

# From talk to transformation:

How governments can really  
'shift the power'  
towards global justice

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**Scotland's** International  
Development Alliance

# Acknowledgements

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## About the collective

We are a team of consultants and freelancers working for social change embedded in intersectional feminism. We have come together as a collective as we recognise the need for feminist and equalities driven analysis to be in every aspect of policy, research and public affairs.

## About Scotland's International Development Alliance

Scotland's International Development Alliance (SIDA) is the membership body in Scotland for everyone committed to creating a fairer world, free from poverty, injustice and environmental threats. Our membership brings together a diverse range of over 200 international NGOs, companies, universities, charitable trusts, public sector bodies and individuals that operate in over 170 countries.

**Watch a short video of the report findings**, kindly supported by EMMS, here:  
[Shifting the power – Scotland's International Development Alliance \(intdevalliance.scot\)](#)

## A note on language

We have endeavoured to use language that we hope is contributing to – not getting in the way of – the fundamental changes we are looking to make in the world, in line with SIDA's inclusive language guide: [SIDA Inclusive Language Guide – Scotland's International Development Alliance \(intdevalliance.scot\)](#). For example instead of the term 'aid' you will see 'social development finance' or 'global redistribution'. However, when quoting others we have used the original language, and in some instances we have used inverted commas to indicate terms that we strive to avoid but are included to support legibility.

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# 1. Introduction

This paper is about possibility, opportunity and the necessity for meaningful change. Whilst global crises escalate, we must also focus on the root causes of inequality and injustice. Feminist, anti-racist and decolonised perspectives can help to redefine our approach to building a just world. The vision of Scotland's global sustainable development community has the potential to be genuinely transformative. And we hope that this paper is, at the very least, a nudge for politicians to rethink how we engage globally.

This work stems from a desire from the membership of Scotland's International Development Alliance (SIDA) to explore in more depth the idea of 'shifting the power' in global sustainable development and related issues of global affairs, and to identify ways in which the Scottish and UK governments can begin to take more feminist, decolonial, anti-racist and inclusive approaches to joined up global affairs policy making.

To produce this report, the authors<sup>1</sup> collected survey responses from over 50 SIDA member organisations and individuals, convened four online discussion groups with members and wider experts from the Global South, facilitated an in-person workshop, and met with SIDA's policy committee. The authors have supplemented this with desk research, prioritising analysis from Global South and anti-racist, anticolonial and feminist experts and activists.

Feminism, anti-racism and decolonialism share a common goal of challenging the root causes of inequality and injustice and dismantling the interlocking systems of power and oppression that sustain them. Taken together, these transformative perspectives can offer an interconnected framework for reimagining and building a radically different future of international affairs through a lens of equality, justice, and liberation. At a time of escalating global crises, widening economic disparities, and rising debt – disproportionately affecting the most marginalised populations worldwide – such approaches are urgently needed.

This paper takes a critical look at whether governments in the Global North could or should have a role in contributing to these transformative changes. It also examines the risk that the terms 'feminist', 'anti-racist' 'decolonial' and 'inclusive' are co-opted by governments and international organisations keen to be seen to be 'doing the right thing', and lose their meaning and power.

At the same time, governments in the Global North bear responsibility for driving and maintaining global inequalities and power imbalances and should be taking action to redress past, and mitigate ongoing, harms. The UK Government's recent white paper on 'International Development in a contested world' and the Scottish Government's commitments to anti-racist and feminist approaches to international relations present opportune moments for both governments to rethink and examine their colonial legacies and frame international commitments around notions of justice.

By not restricting the paper to the framework of 'international development' we hope to some extent to broaden the conversation from being centred purely around the movement of Global North resources, which as the #ShiftThePower Manifesto explains, can create "artificial barriers between communities and movements in the global north and south"<sup>2</sup>. Instead, we sketch out broad principles and pathways that the Scottish and UK governments could take towards transformative approaches. Echoing Bond's 'Future Dialogues' we hope to challenge UK and Scottish policymakers "to stretch their thinking, check their assumptions, and change their approach"<sup>3</sup>.

**“Change in the international aid sector [may] seem impossible... However, history has shown us such things are possible”**

Women of Colour Forum at the Gender and Development Network (GADN)

## 2. Context

### Rise of interconnected global justice movements

The Black Lives Matter movement that emerged in the US in response to police brutality against the Black community initially had domestic racial justice aims, but quickly became a global movement that elevated and intensified conversations about racism, anti-Black violence and systemic racialised power imbalances across the world<sup>4</sup>. In international humanitarian and development spaces, conversations started happening with greater intensity about the racism and colonial attitudes embedded in the structures of social development finance and the development sector<sup>5</sup>, and what it might mean to ‘decolonise aid’. More broadly in international affairs, movements for reparations for slavery and colonialism are gaining recognition and traction, including through the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) and the International Social Movement for Afrikan Reparations. In November 2021, Barbados became the latest country to leave the Commonwealth and remove the British monarch as their head of state, with the country’s first president Dame Sandra Mason saying this was a step “to fully leave our colonial past behind”<sup>6</sup>. Other Caribbean countries, including Belize, the Bahamas, Grenada, Antigua and Barbuda, and St. Kitts and Nevis, have signalled that they may follow suit<sup>7</sup>.

Grassroots feminist activism is also a potent force reshaping the landscape of global politics, with feminist movements increasingly recognised as a significant driver of sustainable change for women and marginalised groups of all genders around the world, and ultimately contributing to a more inclusive and equitable global political landscape<sup>8</sup>. For example, while we are seeing a rollback of women’s reproductive rights in the US and parts of Europe, the Marea Verde or ‘Green Movement’ of abortion rights is sweeping successfully across Latin America. This recognition of the importance of grassroots feminist movements has sparked conversations in the Global North around if and how governments can take a feminist approach to foreign policy, and how to ensure that the global Women, Peace and Security agenda is driven by local feminist and women’s groups. The #MeToo movement has also shone a light on sexual violence and sexual exploitation within the wider humanitarian and development sectors, an issue that has long been ignored or swept under the carpet by large predominantly white, Western-led organisations<sup>9</sup>.

The global climate justice movement is also growing, driven in particular by Indigenous activists, many of whom are young women. For example, due to the relentless advocacy of grassroots Pacific Island feminists, the United Nations member states approved the Resolution for an International Court of Justice Advisory Opinion (ICJ-AO) on Climate Change and Human Rights, “paving the way for transformative climate action globally”<sup>10</sup>. International LGBTQI+ justice groups and disability justice groups are also growing in voice and agency, despite the growing polarisation and risks around LGBTQI+ rights, and the “comparatively lower starting point”<sup>11</sup> of the disability justice movement.

These various global justice movements are closely interconnected and mutually reinforcing, bound tightly together around transforming unequal power structures and unjust economic systems. They also share organising models rooted in collectivity, equity and solidarity<sup>12</sup>, often (though notably not always) with a strong emphasis on intersectional approaches and being led by those with lived experience of oppression and intersecting inequalities. Disability justice groups increasingly centre principles of intersectionality, international cross-movement (and cross-disability) solidarity, anti-capitalist politics and collective action in their movement-building<sup>13</sup>. Talking about intersectionality in the environmental movement, Black feminist eco-critic and scholar Chelsea M. Frazier and climate justice activist Mikaela Loach emphasise that it’s not just about adding anti-racist or ecofeminist approaches to existing movements as ‘optional extras’<sup>14</sup>, but to see these as central to all justice movements, and “perceiving what new ideas and worlds are made possible when the commitments of these movements are enmeshed with one another”<sup>15</sup>. Reparations scholar and activist Esther Stanford-Xosei describes how, for example, “we are seeing the growing influence of Afrikan reparationists on other movements such as environmental and climate justice movements aided by the fact that resistance to the worldwide climate and ecological crises is radicalising forces both in the Global South and the Global North”<sup>16</sup>.

These conversations are not new. None of these justice movements have emerged from a vacuum: all build on decades of grassroots feminist, anticolonial and Indigenous thinking, activism and

groundwork. However the increasing energy and interconnection between global justice movements may present a window of opportunity for the kind of transformative change that has long been called for. As Esther Stanford-Xosei has argued, the global justice movements are at a point where, through combining their collective power, we will see the “ushering in of a new international political and economic order which supports transformative adaptation and is based on ecological restoration, community governance and stewardship of work and resources for the re-making of our world”<sup>17</sup>. “Just as emancipation from enslavement, independence from colonialism, all women’s right to vote, and LGBTI+ rights may have appeared too radical a shift in the socio-economic, cultural norms and interests of the day, so may such a change in the international aid sector seem impossible,” note the Women of Colour Forum at the Gender and Development Network (GADN), “However, history has shown us, such things are possible”<sup>18</sup>.

## Shrinking civic space and human rights backlash

At the same time, across the globe – including in the UK – we’re also seeing a shrinking of space for civic activism, a growing backlash to social justice approaches from anti-rights and populist movements, and a rise in authoritarian and regressive approaches to rights and equality from governments. Women’s and LGBTQI+ rights are particularly under attack<sup>19</sup>. Some examples of this include the US overturning national legislation protecting women’s access to abortion (with global ramifications<sup>20</sup>) and increasing numbers of states enacting anti-transgender laws<sup>21</sup>, Turkey withdrawing from the Istanbul Convention, and the mobilisation of populist narratives which mix misogyny, xenophobia, and homophobia across Europe<sup>22</sup>. In China, the Government has imposed strict censorship policies, including banning feminist terms and content they see as “harmful speech” or “inciting conflict between the genders”<sup>23</sup>. As one participant in our online discussion groups described, “in the last five to eight years, we’ve seen the rise of authoritarianism across the world, whether it is... anti-women’s bodies, anti-abortion, anti-sex education, anti-[trans]gender laws... and most of this is coming from the Global North.”

According to the Civicus Monitor, civic space is under attack in 111 countries and only 4% of the world’s population live in countries where fundamental freedoms of association, peaceful assembly and expression are respected and enabled<sup>24</sup>. Many countries, including the UK, have heightened government surveillance and policing of marginalised groups<sup>25</sup>. Globally human rights defenders, activist groups and civil society organisations find themselves increasingly under threat. In 2022 alone, over 400 human rights defenders were killed because of their human rights work. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) notes that the shrinking of civil society space has entailed severe attacks on women’s rights activists, groups and movements in particular, at risk “precisely because of their work to challenge gender norms and power structures”<sup>26</sup>.

Civil society organisations and groups, particularly women’s organisations and Organisations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs), are also struggling with funding scarcity. Despite the fact that there have been a number of global commitments to financing gender equality through women’s and feminist organisations, in actuality very little funding is reaching local women’s organisations. Instead, argue Mama Cash and the Association for Women’s Rights in Development (AWID), more than 99% of official development assistance (ODA) funding for gender equality has consistently supported large, more mainstream organisations, gone to governments, or stayed within development agencies themselves<sup>27</sup>.

**“In the last five to eight years, we’ve seen the rise of authoritarianism across the world, whether it is... anti-women’s bodies, anti-abortion, anti-sex education, anti-[trans]gender laws... and most of this is coming from the Global North.”**

SIDA focus group participant

# Escalating global crises and extreme economic inequality, and a floundering global redistribution system

This push from global justice movements to take more transformative approaches also comes at a time of escalating global crises and increasing poverty and social and economic inequalities.

Humanitarian crises are becoming “more frequent, complicated and protracted”<sup>28</sup>. Violent conflict, natural disasters and an intensifying climate emergency – all feeding one another – are leading to record numbers of people forcibly displaced from their homes, and increasing people’s vulnerability to famine and malnutrition, illness and exploitation<sup>29</sup>, particularly the most marginalised communities such as persons with disabilities, women and girls<sup>30</sup>. More and more people globally are being pushed into extreme poverty, facing failing or inadequate social safety nets and public services and soaring food and energy prices<sup>31</sup>. One in every 23 people worldwide are in need of humanitarian assistance<sup>32</sup> and the UNDP report that for the first time in 30 years, we are seeing a reversal in human development<sup>33</sup>.

At a global level, economic inequality between countries has been driven through unequal terms of trade, the extraction of potential public revenue through debt payments and harmful tax practices. The growing debt crisis is pushing governments to cut essential services and reduce spending, disproportionately affecting women and the most marginalised communities. According to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), 34 lower income countries were in debt default or at high risk of being so at the start of 2024, compared to just 17 in 2013<sup>34</sup>, and Prizzon reports that “all lower-income countries in sub-Saharan Africa are now classified as being at least at moderate risk of debt distress”<sup>35</sup>.

For most countries around the world, as with all crises, the COVID-19 pandemic disproportionately affected women, persons with disabilities<sup>36</sup> and racialised groups: exacerbating the existing inequities experienced by already marginalised communities<sup>37</sup>. At the same time, the pandemic also required rapid, locally led responses<sup>38</sup>, challenging the way that humanitarian responders needed to operate to maintain access to local communities<sup>39</sup>. This brought to the fore the existing capacities and effectiveness of local actors and groups<sup>40</sup>. For example, the South Asia Women Foundation describes how in India, “women’s and trans persons collectives, groups and organisations stepped in to address the multifarious crises generated by the pandemic with great courage and resilience, highlighting the power and value of social mobilisation, collective action and collaborative strategies”<sup>41</sup>.

Development, humanitarian and climate funding is increasingly insufficient to keep up with the level of poverty, inequality and crisis<sup>42</sup>. Many donor countries, including the UK, are squeezing or reallocating their ODA contributions<sup>43</sup>, and global progress against the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is stalling<sup>44</sup>. Multilateral action appears increasingly fragile<sup>45</sup>, with the UNDP describing a “waning of concerted support, growing chauvinism, and protectionism, which are challenging the virtue of international cooperation”<sup>46</sup>.

Power is also shifting around who is ‘financing’ development work globally, away from donor governments in the Global North towards private sector actors and ‘non-traditional’ government actors from China and the Gulf. Tulika Srivastava and Lydia Zigomo describe these actors as “keeping the colonial system very much alive,” where we are seeing a contemporary continuation and recreation of colonial practices and power dynamics under a ‘new guard’<sup>47</sup>. In both the UK and across the Global North, governments are pushing social development finance through Development Finance Institutions<sup>48</sup> (DFIs, e.g. African Development Bank or European Investment Bank) under the guise of creating jobs and “generating financial return” domestically and driving economic opportunities overseas. However, there is currently very little evidence that DFIs have an impact on poverty reduction, let alone impact that reaches (or even intends to reach) the most marginalised<sup>49</sup>. Even where global financial systems and social development finance reform agendas exist, such as the Bridgetown Agenda, these appear to remain “heavily reliant on private financing”<sup>50</sup>.

In an attempt to keep pace with the changing nature of global crises, many of the more traditional international actors are urging reform of the humanitarian and social development finance systems<sup>51</sup>, “recognising the inadequacies of the global development and humanitarian financing system to meet surging needs created by conflict and climate change”<sup>52</sup>. In 2016, former UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon described the system as “outdated and resistant to change, fragmented and uncommitted to working collaboratively, and too dominated by the interests and funding of a few countries”<sup>53</sup>.

Conversations are increasing around global finance reform, anticipatory funding and supporting more locally led models of humanitarian action and sustainable development (a ‘localisation’ agenda) – building on some of the new working practices which emerged during the pandemic. Towards the end of 2023, the #ShiftThePower movement held a summit in Bogota, Colombia to pursue a conversation around putting communities in charge of their own development and re-shaping the international funding system to be more locally-owned and locally-led<sup>54</sup>.

## The UK Government: evidence of a change of approach?

The UK’s previously globally leading commitment to global sustainable development has been severely challenged over the last few years, with the reduction to the ODA budget, the decision to classify in-country refugee support as ODA, and the dissolution of the Department for International Development (DFID) and merger into the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO). Increasingly large proportions of the UK’s development spend are also being pushed through British International Investment (BII), the UK’s development finance institution, criticised as a way to redefine ODA contributions in the ‘national interest’ as well as an attempt to make the UK’s fiscal deficit appear lower<sup>55</sup>.

In 2023, the FCDO’s own Equality Impact Assessment showed that the cuts have disproportionately impacted women and girls, people with disabilities, alongside other marginalised groups and those with protected characteristics<sup>56</sup>, risking leaving some of the world’s most marginalised communities without critical services<sup>57</sup>. Further, a UK Parliamentary inquiry on racism in the development sector found that “the manner in which the cuts to UK ODA took place, with little or no consultation of downstream partners, or the communities where they are implemented has sent a harmful message that the UK does not care about the people affected, many of which are Black, Indigenous and People of Colour”<sup>58</sup>.

In an effort to redress this negative trajectory and set some commitments up to 2030, in November 2023, the FCDO published its white paper entitled International Development in a contested world: ending extreme poverty and tackling climate change. There is much in the white paper that speaks to a renewed commitment by the UK to the implementation of the SDGs, to continue a commitment to gender equality and to push for more sources of finance for development. The commitments to work for an international system that is fairer for all, and for reforming and greening global financial systems are welcome but without specific targets for change (beyond vague commitments to reform) it will be difficult to measure implementation. The commitments in the white paper largely fail to amount to a truly transformative approach but they do highlight some future positive pathways, e.g. the commitment to longer term locally led funding; the willingness to fund Women’s Rights Organisations – recognising their key role; and the expressed understanding that conflict has led to greater fragility. But these more positive aspects are potentially hampered in their execution by the lack of detail on how they will be implemented and the lack of any policy coherence with domestic policy on human rights, respecting humanitarian principles or tackling climate change. At the outset of the white paper process, it was also made clear that the paper would not announce or result in any additional resources above the current UK ODA budget<sup>59</sup>.

