

## European and External Relations Committee's Inquiry 2010

### On International Engagement

#### **Questions E&ERC has asked NIDOS to respond to:**

- 1. In your opinion, is there a clear, coherent, co-ordinated and well-resourced strategy for international relations within the Scottish Government and its agencies?**
- 2. Are there any specific successes or failures that you would wish to highlight?**
- 3. Is there anything we should learn from the successes of other regions and their initiatives?**

#### **NIDOS Response:**

##### **Question 1: In your opinion, is there a clear, coherent, co-ordinated and well-resourced strategy for international relations within the Scottish Government and its agencies?**

NIDOS and its members find that in our experience, the Scottish Government's strategy for international relations has definitely been strengthened since the last Inquiry in 2004 -05 and the impact of its funded projects improved. The international development strategy and fund in particular is now more coherent and has a clearer focus, especially in relation to Malawi. The placing of the International Development strategy within the over-arching International strategy has been helpful and presents opportunities for joined up government thinking and action.

##### **Improvements that have been made:**

1. Increased financial commitment to international development despite difficult financial environment
2. Much clearer strategy for the Malawi programme: time has been invested in developing focussed strands of activity which are coherent with Malawi Government priorities
3. More emphasis on monitoring and evaluating project impacts
4. Better communications between Scotland and Malawi including:
  - between Ministers and Government officials
  - between Governments and funded projects in Malawi
  - between visiting Malawian officials and international development agencies and umbrellas (including NIDOS) in Scotland
  - some sharing of good practice, with Malawian Government representatives present, among Malawi grant funded projects in October 09
  - capacity building through improved links between parliamentarians, health bodies, education establishments and NGOs.
5. Better response to humanitarian disasters – clearer guidelines on when the Scottish Government will respond to disasters, better liaison with humanitarian agencies and the Disasters Emergency Committee, quicker

- response time on availability of funding, added publicity for emergency appeals and increased capacity offered through secondments, for example.
6. Better engagement with non-governmental organisations (NGOs) including:
    - greater understanding developed by the Scottish Government about non-governmental organisations' (NGOs) operations and approaches
    - more opportunities for NGO engagement with policy development which we would like to see developed further.
    - supported the capacity of networking agencies which work to further drive up standards within the international development sector
  7. Better provision of public information online on funding programmes and on funded projects

Non funding-related improvements have also happened, through stronger institutional links between, for example, Higher Education institutions and with Audit Scotland sharing their experience with similar institutions abroad.

#### Suggestions for further improvements related to policy:

##### a) Within International Development Fund:

Outside of the Malawi programme there has been less coherence and focus to the international development strategy. We welcome the support to programmes in other low income countries and appreciate that the Government did consult widely on the strategy for the South Asia programme.

Some areas that should be strengthened

- more link up and sharing of good practice between funded projects within and between the three main programmes
- more documentation and communication by the Scottish Government of examples of good practice and success
- clearer coherence between elements of the South Asia aid programme and the India Plan; mechanisms for diasporan community to add value; coherence with DFID work in the South Asia region; better communication of rationale for South Asia strategy
- a focus on human rights, rather than on countries, could provide policy coherence for international development.

##### b) Between International Development strategy and International Policy

As well as the opportunity for greater coherence and learning between the three programmes of the International Development Fund mentioned above, there is need for and opportunities for developing more coherence between the overarching International Policy and the International Development strategy. Currently the over-riding rationale for the International Policy is increased economic activity and business investment in Scotland. The International Development programme appears to be 'tagged on' with a 'more responsible nation in the world' rationale.

The economic rationale for international relations is of course important, but can, where economic development is not done in a sustainable, just and ethical way, create conflict with development objectives and eventually with economic growth

itself. In a world of greater inter-dependency and global problems such as climate change and conflict over resources, just focusing on economic growth is counter-productive. The Government's theme of a 'more responsible nation in the world' and improved international relations, could form a more cohesive over-arching aim which would bring together both the economic aims and the international development aims.

Example 1: Energy and Climate. Scotland can benefit, through the International policy, from securing greater investment into its renewable energy industry. With a more coherent tie up between the Scottish Government's 'domestic' climate team, SDI and its international development team, it could produce added benefit through sharing of renewable energy expertise with low income country governments and with development projects. With joined up thinking too, investment would not be made into Scottish business that increase climate emissions, threatening the livelihoods and environments of communities in low income countries.

Example 2: Encouraging Scottish Businesses to operate ethically in Malawi or India: where Scottish businesses are supported by one arm of Scottish Government, in their operations in Malawi or India, systems must be in place to ensure that their activities are not harmful to development there: e.g. that they do pay local business taxes into the economy; that they offer good quality employment conditions; that they adhere to their normal environmental standards.

