

“Scotland and Malawi Co-operation Agreement”

Scottish Parliament Debate 11th November 2015

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The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott):

The next item of business is a debate on motion S4M-14775, in the name of Humza Yousaf, on Scotland and Malawi: 10 years since the co-operation agreement.

The Minister for Europe and International Development (Humza Yousaf):

Presiding Officer, members of the Parliament, ladies and gentlemen, muli bwanji and good afternoon. It is a pleasure to lead this debate on behalf of the Scottish Government. We are here to celebrate 10 years of the relationship that began when the co-operation agreement between the Scottish Government and the Government of Malawi was signed, but we all know without any hesitation that the relationship goes much deeper and is of much longer standing than that.

Every one of us knows the stories of arguably our greatest ever Scot, Dr David Livingstone, and his journeys throughout sub-Saharan Africa. What touches any of the members who have been to Malawi is the knowledge that people in that country have of Dr Livingstone and how much they still revere him, 156 years since he took his first steps in Malawi.

I do not know too much about David Livingstone—certainly not as much as some of the aficionados in the chamber—but I know that he is many things to many people. Many people view him as a great medic, as he undoubtedly was. Many people view him as a great explorer, as he undoubtedly was, looking for the source of the Zambezi river. Many others view him as a missionary; that was his primary role in Malawi, but perhaps the less said about that, the better, because he converted only one person, who ended up becoming what some might call a lapsed Christian.

David Livingstone was a missionary to some, a doctor to some and an explorer to others but the way that I view him, and the way that I think he will be most remembered, is as a humanitarian. He campaigned against the abhorrent slave trade of the time. He believed in commerce as a route out of the slave trade and in the ideals of civilisation, which meant that we were able to overcome whatever global challenges faced us as a common humanity.

As well as the historic, I am very proud of the contemporary contribution that Scotland has made in partnership with Malawi and of the benefit that Malawi has given to Scotland. Credit where credit is due: it was Lord McConnell—then First Minister Jack McConnell—who signed the co-operation agreement with then President Bingu wa Mutharika of Malawi in Bute house. We reflected on that last week when, in Bute house again 10 years on, the current First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon, hosted a number of Malawian delegates and diplomats and people who had been involved in the relationship.

Over those 10 years, the international development fund has moved on. It now applies not only to Malawi but to seven countries throughout the world and has disbursed £80 million. However, Malawi is the primary relationship—the jewel in the crown. Over those 10 years, £55 million of funding has gone to projects that have had a huge impact. Hundreds of projects have been supported but, if I were asked what the primary success of the relationship between Scotland and Malawi is, I would say without doubt that it has been the people-to-people relationship that has been cemented up and down the country.

In that vein, it would be wrong for me to continue without thanking the people who have been involved in that people-to-people relationship. Parliamentarians have been at the forefront of that. Many of the parliamentarians whom I see in the chamber have been to Malawi to help to cement those relationships, but they would be the first to acknowledge that the relationships have grown organically from the grass roots of the communities.

I thank the Scotland Malawi Partnership and its mirror organisation, the Malawi Scotland Partnership, and the chairs and chief executives who have been involved in them—David Hope-Jones, who is the chief executive, and the chairman, the Rev Ken Ross, of the Scotland Malawi Partnership; and their counterparts, Andrew Namakhoma and Happy Makala—for all the work that they have done.

It is inspiring and enlightening that I can go up, down and across Scotland—from the south to the north and from the east to the west—and find somebody who is involved in a relationship with Malawi. They are from all different sectors—doctors, nurses, teachers, school pupils, politicians and many others in between.

Partnership, co-operation and collaboration are key words in the relationship between our two nations. They were important in the millennium development goals and they are important in the current sustainable development goals. Many members will know the famous anti-apartheid slogan, “What is about us without us is not for us.” That very much cements the ethos with which we take forward the relationship between Scotland and Malawi. The priorities of the Malawi Government and the people of Malawi become the priorities of the Scottish Government, too, and, indeed, of the non-governmental organisations that carry out the good work. That is guided by the co-operation agreement. The two Governments come together regularly and go through the agreement line by line, to discuss what is best for the relationship moving forward.

