

Cross-Party Group on International Development

Wednesday 4th February 2026, 18:30 – 19:30
Committee Room 5 and online

Minute

Present

MSPs

Sarah Boyack MSP – Chair

John Mason MSP

Invited guests

Prof Karin Diaconu, Professor of Health, Systems and Society, Queen Margaret University – in person

Philip Ode, CBM Global – online (Nigeria)

Sarah Gibson, EMMS International – in person

Lameck Thambo, Palliative Care Association of Malawi (PACAM) – online (Malawi)

Eddy Chikuta, WaterAid Zambia – online (Zambia)

Non-MSP Group Members

In person:

Olivia Elinchev (Office of Sarah Boyack MSP); Niall Campbell (Logie Legacy); Fatsuma U. Bubaram; Will Joy; Mark Chadwick (CBM Global – Disability Inclusion); Chrissie Cvetković-Hirst (Corra Foundation); Alexandra Koulouris (NHS Lothian); Sadie Watson (IOD Parc); Isabel Vogel (Evaluation Consultant); Frances Guy (SIDA); Magali Courades (UN House Scotland); Karin Kanewske Turner (UNITAID NGO Delegation); Patrick Grady (SIDA)

Online:

Ama Addo; Tarek Alkhalil; Jenni Argent; Amy Blake; Harriet Dodd; Chris Faldon; Mario Lopez Velasco; Bernhard Reinsberg; Janice Richardson; Jo Vallis; Pam

Wilson; Goran Zangana; Anne Callaghan; Chad Morse; Kelly Phillips; Elizabeth McKernan; Huw Owen; John Logan.

Apologies

Maggie Chapman MSP

Agenda item 1 – Housekeeping, Minutes and Introductions

Sarah Boyack MSP welcomed all those attending in person and online and explained the late start was due to the later Decision Time session in parliament.

The minutes of the [previous meeting](#) and AGM held on 11th November 2025 were approved.

Agenda item 2 – Panel Presentations and Discussion

The Chair introduced the theme of the meeting: global partnerships and locally led approaches to healthcare in the Global South.

Prof Karin Diaconu from Queen Margaret University spoke about her work on strengthening health systems in fragile and shock-prone settings, drawing on two programmes. ReBUILD for Resilience examines how to build resilience capacities for responsive, effective, inclusive, gender-equitable and sustainable health systems across a range of countries in Africa, Asia and the Middle East. The research demonstrates both the value and practical challenges of participatory, locally based approaches, particularly when shocks such as conflict, violence or pandemics disrupt services. REDRESS, based in Liberia, focuses on community engagement and accountability, emphasising that community leadership must be locally defined and is most effective when communities are actively involved in decision-making and problem-solving, not only consulted. The programme also seeks to reduce illness, stigma and social exclusion linked to severe stigmatising skin diseases / skin NTDs through co-developed, people-centred interventions. Across both, key messages included the importance of investing time to build trust and capabilities, and the constraints created by short-term, disease-specific funding and power imbalances that can limit genuine participation.

Philip Ode presentation focussed on Nigeria's efforts to tackle Neglected Tropical Diseases (NTDs), which is often underfunded despite the impacts of NTDs on individuals, communities and wider society. Philip discussed CBM Global's "evidence to impact" approach combining operational research with practical delivery, with examples including moving from control to elimination by strengthening state systems (including medicine supply and community distribution), a more holistic care approach to restore dignity, and integrating mental health within local systems aligned to Nigeria's NTD Master Plan. Cross-cutting lessons highlighted that global partnerships can unlock possibilities, but local leadership and integrated, multi-sector approaches are central to sustained change, with donor investment best directed at building systems rather than parallel structures.

Sarah Gibson and Lameck Thambo looked at Locally-Led Development (LLD) as a means of shifting power and resources to local actors so they can set agendas, design solutions and lead implementation, moving away from traditional top-down approaches to aid funding. They described how LLD shapes PACAM's practice and EMMS's partnership approach, including sharing expertise appropriately and strengthening sustainable organisational capacity. A worked example mapped roles across a typical funding cycle: PACAM leads contextual design and implementation, while EMMS leads proposal submission, due diligence and provides project management tools, with regular meetings and shared reporting throughout.

Eddy Chikuta spoke about the work of WaterAid Zambia in promoting access to Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) facilities as a means of preventing the spread of disease and improving life chances across the country. WaterAid Zambia works both to delivery sustainable WASH programmes in communities, and empower communities to campaign for long-term policy change and infrastructure investment by government and local authorities.