In recent years, the FCDO has made a number of clear commitments to disability inclusion and to progressing gender equality. The 2022 Disability Inclusion and Rights Strategy makes some strong commitments around targeted support to persons with disabilities, using “development and diplomatic expertise” to advance the rights and freedoms of persons with disabilities, strengthening organisations of persons with disability and prioritising the active and meaningful participation of persons with disabilities “in all their diversity”<sup>60</sup>. Similarly, the International Women and Girls Strategy launched by the FCDO in 2023 includes a number of high level strategic commitments to progress gender equality globally. However, these strategies now need to be fully financed and implemented in ways that allow the agendas to be owned and driven by persons with disabilities and women and girls<sup>61</sup>.

The UK’s global redistribution and development policies form just one component part of the UK’s international affairs. Successive cabinet ministers in the UK Government have pushed harmful narratives and policy around immigration and asylum, demonising those who seek safety in the country, and threatening to breach international law by deporting migrants to Rwanda<sup>62</sup>. The government continues to export arms to human rights abusing countries, including to Israel and Saudi Arabia. They are also failing to meet international climate commitments<sup>63</sup>.



## The Scottish Government: a vision of international solidarity?

The majority of ‘international’ affairs fall under reserved powers, including development, defence, migration, foreign policy and trade. Despite this, since the introduction of an international development policy in 2005 by then First Minister, Jack McConnell<sup>64</sup>, successive Scottish governments have maintained an internationalist vision for the country, engaging on issues of development, trade and degrees of paradiplomacy. In their 2023 paper on Scottish paradiplomacy, Dellepiane and Reinsberg observe “a determination [of Scottish decision-makers] to invest political and symbolic resources in the building of Scotland’s foreign policy,” based around stated values of global citizenship, fairness and international solidarity<sup>65</sup>.

The Scottish Government has a small but growing development budget, including development assistance for its main partner countries (Malawi, Rwanda, Zambia and Pakistan); capacity-strengthening initiatives between institutions in Scotland and its partner countries; commercial investment initiatives, including the Malawi Investment Initiative; and collaboration with other donors, including Comic Relief and Sport Relief, in its partner countries. The Scottish Government also has a Humanitarian Emergency Fund, a new Women and Girls Fund, and a Climate Justice Fund, including funding for loss and damage, just communities, and international adaptation and resilience projects.

In 2021 the Scottish Government reviewed its approach to international development. Citing the Black Lives Matter movement as impetus for opening up conversations about “tackling systematic racism and inequality and shifting power to partner countries” the review conclusions introduced eight new programme principles: partner-country-led development; equality; amplify global south voice; inclusion and diversity; collaboration and partnership; innovative, adapting and sustainable; embrace technology; and accountable, transparent and safe. The Review also committed to the creation of the new Equality Fund, the establishment of a Global South Panel, and opportunities for organisations in the Global South to apply for funding without a Scottish partner<sup>66</sup>. While gender equality, and to a certain extent, racial justice, feature as core elements of this new approach, other areas of inclusion, such as disability inclusion or LGBTIQ+ rights, are absent.

More broadly than international development, Scotland’s 2021-22 Programme for Government promised a new “global affairs framework... to guide Scotland’s international engagement, grounded in a values-based approach, and a feminist approach to foreign policy”<sup>67</sup>. Following consultation with civil society groups in Scotland and internationally, in November 2023, the government launched a position paper setting out the scope and guiding principles of a Feminist Approach to International Relations (FAIR)<sup>68</sup>. The FAIR commits to “leverage all aspects of Scotland’s international policy to advance gender equality and the rights of women, girls and marginalised groups in pursuit of a fairer world” and “tackling the root causes and power structures” which drive global insecurities and inequalities. It shares much with a decolonial, anti-racist, global justice approach, aiming to “take an anti-racist, inclusive, collaborative approach by harnessing a range of diverse voices, and to ensure we confront historic and continuing injustice”<sup>69</sup>. This paper is set to be the first in a series of papers setting out the FAIR approach.

The Scottish Government also expresses aspirations to start joining up the dots between different areas of international engagement, and between domestic and international areas of policy. They have stated that the eight principles published following the 2020 review process will be applied across government departments and ministerial portfolios, including climate, health, trade, education, and equalities<sup>70</sup>. A number of new bills going through Scottish Parliament may also present opportunities for greater policy coherence around domestic and international policy, including the Human Rights Bill (which will see the incorporation of a number of international human rights conventions into Scots law<sup>71</sup>), the Wellbeing and Sustainable Development Bill, and the Circular Economy Bill. However, as explored later in the paper, while the Scottish Government states its willingness to take a more joined up approach, much policymaking continues to operate in silos.

Despite these strong commitments to a seemingly more transformative approach, a clear concern raised by survey respondents, discussion group and workshop participants is a lack of follow through and the ‘implementation gap’<sup>72</sup> in Scotland. “The Scottish Government is very good at talking the talk but not at walking the walk,” said one workshop participant. “They haven’t done anything except say they will and then nothing happens – same with most of their grand statements!,” said a survey respondent. While progress is being made against commitments to a gender equality focus and more locally-led projects through the establishment of the Women and Girls Fund and Climate Just Communities Fund respectively, workshop and discussion group participants also pointed towards the length of time it took the Scottish Government to mobilise loss and damage funds, and previous commitments to business and human rights and fair trade that appear to have slipped off the radar. One interviewee told us that they felt the recommendations in these areas “were quite strong” but “they did nothing”.

Finally, there is a marked divergence between the current Scottish and UK governments’ visions and trajectories around global justice and development. Dellepiane and Reinsberg note a particular clash arising post-Brexit, between the Scottish concept of Global Citizenship and the UK notion of a Global Britain<sup>73</sup>. The Scottish Government, as well as the SNP members of the UK Parliament, have also been pushing the UK Government across a number of reserved policies, including calling for the retention of 0.7% of GNI on overseas development assistance, for nuclear disarmament and an end to arms sales to Saudi Arabia and Israel, and for a more human-rights based approach to immigration and asylum. They have also pushed for the UK to commit to vaccine equity<sup>74</sup>, and to follow their lead on issues such as climate loss and damage financing, and have been more willing to stand in support of Palestinians in the face of Israeli state violence. However, much less publicised is the Scottish Government’s use of public funds to support arms manufacturers in Scotland, or Police Scotland’s role in providing training and support to overseas police and security forces, which in the past has included the Sri Lankan state<sup>75</sup>.

## 3. What do we mean by ‘shifting the power’?

### Moving decision-making and resources to those most affected by poverty and inequality

**“If we want to shift the power, we need to understand where the power came from”<sup>76</sup>**

For most people in the global sustainable development sector ‘shifting the power’ has come to mean something akin to moving decision-making and resources to those most affected by poverty and inequality – usually framed as moving power away from the Global North towards the Global South, particularly to grassroots and community groups in the Global South.

This version of ‘shifting the power’ sits comfortably alongside the ‘localisation’ agenda, a conversation happening within the international community about “decentralising power, money and resources in humanitarian and development aid” and empowering local actors to take decision-making roles “with international actors (including INGOs) stepping in only if and when necessary”<sup>77</sup>. In 2016, some of the largest donors and humanitarian organisations globally agreed to a ‘Grand Bargain’ which commits 25% of humanitarian funding through local and national responders. However, not only has the financial commitment not yet been met by the donors, the localisation agenda as framed by the Grand Bargain and other global donor conversations also tends to lend itself to technical approaches or fixes. “Attempts to ‘localise’ then become simply about adapting Northern ideas to the local context and empowering only certain hand-picked ‘local’ actors, invisibilising and even silencing the diversity of other stakeholder groups and ideas that may exist in that context” argue GADN, saying that within the localisation agenda, “Ultimately, power is retained by the donors”<sup>78</sup>.

A number of workshop and discussion group participants, particularly those from the Global South, expressed concerns and discomfort with the narratives that see shifting the power in this way, perceiving it as maintaining and reproducing a colonial logic. “This narrative of ‘shift the power’ still places the decisions and the rights to shift resources in the hands of the people who are in power and who have traditionally created the conditions that we find ourselves in now,” said one discussion participant. “Bad aid has brought us to this point, and yet we must still wait for people to shift the power. And I think that there’s something implicitly patronising in that narrative that needs to also be addressed.” Similarly, in a recent meeting of Scotland’s new Global South Panel, panellists noted that the terminology “shifting the power” is potentially problematic as it implies the Global South has no power of its own, suggesting in its place ‘equalising power’<sup>79</sup>. “The system needs to be overhauled both from top to bottom and bottom up”<sup>80</sup>, said one member of the panel.

Looking at the #ShiftThePower Manifesto for Change<sup>81</sup>, it is clear that the term can and does have much greater depth of meaning for some international actors, with the manifesto calling for much more than a mere shift of financial resources or a limited view of power. The manifesto calls for, among other things: expanding our collective horizons beyond money; humility; moving beyond quick solutions and embracing principles of global solidarity and distributed leadership.

### Taking feminist, anti-racist, inclusive and decolonial approaches to ‘shifting the power’

Feminist, anti-racist, inclusive, and decolonial approaches can potentially offer more transformative interpretations of ‘shifting the power’, each in their own way bringing a greater focus on challenging the structures which perpetuate inequality and injustices at their root.

Although each of these approaches<sup>82</sup> have distinct insights and are usually applied separately when thinking about international affairs, they are highly interrelated, not least because the systems of power they seek to address – patriarchy, colonialism, racism, and ableism among others – are also interlocking and mutually reinforcing. Colonialism, Srivastava notes for example, “rides on and benefits from patriarchy”<sup>83</sup>. All have a strong coalescence of ideas around dismantling or transforming systems and structures of oppression, violence, economic imperialism and exploitation, and envisioning alternative realities.

# Our vision

When asked to think about what ‘shifting the power’ might mean from feminist, anti-racist, inclusive and decolonial perspectives, participants in our discussion groups and workshops described a number of underlying values and concepts as illustrated below.



Looking across different interpretations of what it might mean to take a feminist, anti-racist, anti-colonial and/or inclusive approach to international affairs, we have pulled out eight common or recurring themes and principles that are shared by these 'transformative' approaches:

- Centring of local and Indigenous knowledge(s) and lived experience:** This principle advocates for empowering individuals with lived experiences of oppression to lead responses and solutions to the issues that affect their lives, acknowledging that their unique perspectives are often overlooked in historical narratives.
- Intersectionality:** Intersectionality serves as a framework to recognise the interconnected nature of social inequalities, encouraging a holistic understanding of marginalised communities by considering overlapping and compounding factors such as race, gender, disability, sexuality, Indigeneity, and class.
- Reparative and restorative justice:** Central to decolonial thinking, reparative justice actively corrects wrongs through material and symbolic reparations, with a focus on healing and transformation. This principle extends to feminist perspectives on addressing gender-based violence and indigenous approaches emphasising reciprocity and restorative justice, particularly in the context of climate justice.
- Language:** Recognising the power of language, this principle advocates for inclusive and accessible communication, the avoidance of language that reinforces harmful colonial and patriarchal power dynamics. It emphasises the importance of language and storytelling as tools for constructing alternatives.
- Wellbeing, care and healing:** Care and wellbeing form an important part of feminist approaches at individual, collective and structural levels, and are often undervalued in economic and political decision-making. Climate, gender, and racial justice movements often align with an anti-capitalist stance, prioritising care and wellbeing over growth.
- Interconnectedness of people and planet:** Closely related to ideas around care and wellbeing, much feminist, Indigenous and anti-racist thought sees strong links between practising care for humanity and care for the environment and non-human. It emphasises the impact of extractivist capitalist economies on climate and biodiversity crises and recognises the importance of Indigenous perspectives on nature.
- Collective action and solidarity:** This principle emphasises the need to harness 'power with' rather than 'power over' to bring about sustainable social transformation. Global solidarity is essential in addressing systemic issues, with movements actively building connections across borders.
- Space for creativity, learning and joy:** Space within these movements for creativity and joy is also seen as a central part of sustaining resistance. It underlines the significance of learning, unlearning, and critically reflecting on past and present practices as core elements of transformative approaches.

## 4. What pathways can the Scottish and UK governments take to contribute to shifting the power in global sustainable development and global affairs?

### Are governments in the Global North able to ‘shift the power’?

To take the transformative approaches outlined above to their natural conclusion would mean a model of global affairs that dismantles many, if not all, of the existing ways of working. It would require changes to the nature of global relations, moving away from an extractive capitalist economy predicated on endless growth, prioritising global human security over narrow sets of national security interests, and a rebalancing of international power dynamics. Candace Rondeaux believes it's also “time to take a sledgehammer entirely to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), entirely to the World Bank, entirely to this structure of the UN Security Council that we've been living with for 70 years”<sup>84</sup>.

Although it is only one part of international affairs, ‘aid’, or development cooperation and humanitarian assistance, are the areas perhaps the most talked about in terms of what needs to be decolonised. “Development cooperation operates within, and at the same time perpetuates, a much broader (colonial) system. Unpacking development cooperation in this fashion it becomes clear that it is not development cooperation itself but the system in which it is embedded that needs to be decolonised”<sup>85</sup>. For some, decolonising ‘aid’ means an end to the international ‘aid’ system altogether, while others are keen not to ‘throw out the baby with the bathwater’ (“if we dismiss the option of abolishing development aid altogether, what other paths are open to meaningfully transform the development sector?”<sup>86</sup>) and see potential for reforms in the system which would enable communities to set their own needs and solutions. One interviewee from a UK-based international non-governmental organisation (INGO) also noted the potential risk of pursuing a radical dismantling of the ‘aid’ system at a time when governments are making severe cuts to their ‘aid’ budgets. Although the nature and structure of the ‘aid’ system is inherently colonial, the harm caused by colonialism is a big part of the reason why ‘aid’ – in some form – needs to exist.

Within this, it is difficult to comprehend the role that governments might take to support these kinds of shifts. The majority of governments in the Global North are patriarchal, neocolonial powers that seek at some level to maintain the status quo of the international system. What might a reckoning with this actually look like? Further, the big multilateral institutions such as the World Bank and the IMF which nation states work within – and where Global North actors wield disproportionate influence – are also largely colonial in nature, designed with “colonial principles in mind” and setting rules around trade and finance that maintain if not exacerbate power imbalances in the world economy<sup>87</sup>. As Uzo Iweala argues, when you have a whole global economic system that is “built off of the idea that some people are not equal to others or that some people are better than others, if you start saying ‘I think you are equal...’ your whole system starts to collapse”<sup>88</sup>. “I think it's a psychological, emotional, and even an epistemological thing”, she says, “People can't do that, because then you have to completely reorder the world”<sup>89</sup>.

Many decolonial, anti-racist, and feminist activists also argue that it is not the role of governments in the Global North to bring or determine the nature of the change required – “the Global South must end regional inequality on its own terms – not the North's” argues Themrise Khan, a researcher based in Pakistan<sup>90</sup>. The Feminist Centre for Racial Justice agrees, arguing that the Global South should be recentered as the “primary site from which to reframe global narratives on racialised and

**“Is it realistic to integrate feminist principles into the very systems that feminism exists to dismantle?”**

Emitomo Oluwatobiloba,  
Feminist Researcher & Organiser

intersectional gender justice”<sup>91</sup>. “The aim is to provide or to seize the control of power, and allow people to imagine a mutual aid and a solidarity, a humanitarian system, that serves their needs, that is affected by their desires, and that is capable of continuing without the oversight from donors and managers”<sup>92</sup>, says Tammam Aloudat.

Where Global North governments are engaging and taking up the language of more transformative change, such as in Scotland, there is also a risk that terms such as decolonisation, anti-racism, and feminism become “buzzwords”<sup>93</sup> and increasingly divorced from their more radical political roots. Co-opting the language created and used by activist movements is in itself a form of colonialism, even if accidentally so, and can serve to lock-in injustice rather than shift the power.

However, this does not amount to a situation where governments in the Global North can absolve themselves of responsibility from contributing to a more just and equitable world.

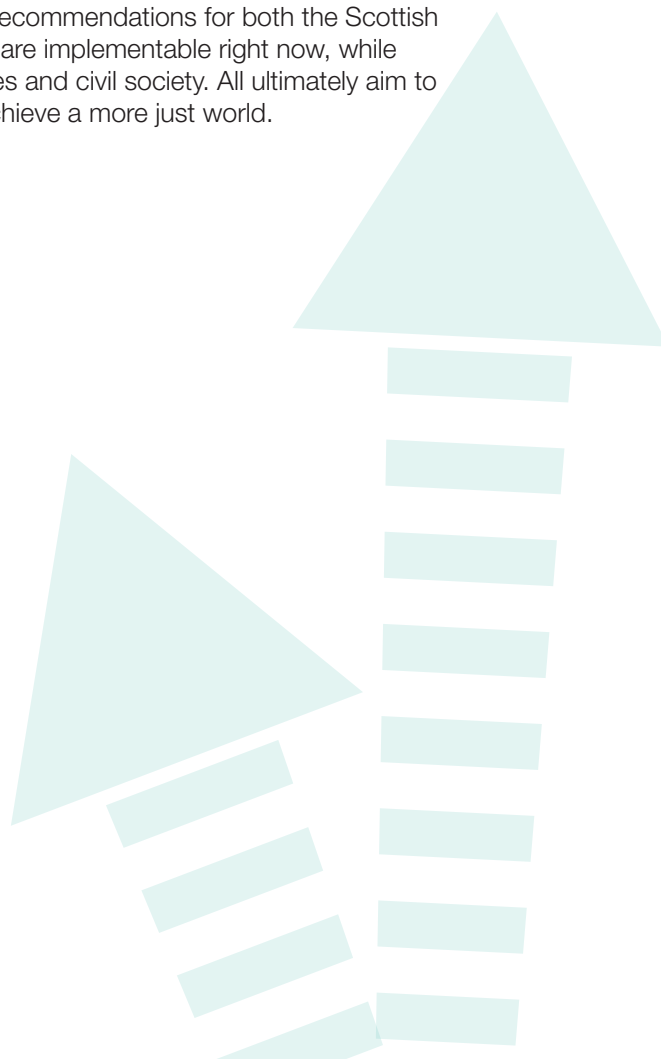
Not only should they be taking actions that further the justice goals as outlined by social movements, and to the extent possible work in solidarity with movements for justice, they can also contribute to more transformative change by stopping doing harmful things. This is particularly true in the case of governments who are moving in more socially conservative or authoritarian directions and placing a stranglehold on the activist movements pushing for transformative change.

