



OFFICIAL REPORT
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Affairs Committee

Thursday 3 December 2020

Session 5



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CULTURE, TOURISM, EUROPE AND EXTERNAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE
20th Meeting 2020, Session 5

CONVENER

*Joan McAlpine (South Scotland) (SNP)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Annabelle Ewing (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)

*Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP)

*Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green)

Dean Lockhart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

*Oliver Mundell (Dumfriesshire) (Con)

*Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)

Beatrice Wishart (Shetland Islands) (LD)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING ALSO PARTICIPATED:

Jenny Gilruth (Minister for Europe and International Development)

Estelle Jones (Scottish Government)

Claire Tynte-Irvine (Scottish Government)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Stephen Herbert

LOCATION

Virtual Committee

Scottish Parliament

Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Affairs Committee

Thursday 3 December 2020

[The Convener opened the meeting at 09:30]

International Development

The Convener (Joan McAlpine): Good morning. I welcome everyone to the 30th meeting in 2020 of the Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Affairs Committee. We have received apologies from Annabelle Ewing MSP, Beatrice Wishart MSP and Dean Lockhart MSP.

The first item on the agenda is evidence on the review of the Scottish Government's international development programme. I welcome to the meeting the Minister for Europe and International Development, Jenny Gilruth; Claire Tynte-Irvine, the deputy director of the international division of the Scottish Government; and Estelle Jones, deputy team lead in international development at the Scottish Government.

Before we move to questions, I invite the minister to make a brief opening statement of no more than three minutes.

The Minister for Europe and International Development (Jenny Gilruth): Good morning. I thank the committee for inviting me to give evidence on the Scottish Government's international development review.

As you all know, Covid-19 has changed the world. It is the reason why I am not with members physically in a committee room today. For the world's poorest, it has made a bad situation worse. Just this week, the United Nations reported:

"For the first time since the 1990s, extreme poverty is going to increase, life expectancy will fall, the annual death toll from HIV, tuberculosis and malaria is set to double."

It said:

"We fear a near doubling in the number of people facing starvation."

It is the economic fallout that Covid has created rather than the pandemic that is having the biggest impact on the people who live in the world's poorest countries.

As I have made clear from the outset, the review is not a strategic review of the type that was initiated in 2016; rather, it is a refocusing of our strategy that has been necessitated by Covid-19. The review has also been an opportunity to make sure that what we do in Scotland has the best

impact in our partner countries and that we listen to the needs of our partner countries. I have greatly appreciated that, given the current travel restrictions.

The review has offered a chance to consider the issue of the white gaze in the international development sector in the light of the Black Lives Matter movement. I was really heartened to hear the reflections of Peter Chapman MSP during our debate in the chamber in October. He said:

"the term 'white gaze' was a new one to me, but I now know and understand what it means, and I agree that it is a powerful phrase."—[*Official Report*, 6 October 2020; c 56.]

I was struck by Humza Yousaf's call for change to the Scottish justice system, and I was equally affected by the viewpoint of an African academic in one of the round-table sessions that we held earlier this year. That academic told me:

"Black Lives Matter in America is not the same as in Africa. But if you come to my country and you put a white person in charge of a programme—when I could do that job, when I know my local community—that's what Black Lives Matter means to me. That is white privilege."

Those issues are being raised and discussed by people who live in our partner countries. However, we also need to ask the Scottish sector what actions it will take to challenge systemic racism. That duty also falls on the Government.

I say all that in full cognisance of my own privilege as a white minister in a majority white Parliament speaking this morning to an all-white committee about development, largely in Africa. We should all check our privilege.

I do not expect immediate solutions to such a complex issue or things to change overnight, and I do not have all the answers. However, I do know that we have a lot of work to do and that the review is a trigger point in starting that journey.

One issue on which I would be keen to hear members' views is the current balance of spend in Scotland. We spend more of our international development fund in Scotland than we do in Zambia. I question—as I hope committee members do—whether that is right, and I ask what more can we do to ensure that our funding is targeted properly.

Running a consultation of any form during a global pandemic has not been without its challenges. Technology can be unreliable, but, for the most part, video calls have been an invaluable way of speaking directly about the review to our partner countries and our partners in Scotland. We have learned from the process and have adapted the draft principles as we have progressed. I hope that the dialogue with the sector will continue. As the minister with responsibility, I am committed to that.

I am also pragmatic, so I want to assure our core funded bodies—the Malawi Scotland Partnership, the Scottish Fair Trade Forum, the Scotland Malawi Partnership and Scotland’s International Development Alliance—that their funding envelope will not be reduced as a result of the review. That assurance stands for the current parliamentary session and it will, of course, be for any new Parliament to look at it afresh.

I am well aware of the huge contribution and value of our core funded bodies to our unique Scottish offer. As long as I am the minister, I will continue to involve their expertise in our international development programme.

I am committed to working with our core funded bodies and the other organisations that we fund to realign their work in the light of our principles and thematic areas to better serve our partner countries. That is what the review is about, but it is also pragmatic to recognise the limitations of a truncated review. A number of members highlighted that as a key theme in our debate in October.

This year marks 15 years since the Scottish Government’s international development programme began its life, and the fund has grown to include Pakistan, Zambia, Rwanda and, of course, Malawi, which was there from the start. The budget has grown at an equal rate and is now worth £10 million.

That offer has always benefited from strong cross-party support, as we heard in the debate in October, and I am keen to harness that support as we begin to conclude the review and progress accordingly.

As I have also previously said to Parliament—I will say it again today—I am keen that we hear the wake-up call that Covid has given us all and make the right and wise choices for the future of Scotland’s international development programme, while always maintaining an approach that is in tune with our values of compassion, solidarity and internationalism.

The Convener: Thank you for that, minister, and thank you for coming to speak to us today.

Some of the submissions that we have received from stakeholders are critical of the Government’s approach to the consultation. You say in your letter to the committee—you have repeated it today—that you are undertaking the review in the context of Black Lives Matter and the importance of tackling the white gaze, which is absolutely commendable. However, I thought that the understanding of the white gaze was well established in the international development community. When I read the submissions from stakeholders, they confirmed that they were very

much aware of that. The Scottish Catholic International Aid Fund’s submission points out that “Our community-led approach means the projects we support are designed by the communities that we work with”

and that it “works directly” with “NGOs in-country”. SCIAF says that, by ensuring

“community ownership, projects are sustainable and create lasting change. Such an approach acknowledges the historical power imbalances of white privilege”.

SCIAF felt that the Scottish Government was ignoring that work and was confused about what it is supposed to change, given that it has been tackling the white gaze for a long time. That feeling was also reflected in the submissions from other international development partners.