The session was opened up to questions and discussion. Topics included the impact significant cuts to aid budgets, particularly the end of USAID programmes, which had resulted in job losses and depletion of capacity, knowledge and expertise in many sectors. Other issues includes an emphasis on the importance of preventive healthcare approaches, engagement with diaspora groups in Scotland, and lessons for Scotland in relation to palliative care.

Agenda item 3 – Review of CPG activities and consideration of next parliamentary session

Sarah Boyack had received a letter from Cabinet Secretary for External Affairs, Angus Robertson MSP (dated 30 January 2026), providing an update on steps the Scottish Government has taken in response to the CPG's June 2025 report on Scotland's international development funding. The SG has welcomed the CPG's

support for Scotland's ODA approach and the shift since 2021 towards partner-country priorities, "shifting power" and a feminist approach. The letter confirms that Scottish Government overseas development spend is now published on the IATI platform, with quarterly updates intended, and that officials have established a regular engagement mechanism with the sector, delivered in partnership with SIDA, while asking the CPG to help identify any remaining communications concerns. The letter also notes that the SG's draft 2026–27 budget delivers the commitment to uplift the International Development Fund to £15m by the end of the Parliament, maintain £1m humanitarian spend, and secure £12.7m for international climate justice programmes. Sarah Boyack asked that the full text of the letter be included with the minutes of the meeting – this is included as an appendix.

Sarah also reflected on a roundtable meeting she had hosted in early January on atrocity prevention, and powerful testimony shared by people affected by conflict and violence in Tigray. This could potentially be explored in more detail by a successor CPG in the next parliamentary session.

There was some reflection on how to ensure continuity of the Group, with a number of MSP members (including both MSPs present) standing down from Parliament. Early and warm engagement with newly-elected MSPs would be important. A review of the operation of CPGs could also mean the need for closer co-operation with other groups, such as those focussed on Fair Trade, Malawi, and other relevant countries.

Agenda item 4 – Any other business

On behalf of the Group, Frances Guy, thanked Sarah Boyack MSP for her many years of service as Chair, and wished her all the very best following her decision to step down from the Scottish Parliament at the forthcoming election.

Sarah encouraged all those connected with the Group to continue in their efforts to campaign for a fairer world, and looked forward to remaining engaged on global justice issues after the election.

The meeting closed at 8:00pm.

Appendix: Letter from Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture Angus Robertson MSP to Sarah Boyack MSP, 30 January 2026

Dear Sarah,

Ahead of the Christmas recess period, we met to discuss the report on Scottish international development funding published by the Cross-Party Group (CPG) on International Development in June 2025.

I undertook to write to you with an update on activity officials have been taking forward which aligns with the findings and recommendations in the report. I also thought it would be helpful to provide an update on the allocations for international development in the recent draft Scottish budget.

CPG Report

I welcome the support expressed by the CPG within its report for the SG in its distribution of Official Development Assistance (ODA) and the CPG's recognition of the impact that the International Development Fund has made in partner countries over 20 years. At a time when other donors have been cutting aid budgets with severe consequences for vulnerable communities worldwide, it is imperative that Scotland remains focused on being a good global citizen; committed to climate justice, international development, and humanitarian aid.

I also welcome the many positive views expressed by respondents during the CPG's evidence gathering process in 2024 about the priorities and impact of the Scottish Government's overseas development spending. In particular, our new approach since 2021 and the adoption of the new International Development Principles to support a shift in power to the Global South and taking a feminist approach. As respondents highlighted, this has meant further aligning our international development funding to the priorities of our partner countries, and in implementing innovative initiatives such as mainstreaming of gender equality through our programme.

I wish to acknowledge the report's findings and note the thorough consideration that informed it. I can confirm that the matters around communication and transparency highlighted in the report correspond closely with areas in which my officials have already been advancing substantive work (see attached). I am pleased to share that the Scottish Government's overseas development spend is now available on the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI) platform referenced in the CPG's report. Officials have also established a mechanism for regular engagement with the sector delivered in partnership with Scotland's International Development Alliance (SIDA). I am mindful, however, that there may still be some outstanding concerns amongst some organisations regarding communications, given that you had raised this issue with me. I had asked therefore if you could please seek to establish more

information about where those concerns lie, in order that we can look to address these.

Draft Scottish Budget 2026-27

In line with our publicly stated commitment to international development, the draft Scottish Government budget published on 13 January delivers on our Programme for Government commitment to uplift the IDF to £15 million by end of this parliament, and to maintain our £1 million humanitarian spend, and allows us to continue to support our partner countries through the steady increase of international development funding. Funding has also been secured for International Climate Change, including Climate Justice programmes, of £12.7 million.