## Potential pathways for Scottish and UK governments

We have identified seven broad pathways where we believe that the UK and Scottish governments can take steps towards contributing to a more just world.

Drawing on our conversations, discussion groups and our reading, these pathways map out different options that the governments could take to integrate more feminist, decolonial, anti-racist and inclusive approaches and principles into their policymaking and actions, at both micro and macro levels. Although each pathway is presented as distinct, in fact there is a great deal of overlap between the pathways, drawn together by the kind of in-depth thinking and reflections required from governments if they are to fully commit to more transformative approaches.

Under each pathway, we have pulled out a few specific recommendations for both the Scottish and UK governments. Some of these recommendations are implementable right now, while some require more time and cooperation with other states and civil society. All ultimately aim to contribute to the structural transformations needed to achieve a more just world.



# Pathway 1: Take basic steps to acknowledge historic and ongoing injustices



## ...by making efforts to understand and have honest conversations about the harms caused by colonialism

What is needed right now, argued one focus group participant, is an “honest conversation around reparations, around colonialism, around slavery, around racism, and all those related issues, including the unfair terms and conditions that are attached to getting funding from them.” “Only by understanding the complex nature of colonialism, past and present, can we begin to tackle its ongoing impact today,” argues Tulika Srivastava, human rights lawyer and director of Women’s Fund Asia<sup>94</sup>.

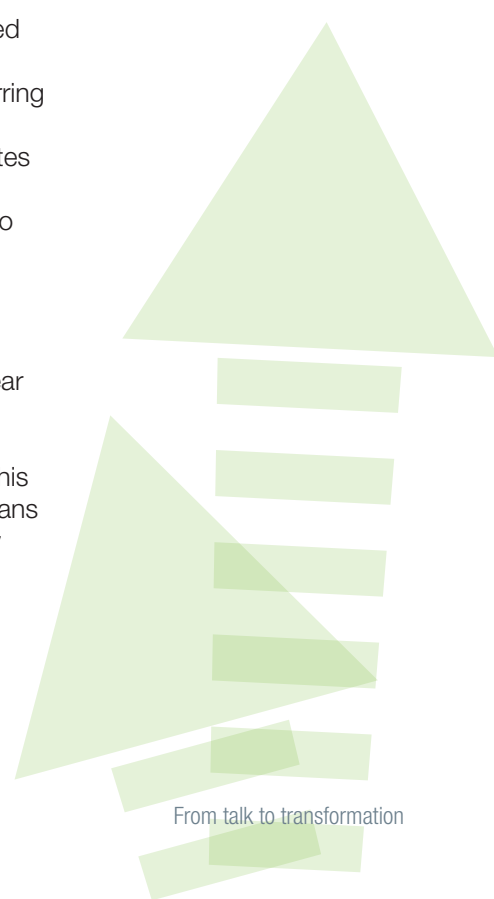
For governments, a first step is to understand and acknowledge the historical and ongoing harms that are enduring and cumulative. This includes understanding and acknowledging the intergenerational legacy of slavery and colonial violence, including the use of gender-based violence as a colonial strategy. It means understanding the “historical accumulation of wealth through colonial means”<sup>95</sup> and how “Europe’s cultural and intellectual riches also cannot be sutured from its encounters” with the Global South<sup>96</sup>, as well as how coloniality and systems of white supremacy continue to shape European and Global North government’s relationships with former colonies, and how Europe continues to benefit and profit from neocolonial systems. It also means acknowledging how the legacies of colonialism continue to affect marginalised and oppressed groups around the world, such as the racialised, anti-women and anti-LGBTQI+ laws and discriminatory norms introduced by the British that continue to cause huge amounts of damage to the lives of women, ethnic minorities and gay and trans communities worldwide<sup>97</sup>.

Participants in our discussion groups generally felt that the Scottish Government is “further along when thinking about these things than the UK Government,” often referencing former First Minister Nicola Sturgeon’s use of reparations language around climate loss and damage funding, or particular programmes of work around Scottish museums. However, in fact there has been very little reckoning or specific engagement by the Scottish Government with Scotland’s role in colonialism or scrutinising on how colonial power continues to play a role in how Scotland acts internationally. Even the ‘special relationship’ between Scotland and Malawi, created initially in honour of Scottish missionary and colonial explorer David Livingstone, continues with little interrogation of Scotland’s colonial legacy in the country. “Referring to the relationship between a former coloniser and colony as one of “friendship” or “collaborative development” is deeply problematic, ahistorical and dangerous,” writes Ben Wilson for SIDA, “It can undermine Scotland’s complicity in empire and rob current generations of an understanding of what the ‘development’ project ought to be about – reparations”<sup>98</sup>.

The 2023 FCDO white paper states that the UK will “engage with humility and acknowledge our past”<sup>99</sup>, but no depth or detail is given on how the government intends to do this. At the same time members of the current UK Government appear to be increasingly using language about not being responsible for the ‘sins of the father’<sup>100</sup> and moving further away from conversations internally or externally about colonial harm<sup>101</sup>. There is a strong opportunity for a new UK Government to reset this path by being open to conversations about our colonial past, and for parliamentarians of all parties to engage in dialogue on the issue through the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Afrikan Reparations (APPGAR)<sup>102</sup>, who are strongly linked with Afrikan Heritage Communities<sup>103</sup>, and look to expand this conversation to other areas of the world.

**“Only by understanding the complex nature of colonialism, past and present, can we begin to tackle its ongoing impact today.”**

Tulika Srivastava,  
Women’s Fund Asia





## ...by issuing public apologies and making symbolic and cultural reparations

Financial reparations are one substantive way of recognising and redressing past harms (and are explored further later). However, as Dr Yonah Matemba and others have highlighted, reparations can encompass more than monetary compensation, including cultural restoration, apologies, commemorations, and other symbolic atonement. Financial reparations alone are limited in what they can achieve, and colonial governments in the current system cannot repair the trauma and harm they have caused. “[Apologies are] an acknowledgment that there was wrong done,” says Uzo Iweala, Nigerian-American author and CEO of The African Center, “That doesn’t actually cost anybody anything financially. You can never compensate for the atrocity but you can acknowledge that that person is human. And I think one of the things around reparations and why people are unwilling to acknowledge or consider reparations in certain cases is because we have a fundamental problem in this world, which is that certain sets of people are still not really considered human”<sup>104</sup>.

Both the UK and Scottish governments should, as a basic form of reparation for the harm they have caused, be making explicit formal apologies for the crimes committed under colonialism. So far at UK level, representatives of the government and monarchy have expressed ‘regret’ for British colonial violence, falling short of offering any apologies<sup>105</sup>. As the CARICOM Ten Point Plan on Reparatory Justice argues, such ‘statements of regret’ “represent a refusal to take responsibility for such crimes” and suggest that victims and their descendants are not worthy of an apology<sup>106</sup>. In April 2023, Prime Minister Rishi Sunak explicitly refused to apologise for the UK’s role in the trade of enslaved people and ruled out reparations<sup>107</sup>.

A small number of cities across the UK, including Edinburgh and Glasgow in Scotland, have apologised for their role in slavery and colonialism. “I apologise to all those who suffered profound physical and mental abuse from the city’s past involvement in colonialism and slavery,” said Edinburgh’s Lord Provost in a speech to council in 2022 in response to a recommendation from the Edinburgh Slavery and Colonialism Legacy Review Group<sup>108</sup>, “We cannot deny the benefits that the city has accrued over the years from the exploitation of others and in particular the continent and peoples of Africa”<sup>109</sup>. The Scottish Parliament, however, has yet to issue such an apology.

Scotland’s museums and universities have been slowly repatriating stolen goods on a case by case, city by city basis. Since 2021, the University of Aberdeen has repatriated a Benin Bronze to Nigeria, Glasgow Museums have returned looted artefacts to India, the National Museum of Scotland has ‘rematriated’<sup>110</sup> a totem pole to the Nisga’a Nation in Canada<sup>111</sup>, and Edinburgh University has returned warrior skulls to Taiwan’s Indigenous Paiwan community – all accompanied by handover ceremonies that attempt to acknowledge the colonial harm caused and honour the community harmed. Despite decades of campaigning, moves at a UK level to repatriate stolen property are even slower, in part due to certain museums being banned by law from permanently giving back contested items in their collections<sup>112</sup>. The British Museum (often criticised for being among the ‘world’s largest receivers of stolen property’<sup>113</sup>) and the V&A have been using a workaround to this law whereby they ‘loan’ items back to their home country, such as with Ghana’s Asante Gold<sup>114</sup>. However, many countries fear that if they take part in such a loan agreement, this infers that the UK is the rightful owner.

## ...by ensuring our school curriculums and public museums and monuments accurately reflect and engage with our colonial histories

Governments in the Global North can also acknowledge historical and ongoing colonial injustices by ensuring that our school curriculums and public museums and monuments accurately reflect and engage with our colonial histories, centring the experiences of impacted communities around the world. One student from an anti-racist school club in Scotland talks about how, for example, history classes in school “can grapple with the injustices of the past and how they continue to impact our present, to disrupt the continuum of the system of racism” and remind pupils “that the ‘Global South’ has a full and rich history on its own”<sup>115</sup>.

NASWUT, the teachers union, describes how decolonising school curriculums involves looking at the curriculum content and sources of knowledge, as well as how the curriculum is taught, recognising also that decolonising is an ongoing process for those involved in education, rather than an end goal<sup>116</sup>. “Decolonising the curriculum involves looking at representation and language across the whole

## Decolonising the curriculum in Scotland

curriculum,” states the NASWUT framework, “It also involves helping learners understand and engage with issues of representation, linguistic diversity, rights, power, equality, inclusion and justice”<sup>117</sup>. Although not synonymous with antiracism in education, decolonising the curriculum forms part of a broader approach to addressing racialised power dynamics in schools, and understanding the connection between colonialism and ‘present day’ racism.

While some positive moves are being taken on this front in Scotland (see Snapshot on the right), the conversations in England, mounting campaigns to decolonise the curriculum – including hundreds of schools signing up to the idea<sup>118</sup> – have been facing successive Conservative governments keen to restore ‘traditional’ learning<sup>119</sup>, pushing back on the idea of teaching Black history, and increasingly using decolonisation as a wedge issue.<sup>120</sup> A petition to teach Britain’s colonial past as part of England’s curriculum received over a quarter of a million signatures in 2020, but received a government response stating that Key Stage 3 history curriculum already included the theme of empire. By contrast, in 2021, the Welsh Government announced that Black history lessons would become mandatory in their new curriculum<sup>121</sup>.

Despite the UK-wide impact of the global Rhodes Must Fall campaign<sup>122</sup>, decolonising at University level is proving slow to take off, and continues to face high levels of institutional resistance<sup>123</sup>. A recent Fol of all UK universities showed that less than a fifth of universities are committed to addressing the legacy of colonialism in their curriculums, and few were committed to decolonising across more than one or two departments or thinking much beyond adding Black and non-Western authors to reading lists<sup>124</sup>.

There are potentially many lessons to be learned from the groups pushing forward anti-racist and decolonial approaches in Scotland for Scotland’s international engagement in education. Education has been a core part of the Scottish Government’s country-specific support for a long time yet, like the global education and the ‘learning crisis’ agenda more broadly, this area of development remains remarkably untouched by the ‘shifting the power’ conversation. The Scottish Government should work with their partner countries to ensure that education programmes and frameworks centre Indigenous and local knowledge, perspectives, and languages within educational frameworks; challenge Eurocentric narratives; and enable students everywhere in the world to critically analyse power structures and social injustice.

Domestically in Scotland, activist-led movements and community organisations are campaigning for anti-racist approaches to education and decolonised school and university curricula. For example the Scotland-based Anti-Racist Educator is a collective of educational stakeholders (including students, teachers, parents, academics and activists) working towards building an education system that is equitable, free from racial injustice and critically engaged with issues of power, identity, and privilege. Education experts such as Rowena Arshad<sup>125</sup> and Khadija Mohammed<sup>126</sup> are also leading discussions about anti-racism in the Scottish school system and decolonising the Curriculum for Excellence. One of the recommendations made by the Expert Reference Group on COVID-19 and ethnicity was to include the teaching of Black history in the curriculum<sup>127</sup>. These efforts have not gone unheard by the Scottish Government, who have set up an Anti-Racism in Education Programme, including anti-racist curriculum principles<sup>128</sup>, and workstreams on curriculum reform and building racial literacy<sup>129</sup>.

Across universities and other higher education institutes in Scotland, groups are also interrogating how different disciplines “have been shaped by colonial history, and the impact of this on individuals and communities... privileg[ing] the needs of some groups and marginalis[ing] those of others”<sup>130</sup>. Various universities have also established specific decolonial research agendas and discussion spaces, including the student-led UncoverEd<sup>131</sup> at Edinburgh University, and Decolonise Glasgow at Glasgow University.

As Cunningham and Grimwood from the cross-university ‘Collaborative Cluster’ highlight, it’s important to note that often people doing this work are precarious (for example, teaching assistants or early career researchers on precarious contracts) and/or People of Colour, which is “not how the burden should be distributed.”<sup>132</sup> Further, involvement in such work may be putting people at risk of harm and abuse – something witnessed in an online backlash to the Racial Literacy Programme<sup>133</sup>. “Some universities are saying they’re doing work, but what they really mean is the students are doing the work for them for free,” Race equality specialist Sofia Akel argues, “and often they’re met with hostility from senior members of staff.”<sup>134</sup>

On an institutional level, in 2019 the University of Glasgow set up a reparative justice scheme with the University of the West Indies (UWI) over its historical links to the Slave Trade – thought to be the first British University to sign such an agreement<sup>135</sup>. The agreement sees Glasgow University committing to spending £20 million over 20 years on a Glasgow-Caribbean Centre for Development Research, co-located in Glasgow and the Caribbean and focused on research and awareness raising around slavery – a move which has received some criticism as “dressing up self-funding as an atonement for its past sins”<sup>136</sup>.

# Recommendations

## Both governments

- ▶ Establish (separate) independent commissions<sup>137</sup> to interrogate the impact of their colonial legacies, including colonialism's continued manifestation in current policy making and decisions. In Scotland, this should include an interrogation of the relationship between colonialism and Scotland's choice of partner countries
- ▶ Issue public national apologies for the harm caused through colonialism, that also recognise the additional and continued harm to marginalised communities including but not limited to women, ethnic minorities and LGBTQI+ communities
- ▶ Use international political platforms to make a clear statement of commitment to addressing systemic racism, domestically and internationally, and the legacies of colonialism, and commit to a timeframe in which to review their progress<sup>138</sup>
- ▶ Work with communities harmed to find ways forward on reparations, reconciliation, and commemoration (with the Scottish Government this could start with holding in-country dialogue sessions on this topic with civil society and government representatives in their partner countries)
- ▶ Create spaces and support anti-racist and anticolonial activist groups within and outside the UK to review the English and Scottish national curriculums, and to work with teachers on teacher education programmes
- ▶ Invest specific funding for universities and students to pursue both research on colonialism and decolonisation, and establish working groups to decolonise university curriculums and structures

## UK government

- ▶ Review the British Museum Act of 1963 and the National Heritage Act of 1983 to allow for more freedom for UK museums to "deaccession" items in their collections
- ▶ Building on existing civil society and school initiatives such as the Black Curriculum, create a government-led programme to support the mandatory teaching of Black history and make moves to decolonise the curriculum in English schools

## Scottish government

- ▶ Working with museums, universities and anti-colonial groups and diaspora communities, produce a national action plan for the proactive repatriation of stolen cultural goods
- ▶ Work with domestic anti-racist education groups and representatives from partner countries to review Scotland's international development education portfolio, and produce a plan to address any issues found

## Pathway 2: Promote feminist and decolonised economic alternatives



### ...by prioritising human and planetary wellbeing over economic growth

An anti-racist, decolonial, feminist, inclusive vision is one which challenges the prevailing neoliberal model of economic growth, privatisation and extractive economies; a model that is pushing us beyond our planetary boundaries and harming the world's most marginalised communities<sup>139</sup>. "With its focus on growth through privatisation, deregulation and liberalisation, the current economic approach has proved deeply harmful to gender equality, and especially to the most marginalised women and girls," says Joanne O'Neill from Action Aid, "It is driving the destruction of the planet whilst fuelling inequality rooted in colonialism – shifting resources from the Global South to the Global North"<sup>140</sup>.

