

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 WaterAid Scotland

About WaterAid Scotland

WaterAid is a major international non-governmental organisation which promotes water, sanitation and hygiene in 28 countries in Africa, South Asia, the Pacific and the Americas. We work with governments and civil society organisations in the global south with a common goal of making clean water, decent toilets and good hygiene normal for everyone, everywhere. WaterAid was founded by the water industry in the UK in 1981, and in Scotland we are hosted at the Scottish Water offices in Stepps. We are currently implementing two projects in Rwanda and Malawi with support from the Scottish Government International Development Fund, supplemented by funding from Scottish Water employee fundraising.

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?

Yes & no. The Scottish Government has made several efforts to consult with a range of stakeholders in both Scotland and partner countries. In challenging times, a wide number of events have been utilised to gather content for the review. However, there are two outstanding issues in relation to this question, 1) lack of clarity over the review process from the outset, and 2) lack of an opportunity for written submission.

In relation to point (1), the review appears to have evolved with the times rather than being set out clearly from the beginning. When the review was announced, very few opportunities for civil society to input were advertised. More and more of these opportunities eventually emerged, which is welcome, however, this meant that organisations could not adequately prepare their contributions. Some of these opportunities were “bolt-ons” to existing events, such as the recent CPG meetings on Malawi and International Development. Moreover, some of these meetings were scheduled at relatively short notice. For example, I inputted on behalf of WaterAid to the CPG on Malawi at which the Minister attended, which was identified as part of stakeholder engagement, and which at an early stage appeared to be one of the few opportunities to input views. I rapidly sought input from my colleagues at WaterAid Malawi, having to put them under pressure to obtain their inputs given the time constraints. This was far from ideal and could have been averted by laying out a clearer process from the beginning.

In relation to point (2), it is WaterAid's view that having an open call for written submissions from organisations would have been hugely beneficial to the quality of the review. This would have allowed organisations to take time to reflect, gather evidence and agree positions. Instead, participation in the various stakeholder engagement opportunities has felt more like firefighting – quickly coming up with

contributions and reflections to share but missing that detailed organisational reflection which we otherwise could have offered. In a big, complex organisation like WaterAid with masses of experience in development, a written submission option would have allowed us to better coordinate and draw upon that experience across the world to the benefit of the review.

Ultimately, this lack of clarity may have an impact on the quality of the review, and did lead to some confusion in parts of the sector. International Development is a very small policy area in financial terms but is also highly valued publicly and crucial to the Parliament's good reputation globally. There is a valuable and experienced community of international development organisations in Scotland that could have been harnessed better in this review.

It is worth noting that this review has obviously been undertaken in difficult circumstances and has clearly been a lot of work for those involved. It is also important to note that the team has adapted to requests from civil society for more opportunity to feed in throughout the review period – which is welcomed. This is a crucial topic for review and of great interest to the sector. Moving forward from the review, it will be important to find more opportunities for a “Team Scotland” approach between civil society and government to tackle the issues facing international development today.

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

The premise and principles of the review are important and have been broadly welcomed by civil society organisations in Scotland. There has been openness from officials to review the principles, and subsequent amendments have been made, which is also welcome. To ensure that these principles are applied thoroughly, and a positive outcome is achieved with regards to the fair allocation of resources, the following must be considered:

- 1) **Division of roles:** in WaterAid for example, our programmes are managed by programme staff in country, though we also have a Scottish-based partnerships manager who liaises with the Scottish Government and acts as the bridge between project funders and project implementers. We find this to be an effective model that is not hierarchical. Our implementing colleagues in partner countries rely on us to advise on the expectations and requirements of the Scottish Government, we rely on them for delivering quality programmes, and we work together on project development. It is possible to be “partner-led” with reasonable balance of roles between two countries. This should be taken into consideration by the review.
- 2) **Harness experience of NGOs:** international development organisations in Scotland have extensive experience that can be effectively utilised by government through collaborative approaches. We have seen this type of co-production frequently in the past, for example around safeguarding, and this can be replicated through sharing what organisations are doing to deal with racism and coloniality in their respective organisations. Organisations like

WaterAid and others have extremely well-developed plans in this area that we would be keen to share. It is important to acknowledge on the principle of “white-gaze” that we are all partly complicit, and both government and civil society (here and in our partner countries) can come together to address these important issues. Achieving positive outcomes from the review requires such an approach.

- 3) **Resources in Scotland are important:** many of the challenges to achieving global sustainable development exist in the policy sphere and in quality improvement – not only project delivery. Scotland’s contribution to development ought to be considered in the round by the review, including exploration of how Scotland’s unique contribution can be harnessed to have a positive effect globally. An effective international development sector is important to Scotland’s overall contribution, and it is important that the application of the principles does not only focus on project implementation.
- 4) **Effectiveness multipliers:** it is important that the Scottish Government’s contribution to development is additional to that of the UK Government (though note that Scotland’s contribution **is** included in the UK’s now 0.5% spending). To harness its financial contribution, investment in networks can play a multiplier role in terms of impact. Moreover, by investing in capacity building initiatives which harness respective expertise in Scotland (e.g. on water or renewable energy) and its partner countries, impacts can be maximised. This must be taken into consideration when making decisions on the allocation of funding.

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?

In general, what efforts have been made in this area have been welcome. The team at the Scottish Government has clearly worked very hard on engagement, and roundtables in partner countries have been very warmly received by WaterAid in-country teams. However, if the schedule of events was pre-determined more effectively and advertised at an early stage, and if it included opportunity for a formal written submission, the quality of inputs from the sector would have been of a higher quality.