My officials are considering how we might deliver on the proposed IDF uplift. We will not know until the end of February if the draft budget has been passed. It is likely that in the initial year of the uplift (financial year 2026/27), we will focus on enhancing existing projects that are currently successful, rather than establishing wholly new programmes. And in response to the forthcoming review of Humanitarian Emergency Fund, I am considering the proportion of our humanitarian spend that comes from Scotland's ODA budget, which could take an increasing share and therefore absorb the majority of the additional funding in 2026-27.

Consulting with our partner country governments and institutions in formulating spending plans is also a priority - to ensure our spending priorities are suited and developed in partnership (in line with our International Development Principles). This engagement process will commence once the Budget is confirmed and ahead of the new Parliamentary Term. Given the proximity of the next Scottish Election, spending plans will be subject to confirmation by the incoming Government.

It will also be important for Scotland to consider how our spending responds to the UK Government's aid allocations, which we expect to have a significant impact on our partner countries, especially Malawi. The First Minister has written to the Foreign Secretary expressing his profound concerns about the potential consequences of aid cuts and we await her response.

All of this too will be set against a backdrop of the Public Service Reform in Scotland. Delivering these ambitions within tight funding constraints demands reform and innovation. I will be looking at ways that we can drive prioritisation, efficiency and transformation to maximise impact in the approach to international development. Views from the CPG on how we achieve the balance between these objectives will be very much welcomed by my team.

I will ensure that my officials continue to keep you informed on these developments and engage with SIDA members and others whilst developing our plans.

I would be happy to discuss any of the above further with the Group, if this would be helpful.

Yours sincerely,
ANGUS ROBERTSON

Update to CPG International Development

Recommendation 1- The Scottish Government should publish through IATI

The Scottish Government is a member of the international Open Government Partnership: a collaboration of 90+ governments around the world who sign up to the principles of openness, transparency, accountability and citizen participation.

All Official Development Assistance (ODA) provided by the Scottish Government is guided by a rigorous process to ensure complete transparency and accountability focused on areas of need where Scotland's ODA can make an impact.

The Scottish Government's international development work is funded from within its own budget and, like any other part of that budget, is subject to Scottish Parliament approval and scrutiny. Our ODA spend is included by UK Government within its overall ODA return to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), and is counted by the UK towards its commitments on spending a stated percentage of gross national income (GNI) on ODA (currently the UK commitment is to 0.5% GNI on ODA, reduced from the global 0.7%, and due to be further reduced to 0.3% GNI in 2027). Scottish Government ODA spend is then reported by the UK Government in its ODA returns every calendar year as part of the UK wide Statistics on International Development: Statistics on International Development - GOV.UK.

The Scottish Government has also itself, since 2017, published its own regular Contribution to International Development Reports (CIDRs), to capture the additional contribution which the Scottish Government makes to international development within the devolved constitutional context – whether through our three Funds (International Development Fund (IDF), Humanitarian Emergency Fund (HEF) and Climate Justice Fund (CJF)), or through wider policy activity across our Ministerial portfolios. See:

- Scottish Government contribution to international development report: 2017-2018
- Scottish Government contribution to international development report: 2018-2019
- Scottish Government contribution to International Development Report for 2019-2020
- Contribution to international development 2021 to 2023.

Since the CPG report was published in June 2025, and following discussion with the sector on most appropriate and useful publication routes going forward, we published the Scottish Government's most recent ODA spend through Scotland's International Strategy Annual Report 2024-25 which provides a breakdown of ODA spend across our three funds (IDF, HEF and CJF) in 2024-25. This therefore follows that series of earlier CIDR publications covering ODA spend in years 2017-18, 2018-19, 2019-20 and 2021-23.

Alongside this we have also been exploring publishing our international aid data through the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI). ODA spend for 1 April '25 through to end of December '25 is now available on the IATI platform and the

intention is that this will be updated every quarter going forward. For ease of reference, the organisation identifier for the Scottish Government is GB-GOV-21.

As the CPG notes, migrating to this reporting system will improve accessibility and interrogation of ODA spend by those with an interest. As noted by a stakeholder in the CPG report, as we become more familiar with the system, we can look to enhance our usage of the platform over time.

Recommendation 2 – Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee (CEEAC) to review ODA spending every three years

Appropriate Parliamentary scrutiny of international development funding would be welcome, however, any decision to take forward this recommendation is a matter for the CEEAC itself (or any future committee of the Scottish Parliament). As noted in the CPG report, that data on international development spend is now being published through IATI will be a helpful resource for the Committee should they choose to progress this recommendation.

Recommendation 3 - For SG to publish a new clearer strategy and rationalise their choices around themes, localities and application processes

Given the upcoming elections, the request for a refreshed SG International Development Strategy covering all ODA spend encompassing international development, humanitarian and climate justice, will be for any new Government to consider in due course.