For a long time, feminist organisations and networks, particularly from Africa and South America, have been pushing feminist economic alternatives which "break away from capitalism's violent and exploitative nature" to centre care, wellbeing, equality, and the environment, at their heart. These models tend to be about putting people and planet before profit and challenging and transforming the gendered power structures of economic systems that disadvantage women and other oppressed groups<sup>141</sup>. As Action Aid highlights, feminist economic alternatives seek changes to material realities in the lives of women, and changes to structures of power: the necessary steps "exist from the grassroots to the global levels and in most cases these steps are pursued simultaneously"<sup>142</sup>.

These models tend to also be about recognising the ways in which dominant economic models both rely upon and at the same time systematically devalue women's unpaid labour and care, and the ways in which this has been reproduced through colonialism and much contemporary forms of 'aid' and global sustainable development. For example, women's unpaid labour is assumed to fill the gaps when state provision of public services is lacking, women are often expected to participate as 'virtuous' environmental or land carers, even within development programmes<sup>143</sup>.

When it comes to steps that governments can take to progress such a vision, asks tend to centre around the need for governments in both the Global North and Global South to:

- Make economic decisions that are guided not by the pursuit of growth, but by how the decision will harm or benefit people and the planet both domestically and internationally<sup>144</sup>
- Move away from GDP as the primary indicator of social and economic progress<sup>145</sup>, and move towards metrics which measure things like wellbeing, happiness, dignity, the natural environment and community prosperity
- Build economic systems that take into account the inherent and non-financial value of care, paid or unpaid, and redistribute the burden of care by investing in the care sector
- Invest in universal high-quality, human-rights based public services that serve the needs of the most marginalised communities<sup>146</sup>

These need to happen in conjunction with a number of structural changes to the global economic system, such as debt cancellation, tax and trade justice (outlined in greater detail below), which currently (and perhaps intentionally) place huge constraints on countries in the Global South from enacting such policies.

Thanks in particular to the work of Wellbeing Economy Alliance Scotland and the Scottish women's sector, the Scottish Government is increasingly picking up some of the terminology and rhetoric around wellbeing economies. They have appointed a Cabinet Secretary for Wellbeing Economy, Net Zero and Energy and are adopting language like 'inclusive growth'. The Wellbeing and Sustainable Development Bill looks to introduce a definition of collective wellbeing into law and incorporate indicators of wellbeing into Scotland's National Performance Framework. As SIDA have argued<sup>147</sup>,

the Bill would help to ensure that actions in Scotland contribute to the betterment of wellbeing, both here in Scotland and elsewhere, as we navigate out of converging global crises.

At UK level, the Office of National Statistics (ONS) have developed a dashboard of UK measures of national wellbeing<sup>148</sup>. However most (if not all) of the steps outlined above sit in direct contention with the UK Government's current direction of travel domestically: determination to prioritise economic growth in its economic policymaking, increasing moves towards privatisation, and ongoing failures to invest in public services and care work (see also policy coherence pathway, p39).

## ...by pushing forward global conversations on reparations and debt cancellation

Financial reparations have been made by governments to communities they have harmed on multiple occasions, including German reparations paid to Holocaust survivors, and the UK Government paying compensation for colonial crimes committed in Kenya<sup>149</sup>. However, these have tended to be sporadic, and often in response to legal action being brought by specific communities for specific crimes, as was the case in the high court case against the British Government brought by torture survivors from Kenya. Such processes should, in theory, provide reparations through a "victim-centred process that guarantees meaningful participation and representation of affected communities aimed at full reparations for ongoing losses and the impact of colonial abuses and enslavement"<sup>150</sup>.

More broadly, there are also calls for global reparations funds and a move away from talking about 'aid' as charity to 'aid' as reparatory justice: "so it's not just sending funding or seeing it as they need aid; it's also about justice and ways to allow them to have agency, not just to be receivers of aid"<sup>151</sup>. There are calls which both the UK and Scottish governments could and should give support for an Enslavement Reparation Fund overseen by a Global Commission for Reparatory Justice which would resource areas such as health, education, technology transfer (as outlined in the CARICOM Ten Point Plan)<sup>152</sup>, as well as more specific calls, such as for a Commonwealth Reparations Fund attached to the Commonwealth Games<sup>153</sup>.

While the call for a more reparatory approach to social development finance is gaining traction within some philanthropy circles, it is still met with a level of hostility and suspicion by donor governments and multilaterals, including the UK. Some initiatives – such as funds to compensate countries in the Global South for loss and damage as a result of a climate crisis – take forward some elements of a reparatory approach without using the specific language of 'reparations', to avoid countries having to admit legal liability for past harm. Climate Loss and Damage Funds offer an opportunity to not only acknowledge that countries least responsible for the climate crisis are disproportionately suffering its impacts, but also to recognise the link between the climate crisis and colonialism, and offer an attempt to right historical and ongoing injustices as well as to prevent them from occurring again in the future<sup>154</sup>. While the Scottish Government was one of the first countries to commit to financial support for Loss and Damage (see Snapshot p22), the UK Government has been slower to come to the table, finally making a pledge of £60 million at COP28 in November 2023. However, the UK Government have been strongly criticised for 'creative accounting' and repackaging existing funds rather than making new money available<sup>155</sup>.

Another substantive way the UK and Scottish governments can contribute to a more 'decolonised' or reparatory model of global finance and development is to lobby for and be part of moves to permanently cancel all debt, and in the meantime support debt relief mechanisms. The global debt crisis is both a legacy of colonialism – with colonised countries struggling to repay debts accrued during periods of colonisation and post-colonial exploitation and state building – and a result of neocolonial policies

**“With its focus on growth through privatisation, deregulation and liberalisation, the current economic approach has proved deeply harmful to gender equality, and especially to the most marginalised women and girls.”**

Joanne O'Neill, Action Aid

pursued by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank, imposing austerity measures and conditionalities that further impoverish debtor nations, exacerbating economic inequality and dependency<sup>156</sup>. Debt cancellation is a form of reparative justice, and goes some way towards assisting countries in the Global South “to free up resources to address economic, social and ecological challenges that are often rooted in unjust economic conditions imposed by the colonising nations since emancipation” explain the Zacchaeus Tax Campaign<sup>157</sup>. Climate justice campaigners highlight that the estimated amount owed by the Global North in climate reparations in fact far exceeds the debt repayments being demanded<sup>158</sup>.

The UK Government should also push against the use of loans by International Financial Institutions, as well as legislate domestically to require private lenders to comply with coordinated international debt relief – the UK hosts more private lenders than any other country. This has been called for by the International Development Committee in May 2023, but continues to see banks, hedge funds and asset managers vigorously lobby against, or, in the case of BlackRock, refuse to attend parliamentary hearings<sup>159</sup>. On a smaller scale, both governments should also review their international development programming to ensure that “innovative financing solutions” such as microcredit in women’s economic empowerment programmes, is not actually perpetuating debt at community level<sup>160</sup>.

## Scotland’s Loss and Damage Funds – “an act of reparation”

At COP26 in Glasgow in 2021, the Scottish Government became one of the first governments to commit funding to address loss and damage, described by First Minister Nicola Sturgeon “not as an act of charity but as an act of reparation”<sup>161</sup>. Sturgeon pledged a further £5 million at COP27, urging other countries to follow suit.

Scotland’s championing of Loss and Damage has been warmly welcomed by climate justice activists worldwide and is seen to have had a big impact on pushing the global conversation forward. A number of people we spoke to noted that this is an example of a particularly clever use of a political intervention by Scotland, where otherwise they have limited political voice or power. Where the UK and the US have often been using their seats at the Transitional Committee table to push for a paring back of the Loss and Damage agenda, the Scottish Government have been making more ambitious submissions to the committee from their more peripheral position.

In 2022, the Scottish Government hosted a conference focusing on practical action around Loss and Damage, bringing together representatives from government, civil society organisations, private sector corporations, global sustainable development organisations, philanthropists and financial institutions. A stated purpose of the conference was to listen to the views of people from the Global South and marginalised groups and those most impacted by losses and damages – something generally felt to be a key gap at COP26.

The Scottish Government has also taken the initiative to include non-economic loss and damage (NELD) in an experimental humanitarian use of Loss and Damage funding<sup>162</sup>. Where economic damage refers to damage to things of traditionally ‘quantifiable’ economic value, like crops, homes or infrastructure, non-economic loss and damage looks at a broader range of harms that are not as easily quantified in financial terms, such as health, Indigenous knowledge, cultural heritage and the natural environment<sup>163</sup>. In December 2023 an additional £1 million was allocated to the Humanitarian Emergency Fund with explicit provision for NELD<sup>164</sup>.

**Debt cancellation goes some way “to free up resources to address economic, social and ecological challenges that are often rooted in unjust economic conditions imposed by the colonising nations since emancipation.”**

Zacchaeus Tax Campaign

## ...by taking action on tax and trade injustices and holding corporations to account

Much international tax and trade rules and practice continue to fuel historical asymmetric power imbalances, and lead to a wealth of injustice in the Global South, particularly for marginalised and oppressed groups. For example, human rights violations in global value chains are widespread and pervasive, with workers employed by multinational corporations in the Global South experiencing low pay, unsafe working conditions, discrimination and often systematic gender-based violence, including sexual assault<sup>165</sup>. Marginalised communities, including women, migrant workers, persons with disabilities, and Indigenous communities, are particularly at risk of exploitation.

Countries in the Global South also lose millions to multinational corporations and wealthy elites diverting their profits and wealth to tax havens. As Global Justice Now have argued, “far more wealth flows out of the global south each year in the form of tax evasion, resource extraction and the illicit manoeuvrings of multinational corporations than is replaced by aid”<sup>166</sup>. ActionAid estimates that every year Malawi loses the equivalent to more than 30% of the country’s health budget<sup>167</sup>. Countries in the Global South are often part of tax treaties dating back to the colonial era that place limits on how they can tax foreign companies and still work in the interests of colonising powers<sup>168</sup>. By syphoning off vital resources, multinational corporations and wealthy individuals deprive these nations of much-needed revenue that could be invested in healthcare, education, infrastructure, and social welfare programs. Moreover, the secrecy and opacity surrounding international financial flows (for example, the use of tax havens, shell companies with deliberately complex ownership structures) create a fertile environment for corruption in both the Global North and Global South, further exacerbating global inequalities.

The UK and Scottish governments should support global efforts to eradicate tax avoidance, evasion and illicit financial flows and advance global trade strategies that work to protect workers’ rights and land rights and the environment, including supporting the calls for a UN convention on tax, the creation of a UN Binding Treaty on Business and Human Rights<sup>169</sup>, and calls to create a Global Asset Registry of all wealth and assets. Under its reserved powers, the UK Government has a number of levers at its disposal at a domestic level to actively support measures to stop tax evasion and avoidance, and address human rights in trade and business. The UK Government should be taking measures to pursue and close tax havens that are under its jurisdiction, close loopholes that enable avoidance, improve corporate reporting standards to include high levels of transparency on tax policies and practices and enforce legislative measures to ensure the effective public disclosure of beneficial owners of companies, foundations and trusts<sup>170</sup>.

The UK Government should also be implementing binding regulations to hold companies to account for failing to prevent human rights violations and environmental harms linked to their value chains and activities, including mandatory human rights due diligence requirements<sup>171</sup>; bring forward a new law on Business, Human Rights and Environment; and make sure that all trade deals are reviewed from the perspective of their impact on equalities and the environment<sup>172</sup>. Investor-state dispute settlement (ISDS) should be removed from existing and new trade agreements. This would mean that corporates could no longer use this secretive, supra-national court system to claim compensation from governments for policies and laws that they believe might harm their profits, something known to discourage governments from taking action on climate change. This would also be in line with the recent decision to pull out of the Energy Charter Treaty<sup>173</sup>.

Scotland has significantly fewer levers to pull around international trade and multinational corporation (MNC) abuses, limited primarily to using their procurement policies to favour ethical companies and to encouraging Scottish businesses to

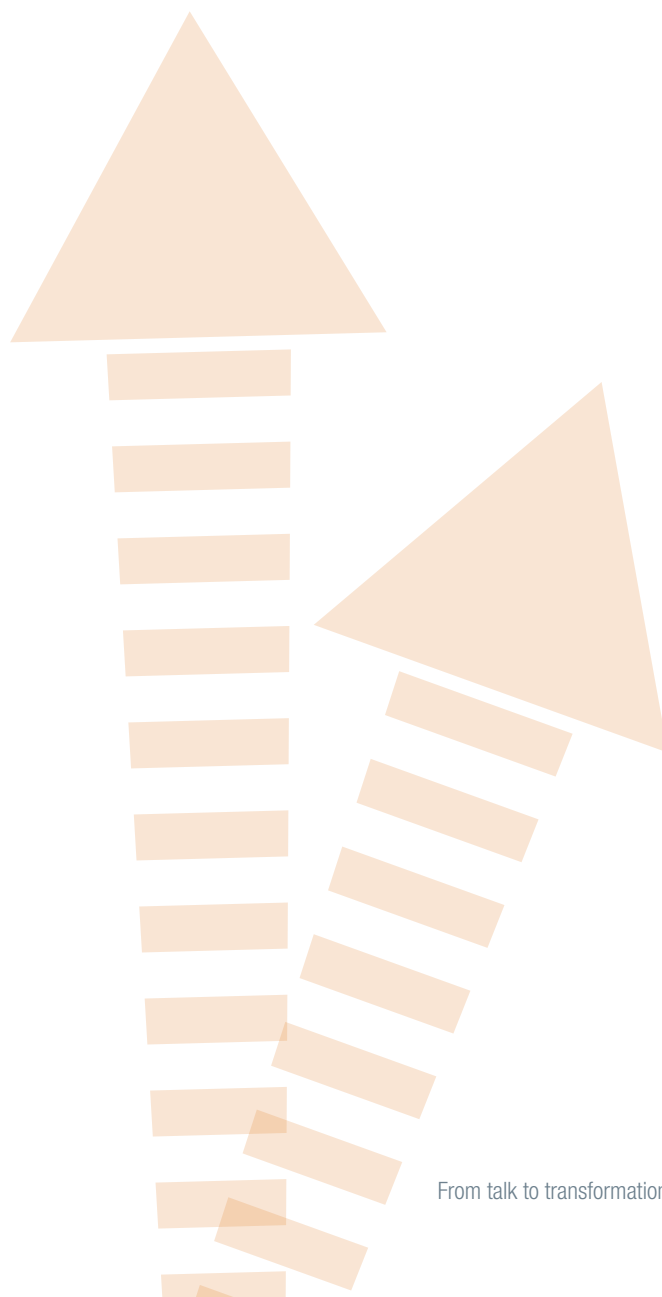
**“Far more wealth flows out of the global south each year in the form of tax evasion, resource extraction and the illicit manoeuvrings of multinational corporations than is replaced by aid.”**

Global Justice Now

make commitments to ethical practices. Even within this, a previous Scottish Business Pledge, which included commitments from and support to businesses around human rights and equality in their practice, has now closed<sup>174</sup>. Similarly, research participants noted that Scottish government commitments to fair trade seem to have fallen out of priority, and work specifically on Human Rights and Business has been subsumed by the broader Human Rights focus. In addition to revitalising these conversations, the Scottish Government should be looking to ensure that their procurement policies favour companies that can evidence fair treatment of workers and respect to labour rights in their supply chains, particularly women and Indigenous workers, and avoid those who cannot. They should also ensure that maximum use is made of the new Human Rights Bill to strengthen the liability of Scottish-based companies for human rights violations abroad<sup>175</sup>.

In their report that explores the ways in which activity in Scotland affects sustainable development beyond its borders, SIDA have outlined how such 'spillover' activities might be measured in the National Performance Framework. This includes adopting an indicator that measures Scottish private sector impacts overseas and developing proxy indicators to track socio-economic impacts in Scotland's global value chains<sup>176</sup>.

Both governments should also be using their respective powers to promote progressive forms of taxation domestically, including wealth taxes on the super-rich and MNCs. Tax Justice UK suggests six wealth tax policies that could raise £50 billion a year, including wealth taxes on assets over £10 million which alone could raise £22 billion a year. Fairer taxes on the UK's biggest polluters should also be on the table, including greater windfall taxes on the big fossil fuels companies who continue to report soaring profits, as well as progressive carbon and pollution taxes<sup>177</sup>. More progressive domestic tax policies can help curb growing domestic inequalities, as well as free up resources to invest in public services at home, and make reparations abroad<sup>178</sup>.