Jenny Gilruth: The first issue that you raised was about the impetus for the review, and you were correct to say that the Black Lives Matter movement has been a pivotal part of that process. However, the driver for change was Covid-19. Going back to the beginning of that process, the pandemic has meant that a lot of the projects that we currently fund had to change their emphasis because of social distancing and the things that Covid has necessitated—the changes that we are all experiencing here are happening in our partner countries. Therefore, a lot of what we were doing at the start was asking our programmes to refocus in the light of Covid.

I have read all the submissions, and there are criticisms of the way in which we have consulted. I accept, in part, some of those criticisms. Naturally, some of those issues arise because we are carrying out a review during a pandemic, and that has not been without its challenges.

However, on the substantive point about the white gaze, I take on board SCIAF’s point that it is well understood by the sector, but there is still an ask of the international development community more broadly. In the debate in October, I referenced an article from *The New Humanitarian* that sets out key tests for the sector. One of those looks at how organisations that are based in developed countries such as Scotland seek to challenge the white gaze within their organisations. There is a huge ask for the sector in Scotland with regard to that.

On how our partner countries experience the Black Lives Matter movement, one of the points that was made previously was that we cannot take a movement that grew up on the streets of America and translate that into how people who live in our partner countries experience racism. That is true but, throughout the conversations that I have had with those who live in our partner countries and those who are meant to benefit from the funding, people have cited examples of times

when they felt that their voices had not been heard, when race could have been a factor.

I do not think it is fair to say that that does not happen in the sector. I was keen to use the review to listen to those who live in our partner countries and to get their voices on the record. That can sometimes be challenging, particularly at the moment, when I cannot travel. We have tried to do that as best we can by using technology such as the platform that we are using today. That has limitations, which is why I have been pragmatic about where we can go with the review. It has been a useful process. As I said in my opening remarks, this is the start of a journey and I want the conversation with the sector to continue. I am encouraged by what I have heard.

I do not accept that there is no race issue with development in Africa. Many academics have published articles about that, and most groups in the sector largely accept that they have a role to play. In some of my conversations with core bodies, they have taken the issue seriously and have reflected on what it means for them as core funded organisations and what more they could do to play a part in tackling systemic racism. We know that that exists in Scotland and, in different ways, in our partner countries.

The Convener: I was not saying that systemic racism does not exist in the international development sector, and I do not think that the submissions were saying that either. They were saying that there was an awareness of that before—for example, from events in America—and that it has been a long-standing issue in international development. SCIAF and others have said that their approach is not to work directly themselves but to work with in-country NGOs. That is how they have tried to tackle the problem.

There has been some criticism of the review's approach to engagement with people in the partner countries. You said that you are engaging with Governments, which is fine as far as it goes, but it is not necessarily the best way to understand what is happening and what the priorities are for the poorest regions of those partner countries. One criticism in some of the submissions is that the consultation did not really include civil society. You referred to that in your opening remarks when you spoke about the pandemic, but there were criticisms of the round-table meetings, where it was difficult for people to be included and to have their say. Documents were provided only in English. That could exacerbate the white gaze approach that we are trying to combat.

Jenny Gilruth: I will take that point on board.

Civil society groups were involved in the review from the outset. It was, and it remains, my intention to discuss the review with the

Governments of our partner countries. I mentioned that in the debate in October. Civil society was engaged from the start of the consultation process.

I will reflect on some of the challenges that we faced in carrying out a consultation during a pandemic. In some of our partner countries, access to technology such as wi-fi or a laptop is not great. We must work with people to ensure that they are available. That does not happen quickly. I set out the clear reasons for doing the review in a quick and truncated way, but I recognise the limitations. Covid means that we must act as quickly as possible, but there are sometimes technical issues.

The people we are dealing with are not next door; there are geographical challenges. In the main, the consultation was done well, but I recognise the criticism in one submission, which says that our principles were available only in English. That is a fair criticism. I was not aware of that until I read the submission before this meeting. I am disappointed to hear that, and we will reflect on it and improve it for next time.

There were a couple of other criticisms that I do not accept. One organisation criticised the fact that their academic was not invited to the academic round table. I do not see that as a fair critique. However, in general, the round tables were a helpful way of getting a broader view.

You mentioned civil society. Civil society groups have been a driving force throughout the review, as has listening to the experience of people on the ground in our partner countries. From my perspective, the discussions are about listening to the lived experience of those in our partner countries, hearing about their experience of the fund and understanding what our themes for international development should be. As the minister, I felt that they were a fantastic opportunity to speak directly to those who attended while we were not able to travel.

09:45

Estelle Jones (Scottish Government): We have a list of a number of civil society events that were held in our partner countries. We have had round tables with members of Malawian, Rwandan and Zambian civil society. We have actually had two events with civil society members. We do not have exact attendance figures to hand, but we can certainly get those to the committee. The Malawian event was particularly well attended. Both events were well attended by a range of representatives from across Malawian civil society.

The Convener: The Scotland Malawi Partnership acknowledges that you admit that the

initial consultation was not great and that you changed your approach.

Jenny Gilruth: I have seen that reference from the Scotland Malawi Partnership. I am not necessarily sure that we have changed our approach, but Claire Tynte-Irvine might want to come in on that point.

However, I certainly reflected on some of the points that were made by members during the debate that took place back in October, as well as on the partnership's focus on civil society. That is potentially what the partnership was referencing. I am not sure that there has been a huge shift in our focus since the announcement in September.

Claire Tynte-Irvine (Scottish Government): I can say a bit more. When we were thinking about how to structure the process, we always planned to consult civil society. In fact, that was fundamental to our approach.

We started that process following the minister's appearance during the debate in Parliament, because we felt that cross-party support for this approach is so important that it was inappropriate to consult civil society earlier in the process.

We have listed the various events that the minister has participated in with civil society on our website. The events basically follow on from that debate.

As the minister said, we had only a few months to run this. We have had a period of intense engagement with civil society, and we do not see that as a change in our approach; that was always our plan. However, it certainly began from October.

Therefore, if the SMP has said that it did not hear much to start with, I would say that we wrote to them all as soon as the review was announced in the programme for government, to set out our plans. The events took place mostly in October and November.

The Convener: In its written submission, SCIAF said:

"We urge the Scottish Government to seek written consultation from civil society in order to fully capture the experience and best practice that already exists."

Are you going to seek written submissions from civil society in those countries?

Jenny Gilruth: Not at this time. The very clear reason why we did not seek written consultation is that, if we did, it would widen the scope of the review.

In my opening remarks, I referenced this as being a refresh of our strategy. We are fundamentally not aiming to unpick our strategy. We had a very full consultation in 2016; I think that

it took more than nine months in total—my officials will correct me if I am wrong about that—to gather all the views. This is a short refresh of our strategy.

I have said before—and I say it again—that I do not think that this is necessarily the end point. We have certainly learned things from the process. I am not sure how many other Government consultations have been carried out during the pandemic. However, I am sure that we are all learning about how we interact with each other as a result of Covid.