I pay tribute to the NGOs and partners that have been involved in the relationship, which has been hugely successful over the 10 years. I have had a look at some of the key achievements. There are too many to mention all of them, but I will mention some of the highlights. We have provided 140,000 seriously ill children with emergency triage and referral for treatment of meningitis. We have saved thousands of lives of mothers and their babies through numerous maternal healthcare projects. We have improved access to energy for more than 80,000 Malawians through our flagship Malawi renewable energy acceleration programme. I visited the college of medicine, Malawi’s only medical school. The Scottish Government has funded projects there with a combined worth of more than £2.4 million, through which medical academics and professionals have assisted in increasing the annual rate of medical graduates from 16 to more than 100. In addition, we have established Malawi’s first ever clinical masters degree in psychiatry. Those are great achievements that will have a profound effect not just for the current period but for years and generations to come. We should be proud of playing a part in those achievements.

In the end, the statistics are just statistics. Those of us who have visited Malawi and those of us who have had delegations from Malawi understand that there is a human story behind every single one of those statistics. I could recall and recount plenty, but one in particular comes to mind. When I visited Malawi for the first time in 2014, it was great to hear that, as a result of a solar project that we had helped to fund at a healthcare centre in a village near Mount Mulanje, for the first time a woman in the village had given birth under a light. It was amazing that until then women had been giving birth in the dark. That woman was the first woman in her village to give birth under a light, and that was through the generosity of Scots. There are many other human stories like that that help us to realise the great impact that we have made in the relationship over the past 10 years.

While I was in Malawi, I had the great pleasure of meeting the current President, Peter Mutharika. We discussed much around the aid project and the development programme. It is important to mention that he touched on the importance of trade. From our perspective, as we take the relationship to the next stage, trade will be an important part. Every time I go to Malawi, people ask us about trade. They say that they do not want to rely on aid or development assistance but want to rely on their own capabilities, capacity, intellects, hard work and endeavour. They want to be able to

create jobs, wealth and an ecosystem that sustains them. I welcome Labour's amendment, in which the important word is "sustainable". Sustainability is what the President talked about.

We have a historic legacy as Scots. One of the very first European businesses to set up shop in Malawi was the African Lakes Corporation. The company was set up by two brothers, John and Frederick Moir, and its headquarters were in Glasgow. The company went on to be known as the Mandala corporation, because one of the brothers wore glasses and "mandala" means "glasses" in Chichewa. His brother had a walking stick. The word for walking stick is "kandodo", and a chain of Kandodo supermarkets now runs through Malawi. We have a historic legacy of trade with Malawi that has existed since the 19th century. We still have a trade relationship with Malawi in modern times.

I visited Mary's Meals, as many other members have done, and I was blown away by the project. It feeds 800,000 children in Malawi and 1 million children across the world every day. One important place that I got to see was the food-processing plant, which employs 2,000 local people in Malawi. We can perhaps do more to build on that.

There is plenty more to say, but I will develop those themes and some other themes in summing up.

Our sustainable development goals command us to build partnerships with the developing world in the next 10 years. The challenge for us is to ensure that the Scotland-Malawi relationship is sustainable and fit for the modern world. The partnership that all of us, and civic society in particular, have created and fostered in the past 10 years is a great model for other countries to look at in their development work.

We should all be very proud. I am pleased that we are celebrating that success, and I look forward to an insightful and encouraging debate. I will be pleased to hear what members are doing in their own constituencies. My thanks go to the people of Scotland, civic society, parliamentarians and everyone who has been involved in making the Scotland-Malawi relationship a success over the past 10 years.

