current pandemic is adding, do you think the timescales and scope of the review are appropriate to best include and serve the needs and capacity of stakeholders in supported projects and funding organisations?

The impact of COVID-19 is and will continue to be devastating for people and communities in low income countries around the world and so it is to be applauded that the Scottish Government is investigating at this time how to maximise the impact of its international development programme.

Longer notice should have been given ahead of the launch of the review and open invitations to all who wished to contribute from their own experience, in writing and/or in person, should have been issued. There is a body of collective knowledge in Scotland which could have better been drawn on, by phrasing the question 'how can we do better?'

Partner organisations and broader civil society in Malawi are relatively easy to contact through the Malawi and Scotland Partnership. It is not as easy in other countries, especially in a short time scale. Given more notice, and a clear set of questions to address, better use could have been made of the networks of organisations in Zambia and Rwanda who work alongside Scottish organisations in implementing Scottish Government grants.

The draft principles offered cannot be criticised in any way, particularly now that the Scottish Government has amended and added to them to reflect feedback from civil society. As they stand, they are all important and integral to good, sustainable, international development. However, no problem areas, or deficiencies, have been articulated which would help organisations and individuals in the sector envision how their work can contribute to improvements the Scottish Government seeks to achieve through its review.

'Needs-led' and 'rights-based' development have always been the only valid drivers for development actions. There are no new 'truths' to be found among the draft principles, although two areas receive heightened prominence: 'decolonisation' and inherent racism in the international development sector, and the injustices imposed by the climate crisis. Together with the imperative of gender equality, the Alliance agrees these are useful lenses through which to view the future of sustainable international development, acknowledging that each area requires broad system change across all levels of governance and economic activity if genuine change is to be achieved.

It is hoped that Scottish Government commits to further, more inclusive and deeper systemic reviews in the coming years. This review in isolation, although clearly well intentioned, could have achieved much more if better planned to be able to draw on the full breadth of perspectives, experience and information available.

The Alliance would welcome another opportunity, in the near future, to draw on our wide network of global contacts to bring thought leaders and experienced practitioners into a more wide-ranging review. It would be exciting to think of an International Development Strategy designed from the ground up with inclusive processes to connect to, and respond to, the needs of people and communities where and how they can most effectively be met.