We did not take written evidence, due to the timescales attached to this. It is important to listen to the views of our partner countries. However, sometimes seeking written evidence in Scotland can be a barrier to their participation. Therefore, to some extent, the round tables allow for a wider range of views to be heard. This was not a wide strategic review; it was a refresh. That is why we chose not to seek written evidence at this time.

The Convener: SCIAF also made the point—as you have—that round tables often cannot reach people who face technological barriers.

My last question is about another point that was made by the Scotland Malawi Partnership that struck me, which is about the partnership between Scottish organisations. You mentioned the amount of money that was spent in Scotland. Sadly, I am old enough to remember going on the make poverty history marches. We had some involvement in the G8 summit, which kicked off some of the international development work in Scotland. My recollection is that the approach then—which has continued and developed—was to ensure that it really was a partnership. Part of that was about education in Scotland, and part was about forming equal partnerships between Scottish and Malawian organisations so that we did not get the white gaze approach—to go back to that phrase—whereby we were somehow giving something; rather, it was about an equal partnership from which we also had a lot to learn.

There seems to be a concern in the Malawi Scotland Partnership that we could move away from that approach and become—to use its phrase—a “mini DFID”, which it thinks would be a step back and a move away from the good and progressive way in which Scotland has approached these matters.

Jenny Gilruth: In reference to the make poverty history march, I am not that young, so I remember it as well. I was also there in 2005.

The convener is absolutely right in saying that we have a unique partnership in Scotland. Through this review, I am absolutely committed to maintaining that partnership approach, which is a real strength of the Scottish offer that we have

always had. I hope that that allays the fears that the convener raised.

The convener also referenced education, which we may yet come on to in future questions. Nonetheless, I note my background as a modern studies teacher and that I feel very passionately about education on global citizenship. The Scottish curriculum already teaches about some of the issues that we deal with through our international offer in Government—there is a natural link there.

The convener made the point about feeling that we are partners and that it is not about people in one country having expertise and all the answers. That point was also well made to me in discussion of the draft principles—which I am sure that we will come on to—with our partner countries and, in fact, civil society in Scotland, who criticised the phraseology of “Scottish expertise” that we had used around one of the principles. We reflected on that and said, “Hang on. It is not only about Scottish expertise. We do not have the answers to everything in Scotland, and you are absolutely right to say that it has to be a partnership approach whereby we learn from each other and share examples.” I do not want to move away from the partnership approach that we have in Scotland, because it is a real strength of our international development offer.

The Convener: That is very encouraging.

Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): Good morning. The convener has covered a number of issues that are of concern to the committee. I will raise two issues. One is that there is a degree of confusion around what the review is about. When the adviser started speaking, she was saying “consultation”, but she then changed that word to “review”. The Government has called it a “refresh”. The purpose of the review is unclear.

The convener also raised the issue of written submissions. The fact that the Government has gone down the route of conversations makes it very difficult for the Parliament or the committee to scrutinise how decisions are being made. Issues of transparency are raised by the question of whether there is a record of those conversations, some of which—as I found out—took place under Chatham house rules.

Issues have also been raised around the ability of everybody to participate. As the convener said, we have evidence of concerns that there has not been sufficient participation in the partner countries, given the number of issues, which the minister herself has recognised.

Jenny Gilruth: In answer to Claire Baker’s first question, it is a review of our international development fund. As I have set out today, I would describe it as, in essence, a refresh. I recognise

that it is not strategic in that we are seeking not to unpick the good work that already exists in the sector but to make sure that it is fit for purpose.

In the debate in October, the Parliament recognised not only that Covid necessitates change but that global movements are happening. We have already spoken about the white gaze in the sector. There is an opportunity for the sector to refresh, to reflect on some of the challenges and to decide whether, in the light of those challenges, it needs to change some of its practices.

On the point about written submissions, which was also addressed by the convener, again I say that it was not a formal consultation; it was a refresh of our strategy. There are very good reasons why we did not seek written evidence.

Claire Baker spoke about Chatham house rules, but we need to take cognisance of the fact that people in our partner countries who benefit in some way from international development funding from Scotland may not feel comfortable about sharing their views in a space in which they know everything is being written down and addressed, meaning that people may come back later and push them on something. We were sometimes able to have quite open and honest conversations with people because they felt that it was a conversation.

I take the point about transparency, but it is a refresh. It is about listening to the views of the people who live in some of the poorest countries in the world and making sure that what we do in Scotland is fit for purpose and seeks, wherever possible, to improve their lives.

We could have had a formal consultation—I am sure that my officials would have a view on that. I was not around in 2016, which was when the most recent formal consultation was undertaken, for which a substantial number of pieces of written evidence were submitted.

We are not fundamentally seeking to unpick our strategy in Scotland at this time. There are real strengths in Scotland’s offer—I think that we can all agree about that; we certainly did in the debate. It is not about throwing the baby out with the bath water; it is about saying, “Hang on a second. Covid changes things. Let’s look at what we currently offer. Is it fit for purpose?”

One of the things that we have not yet referenced today is that, before I was appointed, in February, a number of smaller reviews had already been undertaken—for example, on the small grants programme, on the Scottish Fair Trade Forum and on the humanitarian emergency fund. Those three reviews were sitting with actions to be taken. As part of the refresh, I am looking at those reviews as well, but the important point is that the refresh did not come from nowhere;

something was already sitting there to be actioned.

Covid makes the need for change all the more immediate. Actions will arise from the refresh, but, in answer to Claire Baker's question, I will reflect on and understand the limitations on making real and substantial change, given that the review has been truncated and has been conducted largely via such technology as we are using for this meeting. I recognise the limitations of that, which Claire Baker rightly discussed. Lack of access to the internet, wi-fi, laptops and other equipment can be hugely limiting—we know that in Scotland, and it is the same in our partner countries. I accept that point.

Claire Baker: Thank you. On the purpose of the review, the Scottish Government has suggested that the review is being held

“with a resulting refresh of our strategy in mind”.

What does that mean? You have mentioned outcomes. Will the review have outcomes, and what areas do you intend those to address? The sector is not entirely clear on that. Furthermore, what does it mean to have a refreshed strategy “in mind”? I do not understand by what mechanism the review will influence the strategy. Is the intention that it will?

Jenny Gilruth: It is my intention that we will look at the evidence that we have gathered through the review, I will bring back to Parliament the findings from that process and I will listen to the views of Parliament on it. As I set out in my opening statement, I am pretty pragmatic about what we can do on the back of the review. For me, it was about a conversation with the sector; however, I think that we will be able to make some changes as a result of it. I reference, for example, the three mini reviews—so to speak—that had already been conducted before my time: the small grants review, the HEF review and the Scottish Fair Trade Forum review. Those three reviews were already sitting there, with action points.