I move,

That the Parliament notes both that the tenth anniversary of the signing of the historic cooperation agreement between the governments of Scotland and Malawi was reached on 3 November 2015 and the continuing strength of this relationship; further notes that this agreement marked the beginning of the Scottish Government's International Development Programme, which now works in seven countries in the developing world; believes that, as a good global citizen, Scotland should continue to prioritise its international development work; recognises the contribution of the Scottish development sector and the Scotland Malawi Partnership, in particular their work with partners in Malawi, and the many Scots and Scottish organisations who, over the last 10 years, strengthened these links with Malawi and Scotland's other priority countries through their hard work and enthusiasm and have given their time and support so generously; commends the work of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association and MSPs through their continued work with the Malawi National Assembly, and looks forward to the Scottish Parliament and Government and the people of Scotland working together with the country's domestic and overseas partners toward the delivery of the new global United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals, which will become applicable from January 2016.

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

I thank the minister for bringing the debate to the chamber; I am pleased that the Scottish Government has used some of its chamber time to highlight the anniversary of the co-operation agreement and give us all an opportunity to recognise its significance.

The partnership agreement and the lead-up to its signing were not, at all times, universally supported or popular in the Parliament, or even among outside organisations. There was some

scepticism and even outright opposition, and I appreciate that some people had concerns that a focus on one country could divert attention from other countries.

However, despite the initial reaction from some, it is clear that, as the relationship has developed, attitudes have changed. We have seen a significant number of positive and inspiring outcomes throughout Scotland that have benefited Malawi. I thank our former First Minister, Jack McConnell, and the team that worked towards the co-operation agreement for pushing forward with a process that they believed could change a country.

The co-operation agreement was the first step towards the Scottish Government's international development fund and the positive work that it has delivered throughout the world. Although the fund has been protected, which is very welcome, it has reduced in value by approximately 8 per cent a year in real terms. We all know the pressures on the budget, but the fund is a small pot of money in Scottish budget terms and we should be looking at how we can restore its value.

At the time of the partnership agreement, Malawi was one of the poorest countries in the world. Its income per person was \$160 per year, and despite having a population and land area more than double that of Scotland's, its economy was little more than 1 per cent of ours. To put that into some kind of perspective, Falkirk's economy at that time was twice the size of Malawi's.

The country was suffering one of the worst HIV/AIDS epidemics in the world: life expectancy had fallen from 45 to 37 years, and the number of orphans in Malawi numbered the entire population of Edinburgh. That was the situation facing Malawi at the time when the agreement was signed. I believe that we as a Parliament and as a country can be immensely proud that, in Malawi's time of need, Scotland was there to reignite the bonds of friendship and help.

The agreement was not just a link between the First Minister and the President at the time, nor was it a link between two Parliaments. It was a link between two countries and 17 million people. Since the agreement was signed, the civic links between people in the two countries have benefited two million people in Malawi directly and four million indirectly. That is a quarter of the country's population, which has grown from 12 million to 16 million in the past decade.

With more than 150 schools, 15 local authorities, all of Scotland's universities, most colleges and hundreds of NGOs, businesses, charities and ambassadors throughout the country engaging with Malawi, I am sure that every MSP who speaks today will have their own local example to highlight.

In my region of Mid Scotland and Fife, there are a large number of partnerships working to change lives in Scotland and Malawi. Fife Council was linked with team Malawi in the Glasgow Commonwealth games, and Fife College has a number of links to the country. Local schools such as Kirkcaldy high and Burntisland primary are linking pupils in Scotland with pupils in Malawi, informing and inspiring future generations in both countries. St Kenneth's parish church has links with villages in the north of Malawi and is helping to build infrastructure, fresh-water boreholes, schools and sustainable income-generating projects to help to lift people out of poverty.

There are national examples too—most famously Mary's Meals, as the minister mentioned, which is doing great work in Malawi and beyond. There is also Chance for Change, which, with support from the Scottish Government, works with young people, and Link Community Development. Jack McConnell, continuing his work in setting up the co-operation agreement, has strong links with the Livingstone volunteers scheme, which is now in its third year of helping Scots who are looking to volunteer in Malawi.