# Recommendations

## Both governments

- ▶ Continue to develop and make greater use of metrics that measure wellbeing and community prosperity, and that recognise and value unpaid care work, with plans to move away from GDP as the primary indicator of social and economic progress<sup>179</sup>
- ▶ Enshrine the right to full and universal access to public services in line with USP 2030 commitments<sup>180</sup>
- ▶ Support calls for a UN convention on tax, the creation of a UN Binding Treaty on Business and Human Rights, and calls to create a Global Asset Registry of all wealth and assets
- ▶ Bring in more progressive wealth taxes, greater windfall taxes and taxes on carbon emissions and pollution

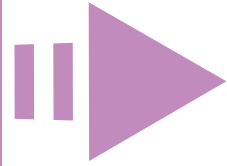
## UK government

- ▶ Expand the pledge towards Loss and Damage made at COP28, and ensure that finance for Loss and Damage is additional to ODA commitments
- ▶ Take part in debt relief and debt cancellation initiatives and legislate domestically to require private lenders to take part in coordinated international debt relief
- ▶ Take measures to pursue and close tax havens that are under its jurisdiction and close loopholes that enable avoidance
- ▶ Remove Investor-state dispute settlement (ISDS) from trade agreements and implement corporate reporting standards that include high levels of transparency on tax policies
- ▶ Conduct gender-responsive environmental and equalities impact assessments to assess impact of trade deals on planet and people
- ▶ Bring forward a Business, Human Rights and Environment Act<sup>181</sup> to prevent environmental harms and human rights abuses in supply chains by UK-based companies

## Scottish government

- ▶ Remove references to 'growth' from the purpose of the National Performance Framework, and incorporate a new National Outcome on care that values and prioritises the role of care work<sup>182</sup>. Change the name of the NPF to become Scotland's Wellbeing Framework and ensure that the concept of wellbeing includes the wellbeing of current and future generations, of individuals and communities inside and outside of Scotland, and of planet as well as people. Introduce meaningful indicators to the NPF to measure Scotland's global impact, using 'spillovers' approach. Introduce a Wellbeing & Sustainable Development Bill to support and scrutinise implementation of the NPF
- ▶ Continue to use role on the Wellbeing Economy Governments Group (WEGo) as a platform to push for shared international approaches to wellbeing economies, including creating spaces to engage and learn from groups in the Global South putting forward visions for feminist alternative economies
- ▶ Continue to support the global call for debt cancellation and promote debt justice internationally, lobby for a UN mechanism for multilateral debt workouts and offer Scotland as a seat of arbitration for foreign debt
- ▶ Continue to explicitly use the language of reparations in policy conversations on Loss & Damage, and continue to champion Loss & Damage on the global stage
- ▶ Hold discussions between teams and partners working on Loss and Damage and Wellbeing economies, including with those most affected by losses and damages
- ▶ Identify ways to hold Scottish corporations to account on their supply chains, including through the new Human Rights Act, Circular Economy Bill, and procurement policies. Renew the Scottish Business Pledge around human rights and business, and ensure this requires businesses to consider global supply chain impacts

## Pathway 3: Work to centre Indigenous and Global South expertise in international and national decision-making



### ...by learning from and investing in knowledge produced by Global South communities and experts, including by Indigenous and traditionally marginalised groups

For the most part, governments in the Global North still come with fairly narrow ideas about what counts as ‘evidence’ and whose expertise is valued when it comes to both international and domestic policymaking. For example, academic or policy research conducted by Global North institutions often holds more weight than community traditions and stories from communities in the Global South.

Further, a lot of development work involves or is predicated upon a fairly colonial, paternalistic notions of ‘capacity-building’, whereby expertise is provided from the Global North to the Global South, rather than seeing capacity in local CSO attributes such as relevance, rootedness, or constituency<sup>183</sup>. “The idea of capacity building of Global South organisations is framed within the neo-colonial framework,” said one online discussion participant, “There is a need for donors to recognise existing capacities in the Global South. In Peace Direct’s report on decolonising ‘aid’, donor and INGO assumptions that local communities lack capacity and skills and require external training comes up as a key illustration of how structural racism shows up in the sector.”<sup>184185</sup>

In their International Development Principles, the Scottish Government has committed to “question whose expertise we value, who we listen to and who holds the levers of power... [and] , to harness a diverse range of new voices and new ideas to drive change”<sup>186</sup>. However, much of the Scottish model of development appears to remain similar to the broader UK, whereby Scotland will share models, practice and expertise with the wider world. For example, new work on inclusive education suggests that Scottish models would be shared with partner countries and ideas being discussed around the establishments of a Scottish peacebuilding institute suggest that this would build on “Scotland’s expertise and history of peacemaking and building and support for dialogue”<sup>187</sup>. Much less emphasis is put by either government on learning from, or identifying knowledge from, the Global South.

There are a number of ways in which both governments can shift the emphasis to learning from communities in the Global South, particularly those whose voice is least heard. The first is to start working in the local language of the community a programme or project seeks to serve, rather than conducting everything in the language of the coloniser. In a recent International NGO Training and Research Centre (INTRAC) report on respecting communities in international development, “staff outside the UK consistently describe languages as being vital in establishing relationships of trust”<sup>188</sup>. While this is clearly an easier ask of the UK Government, who both train international staff in languages and hire nationals through their network of embassies, the Scottish Government could invest more in developing their language skills in local languages of their main partner countries.

Secondly, where research is part of international programming, both the Scottish and UK governments should support more participatory and community led forms of research, wherein data is produced and owned by, and useful to, the communities, rather than to the international partner or donor. This includes supporting (and actively listening to) research conducted by and for place-based communities, but also research by and for groups who experience intersecting inequalities and oppressions, and produced in the languages of the community itself. Further, UK universities and research organisations should be supported by governments to engage in genuine peer-to-peer partnerships with Southern academics and academic institutions, whereby not only the research resources but also the ownership sits much more equally in the Global South, and power asymmetries are addressed as part of the project design<sup>189</sup>.

Finally, in place of supporting the top-down models of capacity-building, the UK and Scottish governments could both invest in more peer-learning models, where spaces are created that privilege local knowledge and Indigenous expertise, and learning and experience is shared between civil society

partners, rather than models that bring in ‘expertise’ from the Global North. “The task, therefore, is not to assume the lack of expertise, but to connect colleagues to the resources and power they need to implement successful projects – transforming capacity building, into capacity bridging” argues Catherine Martha Agwand in the Peace Direct report on decolonising ‘aid’.

### **... by pushing for greater diversity of voices in international fora and meaningful mechanisms for engagement from marginalised groups and civil society**

An important commitment that both governments can make on the world stage is to use their influence to platform diverse voices, and push for meaningful representation of traditionally marginalised groups across international forums. One participant in the climate justice discussions said that this is a “key ingredient for a more representative, more inclusive climate justice action”.

Both governments should be funding opportunities that support traditionally marginalised communities – including but not limited to women, Indigenous communities and persons with disabilities – to take part in global climate, peace and economic negotiations, as well as summits around international affairs topics such as on emerging technologies<sup>190</sup>. When hosting such fora, the UK Government also needs to be much more proactive in enabling civil society groups to get visas in a timely and affordable way, perhaps learning from the role the Swedish Government played on this front when supporting the Yemen International Forum in Stockholm<sup>191</sup>. Many activists were bitterly disappointed by the lack of diverse representation and the power imbalances at COP26 in Glasgow, with Lukka, Stanford-Xosei and Mucchala arguing that much of this came down to seemingly “mundane practicalities” around vaccinations and visas that meant countries and activists on the frontlines of the climate crisis were excluded<sup>192</sup>.

Supporting meaningful engagement, however, goes beyond merely ensuring that marginalised groups are present in the room. At international fora and dialogues, both governments should advocate for inclusive decision-making and participatory coordination structures<sup>193</sup> and more civil society observer spaces, as well as talk with civil society and marginalised groups about what would make it safe – both physically and psychologically – for them to participate fully, and have open discussions about how power imbalances in the room can be addressed, and about how conversations at high level fora can be better linked with civil society actors at a local level. They should also work to make sure that topics that address power and inequality – such as gender, disability and colonialism – are prioritised on the agenda for discussion, and acknowledge that those with lived experience are the ones with the technical expertise needed to find solutions. The issue of overrepresentation of individuals and bodies with financial or corporate power should also be addressed – for example, Global Witness reported that 2456 fossil fuel lobbyists were granted access to COP28 in Dubai<sup>194</sup>.

Governments should also ensure that their own delegations to international negotiations and discussions are diverse, representative and competent across different areas of justice and inclusion, as well as pushing the UN and other IGOs to improve the representation of women, Global South experts and other marginalised groups in their teams of mediators and facilitators. The Scottish Government should also take time to engage explicitly with different civil society groups, rather than use international fora as primarily an opportunity to talk to other governments and build their own national platform, something they were criticised for doing at COP28 in Dubai.

At an intergovernmental level, the UK Government should also be pushing for the big multilaterals to democratise and decolonise. Currently the voting power in institutions such as the World Bank and IMF is heavily skewed in favour of rich countries, and with the US having de facto veto power over all significant decisions<sup>195</sup>. “Not only is there minority control over global economic policymaking, there is also a clear racial

**“The task...is not to assume the lack of expertise, but to connect colleagues to the resources and power they need to implement successful projects – transforming capacity building, into capacity bridging.”**

Peace Direct



imbalance at play,” explains Jason Hickel, Professor at the Institute for Environmental Science and Technology, “In the IMF, a British person’s vote today is worth 41 times more than a Bangladeshi’s vote, and 23 times more than a Nigerian’s vote”<sup>196</sup>. The UK should be using its power to push for changes to the system that ensure that Global South countries have “a fairer say in the decisions that affect them, but also the power to block harmful policies”<sup>197</sup>.

### **...by creating and sustaining mechanisms to meaningfully engage diverse Global South representatives in national decision-making and co-design of programmes**

Donor governments need to think beyond the parameters of ‘consultation’ and adopt more collaborative ways of decision-making and programme design, involving not only expertise from the Global South but people with diverse experiences and identities, “ensur[ing] that solutions are developed with – not ‘for’ – communities.”<sup>198</sup> As GADN argues, in order to value the knowledge, lived experience and expertise of actors in the Global South, international partners must “consistently co-create work and design programmes and solutions collectively” and “not relegate Global South actors into frontline implementers”<sup>199</sup>. “Shifting the work isn’t shifting the balance of power” said one participant in our online discussions.

Both the UK and Scottish governments need to create spaces that allow for meaningful two-way dialogue and co-creation across all areas of international policy and programming, centring the needs and solutions of those communities that have endured and continue to endure the most harm. It is also important in these spaces to be able to step back and discuss what feminist, anti-racist, decolonial and inclusive approaches can look like from different perspectives, without assuming that everyone agrees, or is on the same page<sup>200</sup>. The risk around consultation fatigue was also raised by a number of research participants, wherein the same community members being repeatedly asked about solutions to racism or sexism or ableism leads to increased labour (including emotional labour), trauma and disempowerment, particularly when recommendations from previous consultations haven’t been carried out.

As part of their international development principles and workplan, the Scottish Government has made some clear commitments around supporting partner-led development and meaningful two-way exchange. This has included (re)establishing a Global South Panel, aimed to enable the government “to access a wider and more diverse range of voices and experience and lend expertise to our Programme”<sup>201</sup>. However, there is currently no evidence that this panel has engaged meaningfully in scrutiny of the development of new policies, legislation or funding pots. Concerns were also raised by workshop participants over the limited diversity of perspectives within the panel, and a lack of transparency around the panel’s role and function and how panellists were ‘selected’. On the other hand, many of those we spoke to did point towards some of the very positive examples of community involvement in design through the Climate Justice Communities Fund, something the Scottish Government could draw lessons from and apply across programming.

At UK level, there are some potential positives around the collaborative development of the civil society fund, and the commitments to meaningful engagement with women’s groups and persons with disabilities into their respective women and girls and disability inclusion strategies. However, it is now “crucial that the FCDO outlines details on how it intends to institutionalise, monitor and evaluate meaningful consultation and participation and ensure it includes meaningful engagement with diverse civil society, WROs and CSOs so that their perspectives inform agendas”<sup>202</sup>.

**“Nothing about us without us”**

Disability rights activist  
participant at SIDA workshop

# Recommendations

## Both governments

- ▶ Move away from capacity building models to peer learning models, and support research projects by and for marginalised communities in the Global South
- ▶ Use diplomatic voice and leverage to push for more inclusive and participatory design of international fora, and advocating for justice issues – including but not limited to gender justice, racial justice and disability justice – to be reflected as high priorities in all international negotiations and discussions
- ▶ Push for reform within the IMF and World Bank by calling for open, transparent processes for electing leaders and other measures that ensure equitable voice and decision-making power for countries in the Global South<sup>203</sup>
- ▶ Create spaces for meaningful two-way dialogue and co-creation with Global South representatives and experts across all areas of international policy and programming, including establishing in-country advisory boards representing different intersecting lived experiences and organisations. These should take transformative, feminist and anticolonial approaches, whilst ensuring those present are paid appropriately for their time in consultation and participation exercises and are not extractive


## UK government

- ▶ Enable greater participation from civil society actors in the Global South in international fora hosted by the UK by simplifying access to visas and providing proactive visa support through embassies to underrepresented groups
- ▶ Ensure all government delegations to international dialogues and negotiations are gender balanced and diverse, and competent across different areas of justice and inclusion
- ▶ Produce an action plan that outlines how FCDO will institutionalise, monitor and evaluate meaningful participation of diverse civil society groups

## Scottish government

- ▶ Provide clarity around the selection process behind the Global South Panel and their current remit, and look to make the panel bigger and more diverse, including representatives from organisations working with marginalised groups in more than the partner countries. Ensure representatives have expertise in various ‘spillover’ areas of focus such as human rights
- ▶ Make it mandatory for the expanded Global South Panel to be consulted on all Bills and policies to assess potential impact beyond Scottish borders, including domestic climate change policies and provide clear, substantial guidance to enable them to do so
- ▶ Develop the language skills of their international development and climate justice teams
- ▶ Expand existing support for women in climate action<sup>204</sup> and identify similar mechanism to support women, Indigenous communities and persons with disabilities and other marginalised groups from the Global South to participate in international climate, economic and peacebuilding fora
- ▶ Offer more scholarships, paid internships and work placements for researchers from the Global South
- ▶ Draw out lessons learned so far from the community-led design of the Climate Justice Communities programme

# Pathway 4: Provide more direct support to movements, human rights defenders and take action to enhance strong, independent and progressive civil society internationally and domestically



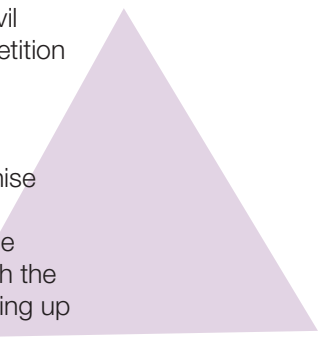
## ...by resourcing activist networks and movement building initiatives in the Global South

A clear message from feminist and anti-racist experts from the Global South during our discussion sessions was the hugely important role activist networks and movements play in pushing forward transformative change. “There is power in movement building,” said one discussion group participant. This is backed up by a growing body of evidence that illustrates the role of community organising and social movements in driving social and political development<sup>205</sup>. Stephan, Lakhani, and Naviwala point towards collective citizen action in places such as Colombia, Liberia, Guatemala, Nigeria, and Afghanistan playing a “key role in challenging exclusionary, predatory governance and in advancing peace processes”<sup>206</sup>. “Collaborative networks allow for holistic action, building on expertise and specialisations across individuals and organisations,” explain COFEM, “Formal and informal networks strengthen and unify... across diverse geographies and sectors”<sup>207</sup>.

Despite this evidence, networks and groups who exist outside of the formal, institutionalised NGO space often receive “inadequate attention and support from development actors”<sup>208</sup> and grassroots groups and movements led by marginalised groups remain “dramatically underfunded”<sup>209</sup>. “We have lots of resources coming to this region,” says Mozn Hassan from Nazra for Feminist Studies in Egypt, “but it’s not going to the feminist movement”<sup>210</sup>. Where support does exist, informal networks and groups are often pushed to institutionalise, or fit predetermined roles by funders. As described in more detail below, governments looking to support transformative change should seek to support existing grassroots networks and social movements by providing flexible, core funds which enable movements to self-organise and work on self-defined strategies.

Support and resourcing to these organisations and movements however does not need to be limited to funding. As outlined by #ShiftThePower equally as important to this kind of work are “other kinds of infinite non-financial assets and resources (knowledge, trust, networks etc)”<sup>211</sup>. As such, governments such as the Scottish and UK governments can look to support and host international spaces where diverse organisations and networks from the Global South can collectively strategise and organise<sup>212</sup>, particularly around issues such as dealing with authoritarianism and backlash, and long-term collective care and healing for those in the movements<sup>213</sup>, and creating opportunities and spaces for voices from the movements to be heard in political decision-making spaces (see Pathway 3, p26). The Scottish and UK governments should also review existing funding for civil society to see if it is working to enable movement building, or whether it is encouraging competition between grassroots organisations, and whether the funding modalities are contributing to or alleviating the stress and false urgency movements are experiencing<sup>214</sup>.

Perhaps even more importantly, there is a need for governments in the Global North to recognise the value in social movements in progressing social change, actively listen to movements and activists, and treat grassroots activists as agents of change to learn from. Talking about climate justice movements in the Global South, US journalist Justin Worland says “They’re dealing with the impacts earlier and they’re also innovating – innovating I say with air quotes – but they’re coming up with ways to build coalitions and address it in a way that we could learn from here as well”<sup>215</sup>.



## ...by creating mechanisms to protect rights defenders and support their safety and wellbeing

Human rights defenders and those speaking out about power imbalances and injustices – from women’s rights defenders, Indigenous environmental and land rights defenders, LGBTQI+ rights defenders and journalists – face a huge amount of danger in many countries. Threats can range from physical violence, intimidation and harassment through to arbitrary arrest and detention and surveillance, to cyberattacks and smear campaigns – particularly in countries with authoritarian regimes or countries affected by armed conflict. In the Women’s Peace and Humanitarian Fund’s (WPHF) 2022 CSO Annual Survey, almost half of all organisations (44%) reported that their organisation and staff had received threats as a result of their work in the previous 12 months<sup>216</sup>.