However, I do not want to prejudge where the refresh takes us. I am not going to set out my stall, because the review is on-going. However, it is absolutely my intention to bring it back to Parliament, in order to get that cross-party support for whatever we do next. I continue to think that there is strong cross-party support for our offer in Scotland. We heard that in the debate in October. I do not want to prejudge that moment, if that makes sense.

10:00

Claire Baker: I think that everybody agrees about the draft principles. There has been no criticism of, or disagreement on, what has been

set out there. In the evidence that it has submitted to us, Scotland's International Development Alliance has said that

“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.”

That is where the confusion comes from. The minister has raised some important points in relation to her concerns about how the sector operates. I think that people in the sector feel that the relevant areas and ways in which they are carrying out their work have not really been articulated or identified. There is broad discussion around areas such as white privilege, but it has not been highlighted exactly where the problems reflecting that concern are in the Scottish sector and in how it is organised.

Jenny Gilruth: Going back to your original point regarding the principles, although they were all accepted by the sector, they were and remain draft principles, and we made a number of changes to them as we carried out the review.

This discussion cannot be about just the sector in Scotland; we have to listen to the needs of our partner countries. We heard that point being made in the debate in October. I will work with our core funded bodies—I recognise their expertise—but it cannot be about just their voices; it must also be about the people we are ultimately trying to help in our partner countries. Otherwise, what is the point of an international development offer in Scotland?

We made a number of changes to the principles. In my response to the convener, I referred to expertise, which I think is point 7 in the principles. We looked to add a principle on accountability and transparency, as well as a reference to the sustainable development goals. Claire Baker is correct in saying that there is an understanding of the white gaze and of what Black Lives Matter means in the sector, and the principles as they stood—although they might have been accepted—were improved through conversations with the sector. That relates not just to the sector in Scotland, however.

I understand the point that you have made regarding the evidence from Scotland's International Development Alliance. All I would say is that everyone can learn to do things better. We should not be standing still in how we develop or deliver our international offer in Scotland. Covid means that we have to pause and reflect, and we should all be part of that. We should not be saying that we have all the answers or that we do all of this really well anyway.

You asked what the sector should be doing about systemic racism. Systemic racism is not just

about the international development sector; it cuts across all elements of Government, and we know that it is a huge issue in Scotland. I have had some really useful discussions with our core funded bodies about the types of things that they might be able to do themselves to lead the way on the issue. I think that we have a good understanding in the sector of what racism and systemic racism mean in this field.

You are right to mention that we are now considering the practical steps that people can take. I do not want to prejudge where the refresh will go next, and I do not necessarily want to dictate to our core funded bodies, as it is for them to come up with solutions. I am aware, from conversations with our core funded bodies, that they are already coming up with solutions and that they are considering the issues seriously.

I am sorry to use a teaching phrase, but I think that there is a learning journey to go on. I do not necessarily accept the idea that, as we are already looking at the issue, the refresh is not for us. I am not sure that I would agree with that. Looking at the draft principles and the process that we have gone through, and given that there have been so many changes to them, I think that the principles have strengthened what we are trying to do through the refresh.

Claire Baker: In the debate in October, I raised some concerns about the short timescale for the review. Is it still the intention that the review will be concluded by the end of the year?

You have suggested that, when the review concludes, you will bring its outcome to the Parliament. Will all of that happen this year, or will it roll into next year? I am not sure what the review will produce. Will it produce, "This is what we are going to do," or will it produce, "This is what we might do—what do you think?" What is the timescale for that? It would seem difficult to get it concluded by the end of the year.

Jenny Gilruth: As the minister with responsibility, I still have a number of events to hold as part of the refresh. Once those have been held, I intend to pull together all the evidence that we have gathered and to report to the Parliament on what I and the Government see as the next steps. However, I will work with the Parliament and members on that. I think that Claire Baker is trying to get me to say, "This is what we're going to do," but I am not there yet. For example, conversations with the partner Governments are hugely important, and we are still working through that part of the refresh.

On timescales, it is still my intention to bring the review to a close at the end of the year. I am looking to my officials with regard to whether we yet have a timescale for coming back to the

Parliament with a statement or a debate. To my knowledge, we do not have a date for that yet. My officials might want to say something more specific about that.

Estelle Jones: We are still exploring dates, but we are looking at January for some of the initial responses to the review.

In response to another point, I will give some of the figures for attendance at the civil society events, because I think that people are interested in that. More than 55 people attended the Malawi events, which were arranged for us by the Malawi Scotland Partnership, which is one of our core-funded partner organisations in Malawi. I want to say a big thank you to the partnership for that. For Zambia, we had 22 representatives from civil society, and we had 17 for Rwanda. Given the technical barriers, we requested that all our partner organisations—the alliance and the Malawi Scotland Partnership—let their members know that anyone who had technical issues or who was unable to attend could submit written responses to be read out at the round-table meetings. We thereby pre-empted some of the technical challenges so that people had the opportunity to feed in to those meetings.

The Convener: Ross Greer is next.

Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green): Minister, I will follow up some of the answers that you gave to the convener about written submissions and how partners were able to respond to the consultation. You said that written submissions would broaden the scope of the review, but, surely, if anyone were to submit something in writing that was outwith the scope that you have defined, you could simply disregard that part of their submission and focus on what remained. You also said that seeking written evidence from people in Scotland could create a barrier to those in partner countries. My immediate thought was that you would surely get around that if written evidence was requested from those in partner countries.

I am sure that you have read Tearfund's submission to the committee, in which it highlights concerns about the cultural barriers but also issues to do with individual personalities that round-table events can create because people might not feel that they can be as direct and frank in such a setting as they might be in written communication.

Could you respond directly to Tearfund's concern and address my points about why written submissions were creating the barriers that you mentioned?

Jenny Gilruth: In answer to your first point about written submissions, I go back to my opening statement, in which I laid out that it is not

a full strategic review. Officials will correct me if I am wrong, but the strategic review that we undertook in 2016 took nine months. As a result of Covid, we need to move quickly—I hope, and I think, that we all accept that. I take your point that we could create a focus in written submissions through, for example, the questions that we asked and then by discounting evidence that was outwith that scope. However, I did not want to be faced with a deluge of evidence from Scottish organisations telling me, “This is what we do and nothing needs to change.” There is an issue for me, as the minister, which I highlighted in my opening statement, in the fact that we spend more in Scotland than we do in Zambia—*[Inaudible.]*

Ross Greer: I think that we have lost our connection to the minister.

The Convener: We do not seem to have the minister, and she does not seem to be coming back. I will suspend the meeting briefly until we can get the minister’s connection back.

10:09

Meeting suspended.

10:17

On resuming—

The Convener: Welcome back to the committee. We had to suspend the meeting because of technical problems, but I am pleased to say that we can now continue, as we have been reconnected to the minister, Jenny Gilruth. Ross Greer was in the middle of questioning the minister, and I ask him to resume.