Although it is right that we highlight the great work that has been achieved through the co-operation between Scotland and Malawi in the past 10 years, we must also use today's debate and the anniversary to look forward to the next 10 years and the 10 after that. In the first decade, we rightly focused on health and education. We are heading into our elections next year and we all understand the importance of those issues to a country and its people. Improving health and education can tackle inequality and transform people's lives.

Now that programmes and partnerships are embedded between the two nations, we can look at what has worked and build on that while considering what areas can be improved and how to expand the work that we do. The original agreement has a section that is devoted to sustainable economic development and one of the big challenges facing Malawi is a fragile economy, like that of many other countries in the area. Headline inflation is running at around 24 per cent; the currency is weak and is falling against all major currencies; and export revenue is low. As we proceed into the next decade of partnership, one of the challenges has to be that of supporting trade and investment in Malawi. That can be achieved by Scotland strengthening its contribution. I welcome the minister's comments on that in his opening speech.

As the original agreement mentions, it is important to stimulate collaboration between agricultural bodies. Agriculture accounts for 85 per cent of the total workforce, 35 per cent of gross domestic product and 90 per cent of export earnings. Of the nation's agricultural production, 70 per cent comes from smallholdings. Farming is a key industry that provides exports such as tobacco, coffee, sugar and tea and feeds the country. However, because Malawi is landlocked, transportation costs are high and vulnerability to weather is a huge issue. The Government's motion talks about the United Nations sustainability goals. We know about the pressures of climate change and that the poorest countries will bear the brunt of that. As a country, Scotland knows the agriculture sector well. Although links have been established, which is to be welcomed, we can do more in that sector.

This week, a group from Malawi is in Scotland to start an international study tour on public sector reform. A directorate for public sector reforms management has been set up and a parliamentary committee is looking to build institutional frameworks to help businesses to flourish. I hope that the group has a successful trip and learns much from our knowledge and expertise in those areas.

Test drilling is taking place in Malawi to consider the possibility that there is oil. Scotland's experience of managing and growing an oil sector could be shared with Malawi. However, we must be on our guard against corruption, particularly if the sector is to grow.

The Scotland and Malawi co-operation agreement and programme are now embedded in our Parliament and wider civic society. As a result of the agreement, we now have a significant and life-changing international development programme. The co-operation agreement is a success story that the Parliament should be proud of. The past 10 years are an example to other nations and an example that we must continue. If we can assist in any way towards a sustainable economy, we will have laid the building blocks of a stable and, I hope, peaceful and prosperous country.

I move amendment S4M-14775.1, to insert at end:

“; welcomes the change achieved through the cooperation agreement, particularly regarding progress in health and education, and believes that, going forward, work should be undertaken to support a strong and sustainable economy for Malawi's future”.

Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con):

I am pleased to speak in the debate in support of the motion and the amendment—there is nothing in them with which I could possibly disagree. I thank the organisations that have provided useful briefings for today, including the Scotland Malawi Partnership, which does such good work under the direction of David Hope-Jones. As other members have done, I pay tribute to the former First Minister Jack McConnell for initiating the Scotland and Malawi co-operation agreement 10 years ago.

Scotland's co-operation with Malawi has consistently enjoyed cross-party support and that continues to be the case. The Scottish Conservatives recognise the significant amount of good work that has been undertaken in Malawi in the past 10 years thanks to the support of the Scottish Government and we commend the efforts of those who have been involved in delivering assistance on the ground. In opening the debate, the minister set out some of the achievements. I have been particularly impressed with the results of the Malawi renewable energy acceleration programme, which is led by the University of Strathclyde and which has helped almost 80,000 people in rural Malawi gain access to sustainable electricity. As the June 2015 end-of-project report states:

“In a country where less than 1% of the rural population has access to electricity, this is a transformational change.”

It is also very much to be welcomed that academic institutions in Malawi are training communities on the use of renewable energy, helping to build future capacity, and that a new master’s degree in renewable energy—the first of its kind ever in Malawi—has been created, with 13 students on track to finish their studies in 2015. I think that that is a marvellous thing.