In the interim, work is currently underway to scope out an approach to refreshing the wider International Strategy (published in 2024) which is in place until the end of the current Parliamentary term. The intention is that the refreshed Strategy will provide a clear and outcomes-focused overarching framework guiding international activity by the Scottish Government and key delivery partners across the public sector in Scotland. Subject to the views of incoming Ministers, a refreshed strategy could be in place in late 2026 or early 2027 and officials are keen to hear views from stakeholders on the approach to this work. E.g. how a new International Development Strategy might align with the planned work to refresh an International Strategy reflecting incoming Ministers' priorities after the election and would encourage the CPG's input to that exercise.

Other matters

Scottish Government Communication

Key Finding 4 in the report raised that “Communication between the Scottish Government and the third sector could improve. Potential funding recipients highlighted the need for clearer funding processes and greater collaboration with partner organisations. There were calls to use partner countries and agencies more effectively in decision making processes, and to enhance the localisation of delivery”.

The 2020 review of the Scottish Government approach to international development resulted in changes to the allocation of the International Development Fund, with a

focus on supporting localisation, in line with good development practice and the new Scottish Government International Development Principles. Our progressive approach to international development (through our new Principles, feminist approach and commitment on shifting power) has been welcomed in particular by and within our partner countries, but it has also been supported by many of the larger Scottish iNGOs including Oxfam Scotland, who said at the time “The Scottish Government has rightly recognised that if it’s to continue to help tackle these growing challenges, then its approach to international development must evolve. If we’re to create a kinder, radically better and fairer world, then governments around the world and organisations like Oxfam need to stand together with communities driving their own change while challenging the gender and racial injustices trapping people in poverty.” (Jamie Livingstone, March 2021).

The evolution of the international development programme to one that is even more clearly partner country led inevitably means some changes have ensued in how and on what we communicate and engage with stakeholders within Scotland.

Having listened carefully to the sector in Scotland on their asks to continue to engage with the Scottish Government (whilst still respecting the role and views of our Global South partners), a number of new initiatives have been established over recent years to support increased communications and transparency:

- as noted in the CPG report the ID webpages on the SG website have been refreshed to provide more accessible information on new international development programming;
- as noted above, information on ODA and projects has been regularly published through the series of Contribution to International Development Reports, since 2017;
- a regular cycle of stakeholder sessions has been established. These are hosted and facilitated by Scotland’s International Development Alliance (SIDA) and take a thematic approach informed by the interests of stakeholders. Previous topics include a general update on the ID programme, the Climate Justice Fund and the Global Solidarity Fund (which will replace the previous SG International Small Grants Scheme); topics for 2026 are being explored with SIDA;
- Ministers have continued to meet in person with groups of both Scotland-based and Global South stakeholders, including attendance at roundtables and conferences by Cabinet Secretaries Angus Robertson and Gillian Martin, and meetings hosted by the First Minister;
- now that the majority of new ID programmes have come on-stream, work with all of our new grant/contract holders has resumed, bringing them together as a group for a holistic whole programme approach and to enable cross-sharing of learning between all organisations; and
- in line with the commitment made as a result of the review of the ID programme, to shift power to global south partners, we continue to engage more heavily outwith Scotland so that our work is informed by the voices of the people and governments in our partner countries, who are best placed to identify their own needs and lead their own development: this included through the recent First Minister visit to Zambia and Malawi, where he met with both Presidents to discuss partnerships, and with local delivery partners.

Prioritisation of Scotland-based aid charities

Although our international development work started 20 years ago (2005) with an ambition to support Scottish organisations partnering abroad, as a key component of Scotland's international contribution as a good global citizen, our approach and programmes have evolved progressively over those 20 years, in line with recognised good development practice, towards increased localisation.

Throughout this shift, the valuable role of civil society in Scotland, and the appetite for global citizenship in our local communities continues to be a key priority. For this reason, around £800,000 per year from the International Development Fund is allocated to 4 networking organisations (3 of which are Scotland based) to support global citizenship in Scotland and our partner countries.

In terms of the wider international development and climate justice portfolio, the Scottish Government has set out clearly in our series of reports information on these awards, including stating where these have been awarded through a competitive process (this typically involves a consortium of organisations and incorporates participatory and country-led design approaches). These competitive processes aim to ensure transparency, accountability and value for money.

Where funding has been awarded on a non-competitive basis, this has been set out within the CIDRs; in particular our funding rationale and processes during the period of COVID were clearly set out in our Scottish Government contribution to International Development Report for 2019-2020