Ross Greer: The minister was part of the way through covering the points that I raised in my question. I am sure that you do not want to repeat everything that you said, minister, but perhaps you could summarise your answer for anyone who has just joined us. I asked about the issues around submissions. Specifically, I asked whether the minister would address Tearfund Scotland’s concern that the round-table format creates cultural barriers for some people, who may find a written submission or a different form of direct engagement an easier way to be honest and direct about their views.

Jenny Gilruth: I apologise for the connection problems. My camera was not working for some reason, but I am back now. It is interesting that we are talking about technology issues in our partner countries when I have had technology issues in Fife this morning.

With regard to Ross Greer’s question on written submissions, the review was—as I set out—not a strategic review but a refresh. If we had been

undertaking a full strategic review, we would absolutely have welcomed written submissions.

The formal consultation that was undertaken in 2016 took nine months—Claire Tynte-Irvine or Estelle Jones can correct me if I am wrong on that—so there was a real impetus for change. As I highlighted in my opening statement, some of the changes that we are seeking to bring about through the refresh are not necessarily huge. I recognise the challenges in making any substantial changes to what we already offer in Scotland in the light of carrying out a review during a pandemic—we need to be honest about that.

In his original question, Ross Greer highlighted the experience of our partner countries. I spoke about their potentially being unable to feed into a written consultation, as there could be barriers to that. On his substantive point about cultural barriers, I found that, in our conversations with partner countries, the people who live there were frank with me and pretty up front. I recognise that people in those meetings may have felt that they could not be up front with me or provide honest feedback, but there will always be limitations in any form of consultation. For example, there will be limitations in giving written evidence for people who would rather give oral evidence via videolink, or vice versa if people would rather set out their stall in writing. Not every form of consultation will be open to everyone.

I very much recognise that the consultation had its challenges, not least because of the pandemic and because we are very far away from our partner countries. I have not yet been able to travel to any of them to meet the people who experience the effects of our international development fund on the ground. That aspect is a hugely important part of my role and I look forward to undertaking it as and when I am able to do so.

Ross Greer: I take your point that any form of consultation has accessibility barriers. That is why a broad mix of consultation methods is useful and is advisable even in a small exercise.

I will move on to a question that you raised with the committee in your opening statement. You mentioned the balance of spend, and you used the example that we spend more in Scotland than we do in Zambia, which is one of our primary partner countries. However, if the Government gives money to an organisation such as SCIAF, it usually hands that money straight on to a local partner in its network in Zambia or somewhere else. It would not necessarily be accurate, therefore, to count that as Scottish rather than Zambian spend.

To use a slightly different example, I note that the Scotland Malawi Partnership makes the point that every pound that is spent by the Government

in Scotland on activities that are related to the partnership can leverage about £200 from Scottish civic society that goes directly towards partners in Malawi.

How does the Scottish Government calculate spend, including where spend is happening and where value is being generated? If the committee has some clarity on that, we might be able to feed back our views on the balance of spend.

Jenny Gilruth: How we measure spend is quite a granular-level question, so I will pass it over to my officials, if you do not mind.

Estelle Jones: The analysis that was undertaken on spend takes that into account. The analysis of spend in Scotland looks at some of the administration costs that Scottish non-governmental organisations and civic society organisations take on to manage those projects. The spend is what is actually spent in supporting the Scottish side of an intervention, and then administration and any other associated costs for running the Scottish side of those projects is factored in.

Ross Greer: If you give money to SCIAF, for example, in a scenario in which it works with a partner from its network, the only part of that money that would be counted as Scottish spend is whatever SCIAF spends on the administration that is involved in handing it over. Is that correct?

Estelle Jones: Yes.

Ross Greer: That is grand—thank you.

My final question for the minister follows up on Claire Baker's line of questioning about what the Government regards as a success from the refresh exercise. Can you clarify how you measure success? What are the key performance indicators that relate specifically to that exercise? Obviously, the Government's overall international development strategy has KPIs associated with various aspects of it, but how do you measure whether the refresh exercise specifically has been successful?

I cannot hear the minister, I am afraid.

The Convener: We seem to have lost the minister's sound.

We still cannot hear her, I am afraid. There is a suggestion that the headphones may be disconnected.

Have we lost the minister completely now? I apologise to our MSPs, who are waiting patiently to question her. We may have to suspend again if we cannot get her back.

10:24

Meeting suspended.

10:28

On resuming—

The Convener: Welcome back to the meeting. We are having some technical problems this morning. We lost the minister's sound again temporarily, but I am pleased to say that we have it back.

We had a little bit of time in hand but, given the technical issues, I want to move on to the next questioner so that all MSPs get a chance to question the minister. I will bring Ross Greer back in at the end if there is time.

Oliver Mundell (Dumfriesshire) (Con): The Scotland Malawi Partnership has been one of the real successes of the devolution era. As a Scot, I am extremely proud of the work that the partnership does to build on the links that exist between Scotland and Malawi. However, I am slightly concerned by the comments that the minister has made a couple of times about the balance of spend. There are costs for such organisations in Scotland that establish civil links with partner or equivalent organisations in Malawi. There is an administrative cost in bringing those different groups together, and I see such spend as representing value for money. Does the minister share that view, or it is more about finding additional money to spend directly?

10:30

Jenny Gilruth: I apologise to the committee—I do not know what is going on with my connectivity this morning, but I hope that we are now back on track.

I share Oliver Mundell's view on the value of the Scotland Malawi Partnership's work. The point that I wanted to make clear about the core funded bodies is that their funding envelope is not being removed as part of the refresh and review. It is important that I am up front about that, because taking the discussion about funding off the table will be quite helpful in creating more of a dialogue about wider issues such as the white gaze and what Covid means for the bodies' work. Some of the responses reflected a concern about funding, but I hope that I have been able to alleviate some of that concern.

In relation to the balance of spend, I do not know whether my response to Ross Greer was caught by the audio—it might have cut out—but I made the point that we spend more in Scotland than we do in Zambia, so we need to look at that. It is obviously a matter for future Parliaments to make calls on future spending commitments, and I am not in a position to predict the future. We all know what will be happening in the next few months.

It is important to say that, in the current parliamentary session, the funding for the bodies that I have mentioned is protected. I very much share Oliver Mundell's view on the value of the Scotland Malawi Partnership's work. It is hugely important. There are strong historical reasons why it is important, but there are also cultural reasons that link Scotland and Malawi. In my response to the convener, I mentioned my time as a teacher, when I saw a lot of that work. It brings to life in Scottish classrooms the importance of global citizenship education, whether that is through modern studies or other subjects in the curriculum.

I very much recognise and welcome Oliver Mundell's points. I hope that I have given our core funded bodies some assurance that the refresh is not about their funding; in essence, it is about reflecting on where Covid has taken us, while taking cognisance of wider global movements and, in particular, the impact of the Black Lives Matter movement. That is a challenge for the whole international development sector. It is not a challenge that we have to try to solve only in Scotland.