In previous debates on Malawi I have praised the outstanding work of the charity Mary’s Meals, which is headquartered near my home village of Dalmally in Argyll. I make no apology for highlighting again today its work under the world-class leadership of Magnus Macfarlane-Barrow. All of us should be very proud that a Scottish charity is a global leader, providing meals to over 25 per cent of all primary schools across Malawi. Headteacher Moses Nderema of Kagolo primary school in Malawi says:

“Before Mary’s Meals the children had nothing to eat all day at school. They were always tired and had no energy or enthusiasm. Now they are very participative indeed and their stomachs are full!”

Mary’s Meals, where possible, buys much of what it needs to deliver its projects from local suppliers, such as building materials and cooking equipment, as well as food from local smallholder farms. That helps to boost the wider economy and supports even more families who are struggling to feed their children. Community support for Mary’s Meals is crucial and a big part of its success.

The Scottish Government’s contribution to supporting Malawi is welcome, but Scots should also be proud of the contribution that we are all making through the United Kingdom’s international development in Malawi. This year alone the UK is spending over £83 million in Malawi supporting 75 varied and significant projects across the country, including family planning advice, agricultural support, water and sanitation provision and road infrastructure improvement.

Skilled health professionals within the national health service in Scotland are to benefit from UK Government funding to help them to teach and offer practical assistance to their counterparts in developing countries. Just last week the international development minister, Desmond Swayne, announced funding to link the Greater Glasgow and Clyde Health Board with Queen Elizabeth Hospital in Blantyre, Malawi, to allow a series of workshops to be created around preventing burn injuries. That will reach an estimated 200,000 people in southern Malawi.

To conclude, we believe that it is right that we are marking the tenth anniversary of Scotland’s co-operation agreement with Malawi. We are pleased that Scotland is making a real contribution to improving the lives of some of the poorest people on the planet. We urge the Scottish Government to continue to support practical programmes that also build up capacity and expertise in Malawi and to work as closely as possible with the UK Government and the many excellent voluntary sector organisations who work there.

Bruce Crawford (Stirling) (SNP):

I am delighted to have the opportunity to speak about the unique and very special relationship that exists between Scotland and Malawi. As the motion in the name of the minister, Humza Yousaf, rightly recognises, we are here to discuss the 10th anniversary of the historic co-operation agreement between our two nations.

As the minister, Claire Baker and Jamie McGrigor did, I pay tribute to former First Minister Jack McConnell, who was so instrumental and forward looking in his role in the creation of the historic agreement. I do not recall being so kind to Jack McConnell from the SNP benches when he was First Minister. Perhaps we should have been kinder to him then.

Tributes should also go to the minister. Like the best of leaders, he likes to hand out praise to others, but there is no doubt that he has helped to strengthen and deepen the relationship.

As the minister said, the relationship stretches back more than 156 years to the time of David Livingstone. However, it is only when we are reminded of the relationship in contemporary times, as

we are by the briefing from the Scotland Malawi Partnership, that the sheer depth of it becomes clear.

In terms of civic links, we were reminded that the relationship benefits 300,000 Scots and 2 million Malawians annually, with 683 organisations having active links with Malawi. Today, more than 94,000 Scots and 198,000 Malawians are engaged in active civic links. Those numbers alone tell us that the relationship is well worth cherishing and nurturing.

The work that is done in Malawi by a large number of organisations, from Government right through to primary schools, covers a significant number of important and valuable programmes. However, it is in the field of education that I believe the most valuable and sustaining work is being undertaken. More than 150 Scottish schools have active links with schools in Malawi. In my constituency, a number of schools are using those links to foster what the Scotland Malawi Project calls “people-to-people and community-to-community links.”