Human rights defenders also face significant threats from corporations, particularly multinational corporations operating in sectors such as extractive industries, with corporations targeting activists with harassment, intimidation and surveillance. Climate activist Marinel Sumook Ubaldo talks about how, for example, the Philippines is one of the most dangerous places to be an environmental defender – “Last week, our friend was killed and just with the threats there is one other aim – actually one other purpose is just to shut us up and we’re not giving them that satisfaction”<sup>217</sup>.

There are a number of ways that governments in the Global North can support organisations and individuals under threat, including establishing their own emergency funding mechanisms that prioritise fast and flexible funds, or by funnelling money through existing independent organisations who do this. For example, the Lifeline Embattled Civil Society Organisations Assistance Fund<sup>218</sup> who provide emergency financial assistance to civil society organisations (CSOs) under threat or attack, and rapid response advocacy and resiliency grants to support CSOs in responding to broader threats against civic space. Or the Urgent Action Fund, a global fund that provides rapid response grants to women’s rights organisations and activists in order to support their work in times of crisis<sup>219</sup>, or the Digital Defenders Partnership rapid response mechanism for human rights defenders, journalists, activists and organisations facing digital threats and attacks<sup>220</sup>.

Governments should also seek out community-based organisations to support, who are already providing the kinds of needs-based legal support, shelter and safe spaces for activists. Examples include the Women Human Rights Defenders Network Uganda who are providing relocation support and direct assistance to meet the basic needs of LGBTQI+ women human rights defenders affected by the law, and Trans Youth Initiative-Uganda who have set up crisis funds for emergency shelter, medical costs, and legal support in case of arrests<sup>221</sup>. Further, any funds that seek to support human rights organisations or civil society more broadly, should include a dedicated and flexible budget line to support physical and digital security of activists, as well as budget lines for psycho-social and wellbeing support<sup>222</sup>, as directed by the organisations receiving funds.

As the Human Rights Defender hub highlights, “while many human rights defenders live with disabilities, there has been little research, analysis and reflection on how disabilities affect the risks they face, and how protection actors respond to these disabilities when providing them with support”<sup>223</sup>. This could be an emerging area where the UK or Scottish governments could take a lead, particularly in light of the UK’s disability inclusion strategy.

Providing temporary safe spaces and rest and recuperation in Scotland and the wider UK for human rights defenders – such as the Dundee University Programme and the Beyond Borders Women, Peace and Security Programme – can also play a role in supporting the sustainability and resilience of wider rights movements, but shouldn’t come at the expense of supporting people within their home countries, or supporting those seeking permanent exile through asylum. Such programmes should recognise

**“While many human rights defenders live with disabilities, there has been little research, analysis and reflection on how disabilities affect the risks they face, and how protection actors respond to these disabilities when providing them with support.”**

Human Rights Defender hub

the value of peer learning and social support between human rights defenders across international contexts, including but not limited to the UK, and ensure that psychosocial and wellbeing support is fully integrated into the programme and is both centred around individual needs as well as considering collective care models.

### ...by defending global civic space

Social justice movements, human rights defenders and journalists aren't only facing threats to their physical safety and wellbeing but, in many areas of the world, a deliberate shrinking of civic space within which to operate. This includes governments increasing legal restrictions on freedom of speech, assembly and association; imposing stringent registration requirements for NGOs that limit the activities they can engage in and placing restrictions on foreign funding that they can receive; employing surveillance technologies to monitor the activities of activists, journalists, and civil society organisations; criminalising activism, often under the guise of 'counterterrorism'<sup>224</sup>, and exerting increasing control over the media to suppress dissenting narratives and independent journalism. In some countries, such as Egypt, governments are also placing economic sanctions, asset freezes and travel bans on rights activists, with the intention of making it challenging for them to sustain their movements and initiatives. Further, corporations – particularly in the extractive industries – are increasingly using aggressive legal tactics to silence critics, as well as wielding significant political influence on governmental policies towards civic space, through lobbying efforts, campaign contributions and revolving door relationships with government officials.

Both the UK and Scotland can play an important role in helping to pushback on this closing of civic space by:

- Engaging in dialogue with authoritarian states to push for a re-opening of civic space and ensuring an enabling environment for civil society groups
- Using their voices in international fora and multilateral spaces to defend and uphold the rights to freedom of association, freedom of speech and press freedoms, and amplify pressure on governments to uphold their obligations under human rights law
- Work in collaboration with human rights defenders and their networks to identify strategies for addressing attacks on rights and civil society<sup>225</sup>, including supporting access to collective bargaining skills-building through international trade union movements<sup>226</sup>

Funders Initiative for Civil Society suggest that for areas where civil society is at risk “just keeping civil society alive and functioning would be a success”<sup>227</sup>.

Other potential avenues that both the UK and Scotland could consider include holding corporate entities accountable for placing activists in danger<sup>228</sup>, including through supporting independent mechanisms to monitor and investigate corporate conduct overseas, and asserting extraterritorial jurisdiction to prosecute MNCs for crimes and human rights violations committed. Scotland could play a role in advocating for international investigations on the state murder, torture or arbitrary detention of human rights defenders, and explore options to be involved in strategic litigation on human rights issues at an international level.

The recent white paper is clear that support to civil society is high on the agenda of the FCDO. However, historically other donor countries have been more willing to tolerate the risk of damaging relationships with partner country governments by speaking out about human rights violations<sup>229</sup>. At domestic level, the UK Government is also pursuing a number legislative moves towards reducing civic space, with moves to restrict protest among others<sup>230</sup> leading the UK to be downgraded on Civicus's civic freedoms index. The UK often supports authoritarian governments overseas through the export of surveillance technologies and counterterrorism and policing training<sup>231, 232</sup>. For the UK Government to really commit to civil society support overseas, it needs to reverse a number of these policies at home.



# Recommendations

## Both governments

- ▶ Fund feminist networks and women's rights organisations, and consider creating similar funds for climate justice networks and LGBTQI+ and disability rights networks
- ▶ Working with representatives from grassroots Global South CSOs and networks, review existing civil society funds to ensure that the funding mechanism encourages collaborations rather than competition
- ▶ Support existing emergency funding mechanisms for activists, HRDs and journalists under threat and incorporate budget lines for gender-responsive safety, digital security and collective care components across international grant-making
- ▶ Provide support to HRDs with disabilities and Organisations of Persons with Disabilities in the Global South to undertake research on the particular safety and security risks faced by activists with disabilities (Scotland could narrow this to activists with disabilities in their main partner countries)
- ▶ Push for a re-opening of civic space, and speak out internationally on violations of freedom of association, freedom of speech, press freedoms as well as specific threats faced by human rights defenders from marginalised groups
- ▶ Support independent mechanisms to monitor and investigate corporate conduct overseas, and assert extraterritorial jurisdiction to prosecute MNCs for crimes and human rights violations committed

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## UK government

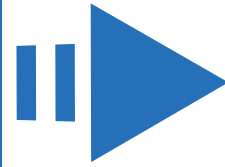
- ▶ Use the planned review of centrally managed civil society and civic space funding as an opportunity to increase flexible support to civil society networks movements
- ▶ Take immediate steps to start reversing some of the new and proposed legislations that place restrictions on protest in the UK, including in the Police, Crime Sentencing and Courts Act and the Public Order Bill.

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## Scottish government

- ▶ Advocate for international investigations on the state murder, torture or arbitrary detention of human rights defenders, and explore options to be involved in strategic litigation on human rights issues at an international level
- ▶ Work with the alumni networks of the Dundee University Human Rights Defenders programme and the Beyond Borders Women Peace and Security fellowship to better understand the role that Scotland can play in providing rest, recuperation and networking space in the future, and how Scotland can continue to support their work on their return home

# Pathway 5: Make development funding more accessible and accountable to the communities it seeks to serve



## ...by increasing the accessibility of existing grant funding to marginalised and community-based groups in the Global South

Many feminist, anti-racist, inclusive and decolonial activists would like to see transformative changes to how international humanitarian and development funding works, possibly even an end to the international ‘aid’ system altogether. Those behind the #ShiftThePower Manifesto also want to see “expand[ing] our horizons beyond money as the central driver of change” towards “other kinds of infinite non-financial assets and resources (knowledge, trust, networks, and others)”<sup>233</sup> However, while more systemic changes in the global sustainable development and humanitarian systems are being pushed for, traditional forms of government grant funding still have an important role to play in supporting the most marginalised communities. Ensuring that grant funding from governments reaches – and is led by – those who are marginalised was a core concern across our discussion groups on power shifting. Governments should look at “not just what they fund but how they fund”<sup>234</sup>, making sure their existing grants are accessible, flexible and sustainable, and deliver support in ways “which do not reinforce inequality or marginalisation”<sup>235</sup>.

Across both our online discussion groups and in our reading, experts, practitioners and grassroots organisers from the Global South all put emphasis on the need for direct funding. “For me as a grassroots mobiliser – I’d prefer funders to work with us directly. The middle organisations use up a lot of resources,” said one participant. Degan Ali, executive director of Adeso, questions why, if international donors trust local development and humanitarian organisations to “undertake 90% of last mile delivery” they cannot trust the same organisations to act without intermediaries<sup>236</sup>.

Within our discussion groups there was some disagreement about the role and necessity of INGOs as intermediary partners in development work, and the role of INGOs in increasing or decreasing accessibility of funding to community organisations in the Global South. A number of feminist practitioners from the Global South felt that international NGOs acting as intermediaries significantly reduces access to resources for grassroots organisations, as well as reducing access to influencing donor decisions. At the same time, many UK-based INGOs felt that there is still an important role for them to play, as INGOs are more able than donor governments to be flexible in their partnerships, and more likely to be already on a journey towards shifting the power to local partners<sup>237</sup>. In a learning process supported by the Corra Foundation, findings showed that local NGOs value the INGO partnerships they have. This tension is also reflected in the literature, with BOND and others recognising that this area of decolonising development and shifting power to local actors is a potential threat to the INGO sector.<sup>238</sup> It is extremely unlikely in the short-term that INGOs, including Scottish and British NGOs, will cease to play a role as partners and intermediaries for local organisations in the Global South. Given this, donor governments can and should make greater efforts to support and promote more equitable partnerships between INGOs and local NGOs. For example, as the Corra Foundation suggests, government donors can require locally-registered and led NGOs to input into application and reporting processes on an equal footing with their UK-based partners<sup>239</sup>.

Getting resources and funding to communities and the most marginalised is not just about skipping the middleman, it is also about making sure that application processes are accessible, particularly to groups and organisations outside of the ‘usual suspects’ list. There is a need to ensure that organisations in partner countries are not overly burdened with application and reporting processes, or expected to apply or report in ways which are onerous and take time away from the work they are doing on the ground.

Grant financing tends to benefit only a small segment of CSOs, usually those who either have received funds before, are of a size or structure determined by the grantmaker, or have the funds to recruit internationally experienced consultants to help with the process. “We cannot afford it any more,” said one small NGO in Calcutta in a US Institute of Peace project reviewing ‘aid’ to civil society,

“The bureaucratic systems of applying, reporting, and evaluation of projects turns such projects into too heavy a burden for us”<sup>240</sup>. In Peace Direct’s paper on decolonising ‘aid’, Bassim Assuqair gives the example of local actors “feeling isolated or not up to the level to understand the imposed system, which creates a power of knowledge relation where local actors are in the position of being unaware or not capacitated.”<sup>241</sup> Making grant application and reporting processes more accessible and equitable can include simplifying the application processes and allowing space for organisations to describe their goals on their own terms; making sure the application process is available in multiple languages; including ways for smaller and non-registered organisations to apply; and reduce reporting and due diligence requirements – as well as more bottom-up approaches like participatory grantmaking, as outlined below. It is also really important for donor governments to do an equality assessment of their funding mechanisms and identify specific barriers that different community organisations might face when trying to access funding.

The Scottish Government has recently committed to adjust funding criteria to enable more direct funding to CSOs in their partner countries, arguing that they are “confident” that removing the requirement for local CSOs to find a Scottish or British partner “will increase the access opportunities for a broader range of organisations in partner-countries” and speak to their commitments to addressing power imbalances<sup>242</sup>. However, concerns were raised during both the discussion groups and workshop (primarily by civil society actors resident in the UK) about how this will work in practice, particularly with regard to making the application process accessible to community-based organisations in the ways outlined above.

Moves on both the Scottish and UK governments’ part to use big for-profit agencies and companies to deliver on development contracts were also raised by a number of participants as a point of concern, and stands in potential contradiction to the Scottish Government’s direct funding and ‘shifting the power’ commitments. Donor governments tend to use big contractors to manage development projects as a way to minimise the administration burden on the donor and maximise ‘value for money’ by keeping transaction costs low, but such an approach is undermining access to funds for smaller players<sup>243</sup>. Often these agencies will have limited relationships in-country – signing up international consultants with country ‘expertise’ and networks to appear on their bids – meaning that local organisations outside of the most well known names are unlikely to benefit, as well as little interest in working in solidarity with local organisations attempting to pursue a more transformative agenda. Despite the fact that Scotland’s funding pot is much smaller than the UK, it is surprising to see them opt for organisations such as global corporate DAI, to manage part of their Climate Justices Communities, particularly because of its focus on being community-led.

At UK level, the use of these contractors is also about creating ‘economic growth’ domestically – and they even have a special Aid Funded Business Service that “exists purely to help UK businesses get lucrative aid contracts”<sup>244</sup>. More and more UK development ‘aid’ is also channelled through financial intermediaries and investment funds, where not only is the aid not ending up in the hands of local CSOs and marginalised groups, but is ‘invested’ in infrastructure projects aimed at creating economic growth – including luxury housing and shopping malls in Kenya<sup>245</sup>. Global Justice Now also highlights that a large amount of these institutions also make heavy use of tax havens, where their activity is shielded from public scrutiny<sup>246</sup>.

The total amount of funding the Scottish Government is able to contribute through its development, climate and emergency funds is extremely small by global standards or compared to the UK. However, by adopting funding approaches which focus on those communities and organisations who are particularly underfunded or at-risk, for example, local Organisations of Persons with Disabilities, women’s organisations, LGBTQI+ – led organisations – has the potential for being transformative for smaller organisations and the communities they serve. Some of the research participants were keen to see the resurrection of Scotland’s small grants funding to support such organisations, as well as partnerships with sister community organisations in Scotland.

**“For me as a grassroots mobiliser – I’d prefer funders to work with us directly. The middle organisations use up a lot of resources.”**

SIDA focus group participant

## ...by recentring 'accountability' as accountability TO the communities the funding serves, including using more community-centred and participatory evaluation models

Transformative justice approaches tend to push for much more radical interpretations of transparency and accountability, placing emphasis on mutual accountability and accountability to the communities who are the focus of funding.

Currently at both Scottish and UK government level, more emphasis tends to be placed on accountability to the 'giver of funds' (a combination of government bodies and ultimately the UK taxpayer) rather than to local communities. This leads to onerous and at times "dehumanising"<sup>247</sup> reporting requirements. Heavy and unrealistic due diligence requirements can be particularly problematic in emergency response and conflict affected areas<sup>248</sup>. One participant at our online discussion also noted that "sometimes very private information is requested for," highlighting that while due diligence may be framed as risk management, it is risk to the donor rather than risk to the community that is often prioritised.

Participants during the discussion groups also noted the need for donor governments in the Global North to apply the same strict measures of accountability and transparency to state recipients of development finance as they do grassroots and community organisations. "Somehow, the governments are not held accountable within the same stringent measures that community organisers are held to," said one discussion participant.

Reimagining Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) and the ways that governments in the Global North think about impact is also an important part of "shifting from a saviour-centred approach"<sup>249</sup>. A large majority of the evaluation models used by both donor governments and the international evaluation industry are hierarchical, "without an eye on power or building an inclusive, participatory model that allows stakeholders to speak for themselves"<sup>250</sup>. In their recent report on equity-oriented evaluation, the Global Change Centre argue that these models in fact perpetuate structural and historical inequities at the global, regional, national, and local level.... reinforced by institutional day-to-day decisions regarding how evaluations are designed, funded, commissioned, implemented, and disseminated worldwide"<sup>251</sup>.

Donor governments need to be rethinking what is deemed as impact or 'success', and move away from a 'value for money' framing that often sees impact in terms of numbers, towards an understanding of impact as conceived by the communities that are seeking the change. Women's groups speaking to the OECD felt that "reporting requirements were often inappropriate for capturing the structural changes which they were seeking, which are not easy to measure or quantify"<sup>252</sup>. It's also important that anything being measured and captured at community level is useful to those working within their community, rather than simply fed 'up the line' to donor institutions<sup>253</sup>. As such, donor governments should be looking to local communities to design and lead on programme evaluations and develop their own localised indicators to measure their impact and social change power<sup>254</sup>. Participatory approaches that prioritise collective learning over traditional reporting are also more likely to see learning embedded in the community the programme seeks to support.