I do not think that the challenge will be easy to solve, but Scotland has always been able to lead the way in international development, to some extent, through our partnership work. I would like us to champion some strong responses to the Black Lives Matter movement in the sector in Scotland. I know that not only Scotland but countries all over the world are grappling with some of the wider issues in international development.

Oliver Mundell: I appreciate that answer. I am just concerned about any suggestion that spending money on supporting organisations to promote international development is somehow money wasted, is not good value or is not something that we should do. It is clear from your answer that you are not saying that. The issue arises when that is coupled with concerns relating to such organisations being described as somehow being "vested interests" in the review process. If organisations feel that they have not been fully included as they would expect to be, it creates a concern. However, I know that you have addressed some of those points.

Jenny Gilruth: I saw the reference to "vested interests" in the SMP's submission. I am not aware that I have used that terminology with regard to the core funded bodies. I very much recognise their expertise and I do not for a second consider the spending to be wasted money. I hope that that answers your question.

Oliver Mundell: It does.

I am happy to let other members in, convener.

The Convener: Thank you, Oliver. I hope that we will have time for a few supplementary questions at the end of the session.

Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): The minister has made the point that we are looking at the arrangements that have been triggered by Covid-19. I want to ask about a few wee issues around that. One interesting little point is that David Livingstone, who is so often associated with Zambia, was a physician.

In particular, I note that countries in Europe and North America—the wealthy world—have cornered almost all the orders for Covid-19 vaccine. I am not suggesting that that lies in the Minister for Europe and International Development's portfolio of responsibilities, but I wonder whether there is a way in which we can respond to that. To some extent, people like me—older people in Scotland—are getting the jab relatively early at the expense of it being available to people in African countries, in particular. Is there anything that we can sensibly contemplate doing to make sure that they do not lose out on getting immunity in their populations from a disease that is not simply a health epidemic but something that has a substantial economic impact?

Jenny Gilruth: Thank you for the question. To come back on your point with regard to the vaccine, you are absolutely correct to say that access to the vaccine is hugely challenging for our partner countries. It is important to say that Covid has not impacted on our partner countries in the same way that it has impacted on developed countries such as Scotland. That difference should be reflected, because we need to understand why it is not affecting our partner countries in the same way. Part of the reason relates to testing and the extent to which it is being undertaken. That was a key theme in one of my most recent round tables, and the issue was raised with me by members of civil society in our partner countries, who said that testing was not happening and, when it was happening, the quality was not great, so we will certainly consider that.

The other issue is the age demographics of our partner countries. There is evidence to suggest that the reason why Covid is not yet having such a detrimental effect on our partner countries is that, in general, their people are younger in age than people in countries such as Scotland and the United Kingdom. We know that, unfortunately, people in the older population are more likely to feel the harsher effects of Covid-19.

There are those two points to take into consideration, but there is now a huge rush for countries in the global north to get access to the vaccine. We have seen it in Scotland this week with the roll-out of the vaccine, and there is a huge

challenge for our partner countries in how they access it. With regard to what we have done in Scotland, you will remember that, in the announcement of the programme for government, the First Minister committed to £2 million worth of funding, which would be ring fenced for a Covid response in our partner countries. I announced on Friday that that fund would go to UNICEF and that it would be divided equally between our partner countries. The fund will focus on a number of projects, not necessarily on the vaccine but on the health response to the pandemic. The international team has discussed how we might be able to do that. The vaccine has only recently been approved, so, when I was having some of the conversations as part of the review, because the vaccine had not yet reached its development phase, we were not yet having those types of conversations; they were more about testing and personal protective equipment.

If members would like, I can come on to examples of what we have done on that in our partner countries, but I hope that that reassures Stewart Stevenson that the issue is being looked at. His point about the rush for countries in the global north to get the vaccine was well made. We must not leave Africa behind, particularly our partner countries; we cannot afford to do that. They have already had to deal with a number of challenges in recent years and they could do without this situation. That is why we were extremely disappointed that the UK Government chose last week to walk away from the commitment to give 0.7 per cent of gross national income to overseas development aid. That is not something that we, in Scotland, support. We think that it says something about our values as a country, and I hope that most members of the committee agree that walking away from that target was not the best thing to do, particularly for the world's poorest in a global pandemic.

Stewart Stevenson: Thank you, minister. My further and, I think—*[Inaudible.]*

There has been significant technological innovation in Africa. Some of that has gone ahead of what we have done in the north, particularly in the use of person-to-person financial transactions by mobile phone. That is only one example of innovation.

Are we learning from our partners in Africa? Are we making sure that the economic benefits that derive from innovations devised in Africa are captured by local people and economies? This should not be an unequal partnership if there are opportunities to equalise it. There are some brilliant technological innovators in Africa. I have visited only four African countries, which are not the ones we work with, but I have had enlightening and exciting discussions with people there.

Jenny Gilruth: You make a good point. The idea of learning from each other was highlighted in the consultation on the draft principles. I referred to that in my response to the convener. I do not remember which number it is, but there is a principle about expertise and how we share that. Our original wording seemed to imply that we in Scotland had expertise that we could give to our partner countries, but this must be about recognising that expertise exists in those countries.

Some of the issues that Covid-19 has created for those countries are the same as those that we face in Scotland. The impact on women has been raised at many of the round-table meetings. Lockdown has made domestic abuse far more likely. We know that the same thing has happened in Scotland. There is a learning opportunity there. I am keen for the refresh to build on that so that it is not a one-way, "We give aid. Aren't we good?" scenario. There should be that partnership approach which, as the convener said, has always been a strength of Scotland's international development offer.

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): The issue of mental health is at the fore every day in Holyrood, but there is a stark contrast between that and the way in which people with mental health issues are treated in developing countries. Europe has 50 mental health workers for every 100,000 people; Africa has fewer than one per 100,000. Human Rights Watch found that, in 60 countries, from Brazil through much of Africa and into Indonesia, tens of thousands of people with mental health problems are chained up.

As part of its international development programme, will the Scottish Government consider including the funding of mental health support and the teaching of good practice to its aid provision?

Jenny Gilruth: That question is well put. I mentioned domestic abuse in my answer to Stewart Stevenson. You are correct to say that we often talk about mental health and that it affects our partner countries. The incidence of poor mental health has risen as a result of the pandemic and the lockdown. In Malawi, growing unemployment and a lack of professional support also contribute to poor mental health outcomes. As I said in my opening statement, the economic impacts of Covid are starting to have a tragic effect. In Zambia, the not-for-profit organisation Lifeline Childline is taking more calls about financial insecurity. We know about Rwandans who have been trying to follow the guidance on protecting mental health.