Suggestions for improving policy coherence between international policy and international development element of it:

- Scottish Government reviews its over-arching rationale for international relations and embeds its economic interests within a focus on being a responsible nation in the world and developing a sustainable and ethical economy.
- greater Ministerial responsibility for ensuring coherence for international issues across the many strands that are being reviewed within this Inquiry, including sustainable economy, higher education, science, culture, tourism, major international events and international development.
- include issues with an impact on international development (even where they do not include international spending), such as work with refugees and asylum seekers and promoting human rights in countries such as China
- use opportunities for promotion of innovative ideas coming out of Scotland, at a UK Government and European Government level, as recommended in the Calman Commission. This could equally apply to all the strands within International relations including international development.
- earlier start to planning new International Development policy and programmes, to allow thorough planning and timely launching of funding rounds both at the start of a new programme and each year. This would enable fuller uptake of funding and even more effective delivery of projects

Suggestions for improving communications:

- greater clarity on how E&ERC works or could work to influence policy – in Scottish Government; at UK Government level (e.g. links with Westminster's International Development committee) and in Europe

- greater clarity on how to access Scottish Government offices in Europe
- quicker turnaround of the results of consultation processes and more timely communication of the outcomes
- adherence as far as possible to published timetables for funding rounds and early warning of any delays where they emerge
- fuller public information under each programme and for each funding round: in addition to the very useful currently provided information on successful grants, it would be useful to include numbers of funding applications, average application size and key typical reasons why applications fail

Resourcing of the international strategy:

NIDOS warmly welcomed the increased resources for the international development strategy and the resulting greater engagement with some of the economically poorest communities in the world. We would urge the E&ERC to support the continued resourcing of the International Development Fund at the current level of £9 million per year during this time when the needs in these communities have increased due to the global economic recession.

We are aware though that the resourcing of the Scottish Government staff team administering the increased fund is very tight and this results at times in delays as a result of lack of capacity. There also appears to be an increasing trend in awarding fewer larger grants to large agencies, possibly as a result in lack of capacity to deal with more grant holders, and that some of the good quality innovative work of small agencies is as a result being lost. This is a loss to the programme and ways of engaging smaller organisations and projects should be considered.

**Question 2: Are there any specific successes or failures that you would wish to highlight?**

The key area of success that we wish to highlight is the more focussed strategy for Malawi and the associated building of relationships, project impact and good practice - as outlined in more detail in our answer to Question 1 so not re-iterated here.

Other key successes:

- the Copenhagen linked climate change Conference brought together diverse groups including businesses and showed the value of collective influence and the development of world leading legislation.
- funding support for Fair Trade and the move in Scotland towards being the second Fair Trade Nation in the world, after Wales. Much progress has been made on this, both through Government and civil society, coordinated and supported through the Scottish Fair Trade Forum.
- support for NIDOS work on strengthening NGO good practice and effectiveness, including the development of a tool and resources and links with other accountability initiatives in the UK.
- the Curriculum for Excellence also provides improved opportunities for increasing global awareness among young people in Scotland.

However, within the international development strategy there has been little focus on awareness raising about development issues within Scotland and no

grants given for focussed work in Scotland around global citizenship – either in formal education or with informal adult and community based learning.

There has been limited progress in developing a culture of evaluation and critique. It has been good to promote the good practice and success there has undoubtedly been. It would be useful to invest more in learning from what has not gone as well as hoped and in evaluating how the programme has developed the sustainability of Southern Partners (particularly in the programmes outside of Malawi). It would be useful to have more over-arching evaluation of the full International Development Strategy.

Staff resource in the International Development team has been very stretched and increasingly so with the success of their work and as they get (very usefully) drawn into linking with the wider work of the Scottish Government. It would be useful to evaluate the best use of the small staff team in International Development and look at whether other staff resources in the Scottish Government could support them to deliver the wide ranging demands on their time. We see the benefits of staff contributing to delivering coherence of International Development work with other parts of Government operations, this is very valuable and crucial. At times however these wider demands on their time have resulted in significant delays in delivering the core funding programmes. The impact has particularly been on the South Asia programme which has yet to announce any grants since it was initiated in February 2009.

Little progress appears to have been achieved in building strategic and practical links between the wider International policy and work and the International Development strategy – again as outlined in our answer to Question 1.

It was not clear either, what happened to the results of the last E&ERC review on international development in 2007/08 and how this supported or shaped the work of the Scottish Government.

### **Question 3: Is there anything we should learn from the successes of other regions and their initiatives?**

NIDOS members have had some experience of working with Nordic and other Government international policy and funding regimes. Many of them have very well resourced International Development strategies and much larger aid programmes so may not be very comparable. However some of their approaches might be of interest.

- in Denmark their approach is to have a clear focus on social justice.
- in Sweden there is a robust checking system and evaluation culture and withdrawal of funding where delivery is not being achieved. Their online information is very clear on their policy and approach with examples of good practice and case studies to illustrate interrelating issues. They have easily used online applications which also streamline administration of applications. They do not outsource all their grant assessments, but have a mix of in-house and contracted assessments which builds their team's experience.
- the Irish and Swiss focus their strategy on areas of their own experience or expertise – the Swiss focus on working with mountainous countries; the Irish have a particular focus on hunger; Nordic countries use their expertise in

renewable energy technology and offer good intellectual property deals to developing countries.

- Norway uses its oil surplus fund, which has tight social and ethical fund criteria, for proactive work on human rights. In Scotland, there is a similar precedence with the Shetland Local Authority using its funds secured from the oil industry for Shetland community benefit. Scotland could share this expertise with other countries in helping their governments secure an income stream for public services from companies that are exploiting their natural resources.
- Wales has piloted the UN-endorsed Gold Star Award Framework – promoting good practice in community linking initiatives with a focus on genuine, two way community partnerships sustaining effective development:  
[www.goldstarcommunities.org.uk](http://www.goldstarcommunities.org.uk)