**"Somehow, the governments are not held accountable within the same stringent measures that community organisers are held to."**

SIDA focus group participant

## ...by exploring and expanding core or unrestricted funding models and participatory grantmaking as ways of ensuring agendas are set by those most affected

Providing core, long term and flexible funds is probably the key ask from organisations in the Global South pursuing transformative agendas. This usually looks like multi-year funding with no re-application process; funding that can be used against priorities identified by the recipient on a timeline set by the recipient and against core running costs of the organisation, and funding that can be adjusted easily to meet changing needs in highly dynamic environments<sup>255</sup>. Core or unrestricted funds enable ‘grantees’ to set and pursue their own agendas, including more political agendas, take the lead in their own language and voice, and to spend in a way which best meets the needs and realities of the groups they work with<sup>256</sup>. From the donor side, such funds require a shift in attitudes towards both risk and trust, recognising the existing capabilities of communities and relinquishing a degree of control over the form of the work supported<sup>257</sup>. AWID describes core funds as “by far the most effective way to advance direct funding to movements” and civil society more broadly<sup>258</sup>. Core funds are also particularly important for organisations operating in conflict or crisis affected countries.

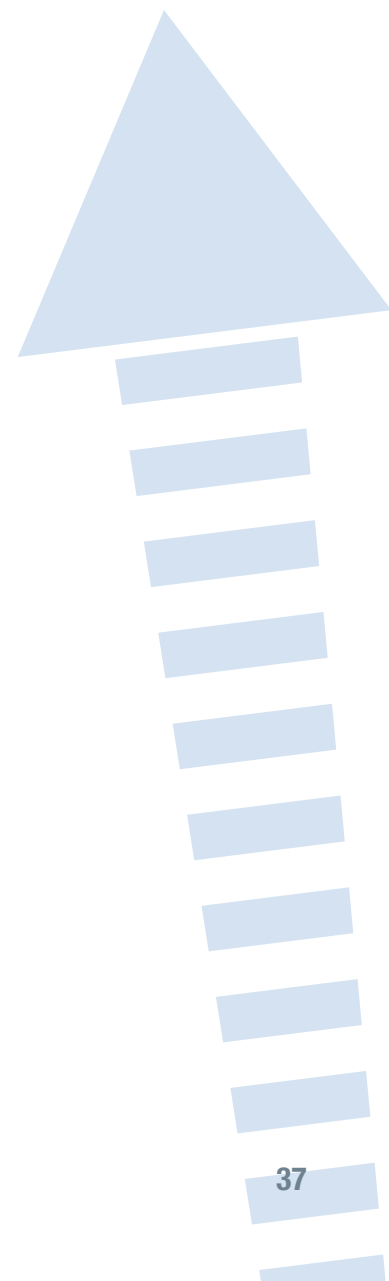
Southern women’s rights organisations highlight to the OECD that “core funding also represents value for money: it frees up time and energy that would otherwise be spent on fundraising or implementing short-term projects, and allows investments in the longer-term organising and rights work” needed to transform root causes of inequalities<sup>259</sup>.

Participatory grant-making is also emerging as an important tool for feminist organisations and other community – and rights-oriented funders around the world. International organisations such as FRIDA the Young Feminist Fund, Mama Cash, the African Women’s Development Fund (AWDF) and Canada’s Equality Fund are all using participatory models, but it is also an increasingly common model for smaller, community-based progressive funders. At its heart, participatory grant-making is about shifting power away from those with historical global privilege and placing funding decisions in the hands of communities as a matter of both principle and efficacy. The grants given can support specific projects and activities, but also are often core funding grants<sup>260</sup>. The tender for the design of the Scottish Government’s new Women and Girls Fund suggests they are seeking to create a participatory grantmaking model, stating that both the design and decision making processes of the fund will “involve meaningful participation and consultation of a diverse range of local women and girls and relevant associated marginalised groups as experts by experience and/or women’s rights and gender equality civil society advocates, in the relevant partner country”<sup>261</sup>.

The discussants and interviewees we spoke to were divided over whether the UK or Scottish governments should prioritise supporting or encouraging community organisations in the Global South to become self-sufficient through local fundraising. “I don’t know how we can really make that power shift to this part of the world while we still aim to access more funding from the Global North,” one focus group discussant said, “So I think it’s critical, in my opinion, for communities to be self-sufficient in terms of raising their own resources.” Echoing this, an open letter to NGOs from organisations in the Global South stated “if you are serious about ‘shifting power’ then reduce your footprint and brand and use your fundraising machinery to help grassroots organisations create the structures to fundraise for themselves and sustain their work”<sup>262</sup>. However, other participants in our discussions expressed concern that shifting the burden of raising resources to Global South communities goes against the drive to take a more reparatory approach that acknowledges that the Global North has a responsibility to resource communities they have caused harm to.

## “Shifting from a saviour-centred approach”

SIDA focus group participant



# Recommendations

## Both governments

- ▶ Develop more pots of funding designed to deliver core as well as direct funding to CSOs in partner countries, with a particular focus on women's organisations, OPDs, Indigenous groups, environmental justice organisations and LGBTQI+ organisations
- ▶ Simplify application and reporting procedures for grants, and require locally-registered and led NGOs to input into application and reporting processes on an equal footing with their UK-based partners, including a sliding scale of due diligence and reporting procedures depending on size of grant and organisation. Identify ways to ensure that grant funding reaches beyond the 'usual suspects' including unregistered groups and collective movements
- ▶ Expand and build on existing participatory funding pots, and look to apply to other areas of inequality, such as disability, in addition to gender, and ensure that any international organisation contracted to design or deliver on such funds have experience in transformative and participatory approaches grounded in the Global South (for example, FRIDA or Mama Cash)
- ▶ Move towards using more inclusive, participatory and community-led models of evaluation, and commission locally-led evaluations

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## UK government

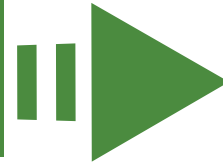
- ▶ Immediately reinstate the government's previous commitment to spending at least 0.7% of Gross National Income (GNI) on Overseas Development Assistance, with a view to increasing this percentage during the next Parliamentary term
- ▶ End the use of financial intermediaries and investment funds as a way of delivering development 'aid'

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## Scottish government

- ▶ Clarify modalities for accessing direct funding for NGOs from partner countries
- ▶ Resurrect small grants funding, with a view to supporting marginalised communities and organisations who are particularly underfunded or at risk, including but not limited to organisations in Scotland's main partner countries
- ▶ Move away from the trend of contracting for-profit agencies to deliver development programmes, instead favouring NGO and INGO partners who have existing relationships in-country
- ▶ In place of contributing to extremely large UN campaigns, look to support existing participatory grantmakers internationally where the level of funding will make a considerable difference

# Pathway 6: Improve policy coherence around global justice commitments



## ...by ensuring shared commitments to feminist, decolonial and inclusive frameworks across domestic and international policy areas

Both the Scottish and UK governments are signed up to improving policy coherence through their SDGs commitments<sup>263</sup>. In addition, policy coherence can be equally – and relatedly – applied to any set of values or principles that a government commits to. For the purposes of this paper, this might include (in addition to sustainable development) commitments to gender and racial equality, disability justice, people-centred wellbeing and security and contributing to a more equitable global power dynamic.

The Scottish Government has made a number of commitments to taking ‘anti-racist’ and ‘feminist’ approaches across government, including explorations of feminist approaches to international affairs (see SNAPSHOT p41). The incorporation of international human rights treaties into Scots law under the planned Human Rights Bill and the upcoming Wellbeing and Sustainable Development Bill, offer opportunities to bring a values and human-rights based approach across domestic and international policy.

Government working groups, committees, observatories, advisory groups, consultation groups and panels abound across the Scottish policy landscape. However, these tend to operate in relative siloes, with little coordination beyond a number of individuals appearing across many of the groups. More classic ‘international’ areas of policy, such as the Government’s development and humanitarian funds and climate justice funds, continue to sit under separate teams.

At UK Government level too there is a disconnect between commitments to a Women and Girls Strategy and a Disability Strategy sitting within the FCDO rather than across government, and there appears to be very little acknowledgment of the implementation of the SDGs requiring action to be taken at home. Both governments could do much more to ensure the implementation of the SDGs domestically as well as internationally and to demonstrate an understanding that what is done domestically impacts global affairs. Both governments could also pay particular attention to marrying climate justice work at home and elsewhere, with gender justice and disability justice, ensuring that climate justice strategies advance gender and disability justice, and vice versa.

## ...by addressing key areas of contradiction

When it comes to taking more justice focused or transformative approaches to international affairs, there are numerous areas of policy that exist in marked contradiction to these ideals at both UK and Scottish level, as well as areas of inconsistency between departments. A few of the most stark examples of these include:



Issue	UK Government	The Scottish Government
<b>Arms manufacture and exports and overseas security training</b>	Continued arms sales to human rights abusing states, including Saudi Arabia, Israel <sup>264</sup> and Turkey, and export of equipment and training to abusive police forces, including Egypt <sup>265</sup> .	At the same time as calling out the UK government on their arms licensing (a reserved issue), the Scottish Government continues to provide financial support to arms manufacturers in Scotland through its Enterprise Funds <sup>266</sup> . The Police Scotland International Academy also provides training on ‘best practice’ to police forces overseas, which has in the past included training packages for Sri Lankan police <sup>267</sup> .
<b>Climate</b>	<p>The UK Government is continuing to miss the majority of its legally binding climate targets<sup>268</sup>. It continues to issue new oil and gas extraction licences, and the British International Investment fund continues to invest in fossil fuel companies.<sup>269</sup> Military carbon emissions are not captured in the government’s measurements.</p> <p>While the UK Government has now committed funding for loss and damage, they are failing to recognise the need for a climate justice lens domestically – for example, retrofitting of private homes but not social housing, and clean air initiatives for affluent areas but not predominantly Black communities.</p>	<p>The Scottish Government repeatedly fails to meet its own domestic climate commitments, including recently giving the go-ahead for gas-fired power station at Peterhead, and not clearly opposing the granting of new oil and gas licences by the UK Government.</p> <p>Scottish Ministers must report on emissions linked to the consumption of goods and services in Scotland, however there are no specific targets for reducing these emissions. A significant portion of Scotland’s carbon footprint is attributed to emissions from imported products and services, and this proportion is expected to increase as domestic emissions in Scotland decline<sup>270</sup>.</p> <p>Likewise, Scotland’s material footprint (the amount of raw materials – both from home and abroad – that go into producing goods and services) is measured by Zero Waste Scotland but no reduction targets are set. This could be tracked via the NPF which would address a key gap in coverage of Scotland’s spillovers<sup>271</sup>.</p> <p>Further, the materials required by Scotland to support a transition to renewable energy – such as lithium – are increasingly linked to social and environmental harms overseas, something that is not currently being tracked or addressed by the Scottish Government<sup>272</sup>.</p>
<b>Immigration and asylum</b>	The FCDO has for a long time prioritised supporting conflict-affected and ‘fragile’ countries. However, the Home Office is at the same time pursuing a whole package of policies and approaches that disadvantage and harm those fleeing the conflicts and persecution recognised by the FCDO.	

Particularly at UK level, the majority of the above contradictions arise from the UK Government prioritising British commercial interests and economic growth, and taking a narrow approach to national security rather than a more expansive global human security perspective. In essence, this embeds a contradiction with any transformative approaches at the heart of the current UK government, and requires an overarching, cultural shift. “Conceiving of security as military strength and strong borders perpetuates a violent world,” write Rosamond, Duncanson and Gentry, “Championing economic growth drives ecological breakdown and prioritising the national interest reinforces a competitive state system that further fuels both militarism and extractive capitalism”<sup>273</sup>.



## ...by regularly reviewing coherence across policy objectives and implementation, and developing mechanisms to address inconsistencies

Policy coherence should not be limited to a series of commitments or shared principles, it also needs to be effectively reviewed, with transparent mechanisms for addressing incoherent policy and acknowledging trade offs. In Finland, for example, the government has instituted an inter-ministerial coordination network on policy coherence around sustainability, and an annual report which evaluates how each policy area is integrating the goals into their actions and budgets<sup>274</sup>.

Part of policy coherence is also about applying the same standards of scrutiny and assessment across different departments, and both governments use of equality and human rights impact assessments should continue to be applied across government departments and local authority work, with an eye to explicitly including analysis on international as well as domestic human rights and equalities across domestic policy and programming, and vice versa for international areas. Scotland should also look to include measurements of its global impact within its National Performance Framework, including indicators around areas such as its participation in global business human rights initiatives, the socio-economic impacts in Scotland's global value chains, fossil fuels extraction and export and its manufacture or storage of weapons and arms<sup>275</sup>.

### SNAPSHOT

#### Scotland's commitments to a 'Feminist Foreign Policy'

Scotland's 2021-22 Programme for Government promised a new "global affairs framework ... to guide Scotland's international engagement, grounded in a values-based approach, and a feminist approach to foreign policy"<sup>276</sup>. After a lengthy consultation process<sup>277</sup> in November 2023 the government launched a position paper setting out the scope and guiding principles of a Feminist Approach to International Relations (FAIR)<sup>278</sup>.

The Scottish Government's position paper claims that the FAIR will "leverage all aspects of Scotland's international policy to advance gender equality and the rights of women, girls and marginalised groups in pursuit of a fairer world"(p4). It commits to "tackling the root causes and power structures" (p4) which drive global insecurities and inequalities. It shares much with a decolonial, anti-racist, global justice approach, aiming to "take an anti-racist, inclusive, collaborative approach by harnessing a range of diverse voices, and to ensure we confront historic and continuing injustice" (p5). Within its guiding principles, there is a core focus on being 'consistent' (along with transformative, intersectional, equitable, participatory, and accountable), demonstrating a familiar acknowledgement from the Scottish Government about the importance of policy coherence (p6/7).

However, many questions remain, about whether the rhetorical commitment to policy coherence, and indeed, to the broader feminist approach, will actually be implemented.

The pledge to "tackling root causes and power structures" from the definition is rarely apparent in the concrete commitments of the four focus areas (international development, climate justice, trade and peace and security). The International Development actions, for example, do not include any mention of what the Scottish Government might do to raise the need for

the structural changes in the global finance and trade systems required to achieve gender-justice and greener, fairer development, such as those recommended by women's civil society.

Without these changes, the good intentions of the Scottish Government in terms of providing more feminist funding to women's organisations in the Global South will do little to challenge entrenched gendered inequalities and insecurities.

In terms of policy coherence, the cross-cutting actions section (1.8) of the position paper also omits a range of other suggestions women's civil society representatives made, including

- Accelerating action on climate justice at home, in order to stop undermining initiatives to achieve climate justice overseas
- Ending subsidies to arms manufacturing in Scotland, in order to stop undermining the good work in support of a rights-based international order, peacebuilders and human rights defenders
- Championing alternative economic models such as the wellbeing economy internationally as well as domestically

More generally, the position paper situates the FAIR as a gender equality policy for the international realm, rather than using feminist analysis to productively rethink how international relations and global sustainable development are done in order to better achieve peace and security and greener, fairer development. The FAIR emphasises the representation and inclusion of women and girls, for example, but this is a necessary-but-insufficient tool for tackling global challenges. More thinking needs to happen around how a feminist approach might contribute to "systemic transformations"<sup>279</sup>.

# Recommendations

## Both governments

- ▶ Commit to joined-up working across government, bringing a values and human-rights based approach across domestic and international policy.

Specific measures to address this include:

- ▶ Include carbon emissions on imports in targets. Re-establish business and human rights assessments and introduce incentives for private sector implementation including through public procurement processes.
- ▶ Fairer taxes on the UK's biggest polluters as a way of ensuring UK and Scotland pays its fair share of action to keep below 1.5% global heating
- ▶ Take more concrete action to implement the SDGs domestically, including committing to at least one Voluntary National Review (VNR) before 2030 and defining clear responsibility at the centre of government for policy coherence

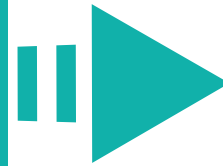
## UK government

- ▶ Immediately cease issuing any arms licenses to Israel, Saudi Arabia any other country that violates international humanitarian law
- ▶ Immediately cease issuing any new licenses or permitting the expansion of coal, oil and gas exploration, extraction, or processing, and remove any government investments, including FCDO investments, from fossil fuel companies
- ▶ Establish safe routes for refugees to the UK, including but not limited to broadening family reunion options, and cancel plans to send asylum-seekers to a third party country
- ▶ FCDO should commit to fully funded Delivery Plans for both the Disability Inclusion and Rights Strategy and International Women and Girls strategy, set out publicly its concrete plans to mainstream gender equality and disability inclusion across areas within its mandate, and identify any areas of inconsistency with domestic policy and approaches
- ▶ Ensure that current and future National Action Plans on women, peace and security include commitments to addressing intersectional climate injustice
- ▶ Take a climate justice approach to delivering on climate targets both internationally and domestically
- ▶ Provide more financial support and services to refugees using Home Office funding, while at the same time ensuring that ODA is used only for overseas assistance

## Scottish government

- ▶ End public enterprise funding for arm manufacturers
- ▶ Conduct a comprehensive review of previous and current government commitments to promoting justice, rights and equality within international policy and create mechanisms for all policy teams across government to report against the commitments outlined
- ▶ Establish an inter-governmental review body that looks at commitments to antiracism, disability inclusion and feminist approaches across domestic and international areas, and feed into the Ministerial Working Group on Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development
- ▶ In collaboration with gender experts from the Global South, create a work plan to implement the Feminist Approach to International Relations, and its commitment to “securing transformation to a just and inclusive global economy” by taking steps towards a long-term goal for structural change that reduces inequalities<sup>280</sup>
- ▶ Demonstrate a twin track approach to disability inclusion in any programmes funded by the Scottish Government, including climate justice, and ensure full and meaningful participation of persons with disabilities and Organisations of Persons with Disabilities in all climate policies, plans, practices and funded programmes and responses
- ▶ Support an independent body to scrutinise Police Scotland overseas activities
- ▶ Review and improve National Performance Framework indicators so that they better measure Scotland's global impact, including negative spillover effects, and develop a strategy to limit the demand for materials required in the transition away from fossil fuels
- ▶ Implement a strong Wellbeing & Sustainable Development Bill to support better coordination across government
- ▶ Ensure that Scotland's budgeting processes reflect both international/domestic gender, disability and racial justice goals

## Pathway 7: Ensure internal government processes and structures are inclusive and anti-racist



**...by committing to hiring a diverse and international workforce, addressing racism and bias in recruitment processes and government structures, and ensuring it is safe for staff to speak out on experiences of racism, sexism and discrimination**

The internal processes and structures and cultures of organisations working in international affairs – both governmental and non-governmental – are critically important to pursuing a more just vision. “The systems and structures that make up our sector reinforce racism”, says Martha Awojobi, curator at UnCharitable, “We really need to learn to talk about it openly”<sup>281</sup>. Much of the work done in this area either focuses on I/NGOs, such as the recent UK parliamentary inquiry on racism in the development sector or the work done by Charity So White/UnCharitable, or on domestic policy areas such as the, now inactive, National Anti-Racism Infrastructure by a Scottish Government convened working group<sup>282</sup>. However a lot of these principles and practices need to be applied internally within governments, including within departments focusing on international affairs.