In Zambia, we have funded First Aid Africa. Our work with Police Scotland has supported mental health. First Aid Africa has developed a psychological first aid course to complement its

physical first aid course, working with six of Zambia's leading mental health and wellbeing organisations and taking on board guidance from the World Health Organization. It has also founded a health and wellbeing alliance to increase the impact of mental health first aid services during the pandemic.

To go back to the substantive point in Kenny Gibson's question, which is about whether we are considering mental health and will seek to fund it in future, I can assure him that we are looking at that. The virus has so many different impacts, many of which we are still learning about. We will seek to support that work. Mr Gibson is correct to say that mental health is an issue in Scotland and in our partner countries. I am committed to trying to provide that support wherever we can.

10:45

Kenneth Gibson: Thank you—I am reassured by that. I know that the third of your draft principles is to

“support advocacy for the poorest people and those in vulnerable situations”,

which clearly includes people with mental health problems. The problem is that, in many parts of the world, mental health problems are considered to be the manifestation of evil spirits, and, even if mental health professionals are available, traditional healers might be called on before they are. Given cultural sensitivities, how can good practice be encouraged? That goes back to the issue that you raised about the white gaze—it is important that such work is undertaken in the context of any traditional culture sensitivities that are encountered.

Jenny Gilruth: There are sensitive ways in which that can be addressed. A challenge for us is that we do not have staff on the ground in our partner countries, so we rely on our partners to deliver our projects and, in turn, they report back to the Scottish Government.

Your point is a good one. We have seen evidence of people with albinism being kidnapped in some of our partner countries, and there are issues around witchcraft and superstition. We must consider all those things sensitively.

It might not surprise the committee to learn that I am pretty concerned about the lives of people in lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender communities in our partner countries. I think—officials will correct me if I am wrong—that it is illegal to be LGBT in all our partner countries, and punishments go with that. How do you deal sensitively with a topic such as that? How can we be clear that we are there to help but that we recognise the cultural differences? Some of what is going on at the moment is a huge challenge,

particularly for the people in LGBT communities in our partner countries. I have addressed that with our core bodies and with the sector through our round-table conversations.

I do not necessarily have an answer for how to deal with it sensitively. However, if we do not address it, we condone it to some extent. For me, as the Minister for Europe and International Development, that is an issue. There has to be a middle ground in addressing some of the issues.

We will certainly consider Kenneth Gibson's point about funding for advocacy, particularly for people with mental health issues.

Kenneth Gibson: The LGBT issue is important. The Commonwealth Parliamentary Association has done quite a bit of work on that in some countries, particularly in Uganda, which is not one of our partner countries. It is my understanding that the reactionary views that are held in Uganda are similar to but much stronger than, those held by people in our partner countries. Will the minister work with the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association to co-ordinate activities on that?

Albinism is an important issue as well. I have met representatives of the albino community in Malawi and, over the years, I have lodged a couple of parliamentary motions on the issue. What progress is being made in that area? What work is being done with the Government of Malawi and the CPA on that? I think that Malawi is the country in which the persecution of albinos has been the most severe in recent years.

Jenny Gilruth: It certainly was before. I have seen a couple of submissions on that topic but, during my time in post, there have been no specific conversations on that with the Government of Malawi. Perhaps my officials could come in if they are aware of the historical challenges in that regard.

Claire Tynte-Irvine: I am happy to come in on that. Albinism is a long-term topic. The present and previous Governments of Malawi probably share many of our feelings on it, but it is undoubtedly a problem in communities, where people with albinism may be targeted for the perceived value of their body parts in traditional medicine. The previous Government of Malawi took a strong line on that, which brought its own challenges due to the potential application of severe penalties. We continue to address the issue.

One of the previous members of the Scottish Government's human rights defenders fellowship was an albinism activist from Malawi. Through that fellowship, we sought to build the relationship and her capacity, to provide her with respite from the pressures of campaigning in Malawi and to give

her the ability to explore what support we could offer her, her organisation and her community.

This is certainly an on-going area of focus. We will investigate the links with the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association. Its work is important and welcome, so we will pick up the conversation with its representatives.

Jenny Gilruth: Earlier, I said that it was illegal to be LGBT in all our partner countries. I apologise and would like to make a correction: it is not illegal in Rwanda.

Kenneth Gibson: Thank you for that.

In your response to Stewart Stevenson you touched on my final point, which is about the impact of the UK Government's reduction in international aid. Almost 99.9 per cent of such aid given in the UK comes from the UK Government, because it is a reserved matter. In 2019, it amounted to £15.174 billion. If there is to be a reduction in our commitment from 0.7 per cent of our gross national income to 0.5 per cent at a time when the UK's economy is itself shrinking, we could be talking about a loss of £5 billion in aid in a financial year. What impact is that likely to have in our partner countries on which Scotland has a focus?

Jenny Gilruth: I have already made clear my view on the cut to overseas aid, and the Scottish Government absolutely deplores it. It says something about the United Kingdom's standing in the world if, during a pandemic, we turn our backs on its poorest people. Scotland certainly does not want to be associated with such an approach.

I recognise that our international development offer in Scotland is far smaller than that in the UK, because the budget for it is largely reserved. However, I will make a couple of points on the issue that Mr Gibson has raised. First, the UK Government has recently been looking at international development through the integrated review. The Scottish Government is also carrying out a refresh in that area. In September, the UK Government also announced the merger of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office with the Department for International Development without having carried out any consultation with the sector. Part of my aspiration as minister was to suggest then to the sector that we should have a consultation and a conversation, because it had not been involved in that merger process. On the back of that, I decided that, as the UK's international offer was largely reserved, we should speak to the UK Government to see whether we could find some middle ground. I asked to meet James Duddridge, the UK Government's Minister for Africa, to speak to him about the integrated review and Scotland's work on international

development, but I was refused, which is deeply regrettable.

I would far rather work with the UK Government on issues such as international development, and I think that we should do so. When people such as Tony Blair and David Cameron speak out against the cut to the overseas development budget as they have done, it shows that it is not a political issue but a matter on which we should all agree.

I hope that that gives Mr Gibson some reassurance that, although we in Scotland deplore what the UK Government has done, we will not move from our view. I know that he shares my opinion with regard to our spending on international development.

Kenneth Gibson: Indeed. Thank you very much, minister.

The Convener: We have a little time in hand. Before I raise my own point, I welcome the minister's assurances that Scotland will not follow the UK in cutting the international development budget. That is very good news indeed.

When partners' submissions on the review were received, it was not known what the plan for funding the response to Covid-19 in partner countries would be. Minister, on 30 November you wrote to the committee to share with us the fact that £2 million is being given to UNICEF for its work on that area. This morning, we have explored the importance of working with organisations on the ground, as SCIAF does in our partner countries, and with programmes that work closely with communities. Notwithstanding all the good work that it has done, UNICEF has come under criticism for being what we might call a mega-charity. The organisation can be perceived as being a little remote in that it works with Governments, its structure is quite opaque and it is difficult to understand how its programmes work. We all know that it does a lot of good work, but it is a very large charity. What was the thinking behind handing over £2 million to UNICEF? Did you have conversations with our partners here in Scotland, or with the people with whom they work in our partner countries, to see whether that money could be used effectively in another way?

Jenny Gilruth: I hope that committee members all have a copy of the letter that went out on Monday this week about the announcement last Friday of the £2 million spend that is, as you say, specifically focused on the Covid-19 response in our partner countries. I was delighted to announce that funding through UNICEF; it will be used to meet the needs of our partner countries, including on sanitation and hygiene, child protection, healthcare, immunisation, nutrition and education. It will also be used to prepare the health systems in Malawi, Zambia and Rwanda for the distribution

of the vaccine, which is an important point to make and one that Stewart Stevenson referenced previously.

On the question of how we arrived at that decision, we have a strong existing relationship with UNICEF, which has extended programmes that are already operational in our partner countries and is working in those countries on the Covid response. Given the immediacy of the pandemic, we felt that channelling the funding through one partner that can operate at scale in all three countries will allow for the maximum benefit in our partner countries.

I take your point about UNICEF being a large organisation; my riposte is that funding through UNICEF acknowledges the importance of multilateralism and multilateral relationships and we recognise the importance of UNICEF in that. Partners fed into the discussions on the refresh but, ultimately, it was not for them to make the decision; it was for me to arrive at that decision and I felt that, based on the evidence, funding through UNICEF was the best way to get into our three partner countries' systems to deliver what we intended in a timely fashion.

Claire Tynte-Irvine: I emphasise what the minister said. We asked our partner countries and the civil society round tables what they saw as the greatest needs in relation to Covid, and the responses that we got back talked about washing and sanitation and the impact on education, so we had those in mind when we were considering what we could do with the money. We have also given money where existing partner projects have identified activity that they could do that would meet that need, for example in relation to PPE, and we have sent oxygen machines to Malawi, so this is not the only thing that we have done. For a single nation of our size wishing to have a systemic impact in all our partner countries, UNICEF offered a route in, and it is working with the host Governments in the partner countries on those programmes. That was the thinking behind the decision on this occasion.

Claire Baker: I will follow up on the last question. The submission from Scotland's International Development Alliance highlights the way in which money from Sweden's international development budget and Irish Aid has been distributed and suggests that they went down the route of increased flexibility and that that approach seemed to be more responsive. It suggests that the Scottish Government should take a similar approach and it talks about "adaptive programming". During this period, has the Scottish Government taken that type of approach? Claire Tynte-Irvine talked about equipment that has been sent to the partner countries, but I am a bit concerned that the £2 million pot has just been

given to UNICEF. The review is based around the need to make changes due to Covid, but what have we done in the shorter term? Have we taken that more responsive and adaptive approach?

Jenny Gilruth: It is hugely important that we are able to respond quickly, and Claire Tynte-Irvine gave an example of when we did that. In Malawi—this is in addition to the £2 million spend and was carried out earlier in the year—we awarded the MalDent project money through the University of Glasgow, which was focused on giving digital devices, laptops and computers to allow people to learn remotely. We also awarded money to the MalScot project to purchase PPE for the safe delivery of cervical cancer screening and to St John Scotland to support work in Malawi on PPE.

We also awarded funding in Rwanda via the Christian Blind Mission, to increase phone and internet access, and through Tearfund, for the installation of hand-washing stations. In Zambia, we awarded money to Christian Aid, which was focused on Covid-19 mitigation measures such as PPE and hand washing, and to First Aid Africa, to supply PPE and oxygen for distribution through the Zambian Ministry of Health. I hope that those examples give a flavour of some of the additional things that we have done.

11:00

Your point about being flexible in how we spend money was well made, convener. Back in March, we had to pause and look at what we were delivering. Officials went out to all our partners and said, "Are you still able to deliver?" Some came back to us with changes and adapted their programmes accordingly in the light of Covid; Claire Tynte-Irvine or Estelle Jones may want to come in on that point. Some came back with PPE programmes, whereas some were not able to continue because of social distancing.

At the heart of all that, we were able to respond quite rapidly at the outbreak of the pandemic. I hope that that gives the committee some assurance that that work was happening already. The additional spend through UNICEF is not coming from nowhere—there has been a pattern in which we have been listening and responding quite quickly from the start. Could we do things better in the future? Undoubtedly, and we probably will; we will all learn from the pandemic. Nonetheless, some of that work was already happening.

I appreciate that I have just fired through a list of specific projects; I am happy to share details of the spend—where it went, who it came from—with the committee. Estelle Jones or Claire Tynte-Irvine

may want to come in on the specific changes that some of our projects have made.

Estelle Jones: I am happy to provide some additional information. In April, when the pandemic came to a head, we did a rapid risk assessment across all our projects. We consulted the Scottish partner and the in-country partner directly to look at the immediate, short-term and medium-term risks. We then worked with the partners to keep all the projects running on course if possible. Obviously, Covid was having an immediate effect, but we had committed money to other important projects, so we were keen to try to keep those on track if we possibly could.

With regard to the short-term impact, we worked with each of the projects to understand what they would need to enable them to continue or pivot, and what approaches they needed to change. We adapted our approach to think about how we could support them so that they could respond to the additional impact of Covid.

With the projects that were unable to continue, we worked on contingency plans and looked at whether we would extend funding, or pause it so that we could use the money to support other projects or to contribute to the Covid response through UNICEF that the minister announced.

The Convener: Minister, we have talked a lot about sub-Saharan Africa, but I know that Pakistan is also a partner country of Scotland. As I understand it, our focus there has been on the education of women and girls. What kind of feedback have you had on our activities in Pakistan? Are you planning any change there?

Jenny Gilruth: You are right to say that our offer on international development in Pakistan is somewhat limited in comparison with our offer in the three African partner countries. It is focused on a scholarship programme for girls. Two weeks ago, I had a fantastic Zoom call with the British Council in Pakistan in which I heard from some of the graduates of that programme. It is a really worthwhile programme.

At this stage, I would not want to say what I would or would not change about anything through the refresh, because that would not be fair; I want to bring those issues to Parliament so that we can have a wider discussion. Nevertheless, I certainly find the programme to be valuable. Our offer in Pakistan is slightly different, as our work with the country does not sit only with me. There are other strands to it—for example, we have a trade offer, which sits with Ivan McKee. You are therefore right to say that it is different, but I very much recognise the strength of that offer at present. It was a great experience for me to hear directly from some of the women who have been through the scholarship programme about the

opportunities that it has given them through that funding. It is certainly a valuable scheme.

The Convener: The programme sounds very valuable indeed—it is good to hear that it is going so well.

That concludes our evidence session. I thank the minister and her officials for attending. The committee will now consider in private the evidence that we have heard today.

11:05

Meeting continued in private until 11:27.

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