In the FCDO’s response to the parliamentary inquiry on racism in the ‘aid’ sector, they point towards their commitments to ensuring the racial diversity of staff and pay parity in the UK as their main evidence of working practices that are mindful of the intersecting identities of their staff, without giving any real detailed thinking on how this connects to broader anti-racist ways of working in international affairs, or to mention the pay disparities between UK and locally-recruited staff<sup>283</sup>. Continuing to cite security concerns, they also refused to consider a review of their decision not to hire foreign nationals<sup>284</sup>, despite the criticism this has received in terms of the loss of skills and knowledge and diversity in staff, and what this says about the UK Government’s recognition of expertise. The FCDO’s response also demonstrates no reflection on the power hierarchies that exist between British and national staff in embassies, and what this means for whose knowledge is valued.

The Department of Education’s (DfE) Digital, Data and Technology have made a number of more in-depth commitments to ‘learning how to be anti-racist in our recruitment’, and say that they are working with members of the department’s race working group and others around ensuring diverse interview panels, training interview panels in affinity bias, changing how they assess candidates in a way that recognises lived as well as work experience, and ensuring job adverts are in plain English<sup>285</sup>. However, there is little available information to suggest that similar approaches are being taken proactively across the UK civil service, or how the acknowledgement of ‘lived experience’ might apply to departments working on international affairs.

In 2021, Scotland published a comprehensive race recruitment and retention action plan, with a focus on “changing systems, organisational structures, policies and practices and attitudes, so that power is redistributed and shared equitably”<sup>286</sup>. Similarly to the DfE’s plan, it would be good to see this action plan interpreted specifically for the civil service teams working across international affairs. Given the Scottish Government’s lack of permanent presence in their partner countries, and are therefore unable to recruit ‘national’ staff in the same way as the UK Government, they should also look into ways to embed local knowledge in their staff teams, for example looking into whether their programmes in Malawi, Rwanda and Zambia could be run and managed by staff recruited in these countries, rather than from Edinburgh.

**“The systems and structures that make up our sector reinforce racism”**

Martha Awojobi, UnCharitable

Both governments also need to make sure that it is safe for staff from marginalised groups to speak out on experiences of racism, sexism, ableism and other forms of discrimination, whether in the UK or overseas. This includes: having safe and accessible procedures to report incidents and abuses of power; staff having confidence that incidents will be responded to in a timely way; and providing staff with appropriate support from those with relevant lived experience. Further, it is also about creating a culture in which speaking out is both encouraged and supported, and managers and leaders within the government are willing to take ownership of difficult conversations<sup>287</sup>. For the UK Government, they should also review whether the staff protection policies in place overseas serve and prioritise national staff to the same degree as international staff<sup>288</sup>, are gender responsive and developed in collaboration with staff members most at risk.

### **...by creating a reflective and inclusive working culture and taking time to fully understand the transformative concepts and approaches behind the buzzwords**

In Scotland, there is some strong rhetoric from the government around feminist approaches to foreign affairs, anti-racism and intersectional equality. The Scottish Government also frequently uses the term 'shifting the power' in relation to global sustainable development and wider approaches to international affairs, and even talks about taking an inclusive approach "that breaks "white gaze" in line with concerns raised recently by the Black Lives Matter movement"<sup>289</sup>. However, participants at our 'Building a Just World' workshop also noted a lack of clarity and understanding behind many of the Scottish Government's rhetorical commitments – a keenness to use the words, but not necessarily a shared understanding of what the terminology means in practice among and across teams.

At UK level, anti-racist and feminist approaches are used much more sporadically, but do exist in the language of specific teams, including in embassies around the world. While the FCDO state that the learning provision of their International Academy aims to "point staff to useful material on the history of the place concerned, including colonial history, and how this has shaped international relations and states' foreign policies and priorities", no mention of race is made or how this might be brought into conversations about workplace culture, either within or outside the UK.

Both governments should look to provide meaningful, ongoing learning opportunities to civil servants on anti-racist, anti-colonial, inclusive and feminist approaches to international affairs and what these mean in practice – ideally developed and led by relevant experts from the Global South. However, in addition to more traditional training opportunities, they should also be creating spaces where teams can reflect together and have honest and open conversations on feminist, anti-racist, inclusive and anticolonial ways of working, and how to embed this across government's internal culture, leadership and language. Spaces for and by People of Colour, women, persons of disabilities and LGBTIQ+ staff to discuss government approaches to international affairs should also be encouraged.

### **...by collecting, analysing and publishing disaggregated data, and tracking and sharing information on financial flows**

In order to be able to undertake – and enable others to undertake – the kind of intersectional analysis required to take more transformative pathways, governments must collect and publish data disaggregated by gender, race and ethnicity, disability and other protected characteristics across all areas of both domestic and international policy and programming. "Without data," explained one survey respondent, "persons with disabilities remain invisible to policy makers and processes."

In Scotland, the need for disaggregated data is pushed heavily by third sector equalities organisations and experts in terms of domestic policy and programming. For example, Scotland's Interim Governance Group to Develop National Anti-Racist Infrastructure argued that the lack of quality disaggregated data around ethnicity in Scotland "creates an implementation gap, exacerbating the issue of tackling systemic change"<sup>290</sup>. The same case needs to be made for international programmes and areas of policy, where the Scottish Government should be actively seeking to collect comprehensive and inclusive disaggregated data to ensure that programmes are reaching and responding to the needs of marginalised groups and individuals with multiple, intersecting identities.

While the FCDO will have inherited relatively advanced data collection systems from DfID, they need to ensure that they continue to improve systematic collection and use of disaggregated data and knowledge across international work.

Both governments should also be tracking and sharing information on financial flows and policy initiatives that target gender equality and other areas of global (in)justice, for example by implementing the OECD DAC gender marker to track financial flows that target gender equality<sup>291</sup>. Both governments have made a commitment to implement the OECD gender marker, but need next to clarify exactly how and when they will use it and share the information, and whether they are linking this to particular targets for funding gender equality work. Both governments should also look to use or develop similar tools to track other areas of equality and justice funding and programming, including around climate justice, disability justice, and LGBTQI+ rights.

### **... by reviewing the use of Artificial Intelligence through an intersectional equalities lens**

Anti-racist and feminist activists and analysts are increasingly drawing attention towards the inherent biases in various forms of emerging Artificial Intelligence (AI) and new technologies including in facial recognition technologies, machine learning, large language models (LLMs), automated tools to moderate content across large scale social media sites, and bots that produce misinformation and disinformation. Many of these technologies replicate and reinforce societal biases and power dynamics.

Liberty report that the direction of travel in the public sector – at both a national and local level – is towards greater digitisation and automation<sup>292</sup>, and although less is being written on the subject, this is likely also true at an international level too.

Both the UK and Scottish governments should be constantly reviewing and reporting on their use of these emerging technologies from an intersectional equalities lens, both domestically and internationally, as well as their use by private sector partners and contractors. Where possible, they should share the details of how algorithms work, and who the systems are being tested on, so that public watchdogs can scrutinise<sup>293</sup>. While it is good to see that the UK Ministry of Defence (MoD) 2022 paper about the ethical use of AI in defence mentions the risk of biased algorithms “resulting in discriminatory outcomes and disproportionate harms for certain groups of users”, they need to show evidence of how they have been mitigating such risks.

The UK Government could regulate the Big Tech monopolists and ensure that any trade deals can scrutinise the algorithms and source codes used by the companies. As Global Justice Now argue, “trade deals in which countries sign away their ability to look into the under-the-bonnet programming of AI mean they cannot examine its biases or vulnerabilities,” and also open themselves up to “a myriad violations of privacy [and] civil rights”<sup>294</sup>.

**“Without data, persons with disabilities remain invisible to policy makers and processes.”**

SIDA survey respondent



# Recommendations

## Both governments

- ▶ Ensure that there are safe and accessible procedures for staff and partners in the UK and internationally to report incidents of racism, sexism, discrimination and abuse of power
- ▶ Provide ongoing training and development for staff on anti-racist, anti-colonial, inclusive and feminist approaches to international affairs and what these mean in practice
- ▶ Review and publish use of AI across areas of international policy and programming (including by private sector partners and contractors), undertake an equalities impact assessment and publish detailed analysis of potential bias
- ▶ Publish plans on how the OECD DAC gender marker will be implemented and how the information will be shared, and look to identify or develop similar tools for tracking funds targeting other areas of inequality

## UK government

- ▶ Reconsider FDCO decision to not hire foreign nationals, include locally hired staff in pay parity reviews, and review security protection for locally hired staff and ensure security protocols are gender-responsive
- ▶ Take learning from the Department for Education's work on anti-racist recruitment and work with their working group to apply to FDCO and other departments
- ▶ Work with Indigenous communities and anti-racist and anticolonial experts to review the International Academy learning provision on countries

## Scottish government

- ▶ Apply and interpret the race recruitment and retention action plan specifically to departments working on international affairs, and investigate ways to embed local knowledge of Malawi, Rwanda and Zambia in staff teams
- ▶ Establish cross-department discussion spaces for staff to reflect on feminist, anti-racist, inclusive and anticolonial ways of working, including supporting and encouraging identity-specific spaces for staff members of colour, women, persons with disabilities and LGBTIQ+ to discuss the same
- ▶ Require all Scottish Government funded development, climate and HEF projects to report using intersectional disaggregated data, and apply pressure with development partners for increased use of disaggregated data.

## 5. Conclusion

Amidst escalating global crises, widening inequalities and the shrinking of civic space worldwide, there is a clear, urgent need to embrace alternative frameworks and start to take more transformative approaches to global sustainable development and international relations. As this paper outlines – with their shared focus on addressing the root causes of inequalities and challenging entrenched power structures – feminist, anti-racist, decolonial and inclusive approaches play an important role in helping identify and push forward the kinds of structural changes that are needed at an international level, and foster a future of international affairs grounded in equality, justice, and liberation.

Governments in the Global North, including Scotland and the UK, have a responsibility to both acknowledge and address the past and ongoing harms that patriarchal and colonial systems have enacted on communities in the Global South. By starting to take more feminist, anti-racist, inclusive and decolonial approaches across their international engagement, and working in solidarity with civil society movements, governments can start a process of shifting or redistributing the power imbalances that lie behind much global injustice.

In Scotland, the Government needs to urgently move from rhetoric to implementation, and make their stated commitments to feminist, anti-racist, decolonial and inclusive approaches a reality across all departments. At UK level, the Government as a whole need to embrace the potential change in approach outlined in the FCDO's recent white paper, and make progress on issues such as tax, gender, disability and climate justice, while also reversing some of the policies most out of step with these more transformative approaches, such as around oil and gas extraction, arms licencing and immigration and asylum. Both governments also need to take care not to work on justice issues in silos, instead ensuring a coherent approach across domestic and international policy areas.

By delineating pathways for potential action, this paper hopes to offer the beginning of a roadmap for the UK and Scottish governments to navigate the complexities of global sustainable development with a renewed commitment to justice and equity.



## 6. Glossary

**Anti-racism** is more than not being racist. It is a way of actively fighting against racism by acknowledging its systemic and structural aspects. Anti-racism involves making changes to systems, policies, and practices, and taking positive actions to address the disadvantages caused by racism.

**Colonialism** refers to the historical process in which European and western powers exerted territorial, political, social, and cultural power over non-western territories between, roughly, the 15th and mid-20th centuries. Although non-western colonisation exists, decolonial theory focuses on European and western expansion and its relations to the development of capitalism.

**Feminism:** has historically been a movement advocating for equal social, political, legal and economic rights for all and has increasingly become a movement arguing for transformative justice that challenges existing political, economic and social structures. Feminists recognise and seek an end to patriarchy. While all feminists are united under a shared belief that one's gender should not determine one's role or treatment in society, many feminists differ on the nuances of feminist theory. There are many labels different feminists might use to describe their beliefs, but prominent types of feminism are liberal feminism (fighting inequality within the structure of a liberal democracy) and socialist feminism (connects flaws in capitalism to gender inequality)<sup>295</sup>.

**Feminist climate justice** envisions a world in which everyone can enjoy the full range of human rights, free from discrimination, and flourish on a planet that is healthy and sustainable. It can be achieved through four interlinked dimensions (recognition, redistribution, representation, and reparation) and the principles of interdependence and intersectionality<sup>296</sup>.

**Indigenous** is used to refer broadly to peoples of long settlement and connection to specific lands who have been adversely affected by incursions by industrial economies, displacement, and settlement of their traditional territories by others.

**Intersectional feminism** centres the voices of those experiencing overlapping, concurrent forms of oppression in order to understand the depths of the inequalities and the relationships among them in any given context. This is the approach taken by the authors of this paper<sup>297</sup>.

**Patriarchy** is a system of society or government in which men hold the power and women are largely excluded from it.



## 7. Thank you

This research was kindly funded by:

Changing the world  
with women and girls  
**actionaid**

**ActionAid** is an international charity that works with women and girls living in poverty. Our dedicated staff are changing the world with women and girls. We are ending violence and fighting poverty so that all women and girls, everywhere, can create the future they want. We understand the deep-rooted problems facing women and girls and work alongside whole communities to find solutions. We make sure women and girls are safe from harm, able to earn a living and to claim their rights, and we prioritise their rights and leadership during times of crisis.



**CBM UK** It is time for a positive, transformative change in our approach to international development. When global conflict, debt and climate crises are intensifying and disproportionately affecting our most marginalised communities, including the 1.3 billion persons with disabilities, how can an inclusive, just and climate-resilient world be realised? This timely report highlights the current challenges whilst providing insights on the voices, decision makers and agency required to instigate and deliver the change needed. Rooted in the justice movements of those whose lives are most affected, CBM is seeking to learn, develop and champion such approaches in partnership with the disability movement..

**EMMS**  
International  
Health, Hope

**EMMS International** is delighted to support SIDA's *From Talk To Transformation* report. Our vision is a just world in which all people have access to good quality, dignified healthcare. Working with partners in India, Malawi, Nepal, Rwanda, Scotland and Zambia, we help them make their countries' health and healthcare systems just and accessible to all. We work within the strategies and plans of these countries' governments, and in partnership with others, we help shape these strategies. We hope that through this report, SIDA helps the UK and Scottish governments to play their roles in shifting the power towards global justice.



**Oxfam** Amid rising levels of global poverty, extreme inequality, protracted conflicts and a deepening climate crisis, there is an urgent need to chart a new path. This report offers a suite of bold, transformative policies to deepen the Scottish and UK Governments' contributions to global justice, including by shifting power to the Global South. From debt relief and acknowledgements of past harms to making polluters pay for their damage, bold new global agreements on tax and better funding for feminist and women's rights movements, Oxfam commends this report's vision. A more equal world is possible. After all, there is no them, just us.



**The READ Foundation** takes pride in its role as a key contributor to this report. As an organisation committed to empowering vulnerable children in impoverished communities through education, we acknowledge the need for systemic change outlined in this report. The call for a reimagined global approach resonates with our mission to deliver high-quality education, ensuring access for every child regardless of their background. This report establishes a foundation for a just and inclusive approach, emphasising the necessity to dismantle power structures perpetuating inequality. In collaboration with SIDA and its members, we advocate for governments to embrace these principles, reshaping international relations with a focus on equality, justice, and liberation.



**Unicef** proudly support the Scottish International Development Alliance for their ambitious commitments to drive positive change through the *From Talk to Transformation* report. This report highlights how governments can authentically embrace feminist, anti-racist, de-colonial and inclusive principles while amplifying their positive impact. These values can help us, as a sector, in our collective work to drive meaningful and sustainable change for children and communities worldwide while fostering a more equitable and inclusive future for all.



**Water Aid** It is fundamentally unjust that the communities that have done the least to cause the multiple crises of conflict, debt, inequality and climate are the ones that bear the brunt of the impact. At the same time, communities have solutions and are driving a call for change that cannot be ignored. WaterAid commends this report's vision and bold set of actions that the Scottish and UK governments can take as part of global efforts to shift power and create a world that is more just and more equal.

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