For example, in the summer, Bannockburn high school sent a group of students and teachers to Malawi for the first time, and they helped to build and refurbish classrooms. I am glad to have played a small role in helping to make their trip to Malawi possible by introducing them to the McConnell International Foundation and encouraging them to apply for funding to support their work. I am also proud of the work that they accomplished, along with the many other schools that have been connected with Malawi. I can only imagine how much they learned about their own lives and the lives of others, especially through the relationships that they formed. The benefits of school partnerships cannot be overstated, as they allow communities in Scotland and Malawi to feel connected to a greater global society. We are teaching our young people to celebrate and learn about other cultures while finding common ground.

The Scottish Government has done some valuable and important work to improve the quality and availability of education in Malawi. One noteworthy programme is the inclusive education project, which is working to improve access to education in the most rural areas. Through that project, communities are working together to support the students in Malawi who are at the highest risk of dropping out. Scottish Government funding has also helped to establish mother groups and female teacher networks, which have trained almost 1,000 female teachers to handle issues that particularly affect girls’ access to education. The importance of education cannot be overestimated. When we invest in education, it is an investment in the future because it paves the way for economic and social development.

There is still much work to be done to strengthen Malawi and our partnership with the Malawians. I very much look forward to seeing what will happen in the next 10 years as, I hope, we strengthen and deepen that relationship further. It is a unique and special one, as I said. I look forward to what the minister, in summing up, has to say about the next 10 years.

Elaine Smith (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab):

I was in Malawi with my colleagues Liam McArthur and James Dornan earlier this year, on a visit by the Scotland branch of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association. The visit was motivated, in part, by the 10th anniversary of the agreement between our countries. I found Malawi to be a country of contradictions. It is beautiful in parts but grim in others; it is uplifting but also depressing. Many people are desperately poor economically but inspiringly rich spiritually.

The delegation was there primarily to interact with Malawian MPs and to deliver workshops to strengthen relations between MSPs and members of the National Assembly of Malawi. However, we also visited projects that have links to Scotland, including St Michael and All Angels church in Blantyre, which was built by Scottish missionaries. In the church, there is a memorial plaque to the Rev Robert Clelland, a Coatbridge-born engineer who founded the Mulanje mission, which had a school and a hospital, and who, like David Livingstone, stood up against the slave trade. He died of blackwater fever in 1890, at the age of 33, but modern-day connections mean that his legacy lives on in Coatbridge, with Coatbridge high school, St Ambrose high school, St Andrew’s high school and many local primary schools having partnerships in the Mulanje area through the healthy lifestyle

project that is run by Charles Fawcett. There is also an opportunity, every year, for schoolchildren to raise funds and visit Malawi, which is a real life-changing experience.

I was able to visit Mulanje and visit the sterling work of the healthy lifestyle project's aiming higher in Malawi project. It includes the very successful girls go for health team, which is based in Mendulo parish, and a disability project that cares for about 400 disabled children from poor rural backgrounds. That work is carried out mainly with local fundraising in my constituency, and I am sure that the minister will not be surprised to hear me make a plea for more assistance for those projects.

Not all our visits were pleasant experiences. Malawi had been devastated by flooding, and the disabled children's project had several children living in even more dire circumstances than usual. I visited one family with a disabled child who were living in a tiny temporary shelter. The conditions were appalling, and the ground that the family had to lie down on to sleep was still sodden from the floods.

Overall, disabled children in Malawi face many challenges, for example in accessing school and healthcare, or in relation to cultural acceptance, discrimination and superstition. They are also often hidden away. The healthy lifestyle project provides aid such as wheelchairs, and supports disabled children in school and with meeting their health needs.

Another difficult visit that we made was to Bvunmbwe young offenders institution, where the young men are supported by Sister Anna Tommasi. It was an experience that was humbling and appalling in equal measure. It was humbling because of the work that Sister Anna does to educate the boys, as well as the fantastic welcome and entertainment that were put on for us, but it was appalling because of the living conditions and the boys' personal plight.

The prison holds 270 young offenders aged 14 to 20, both convicted and remanded, with more than 200 children sharing a cell the size of a classroom. There is one shower for everyone. Boys are imprisoned for what people here might consider to be very minor offences or crimes of extreme poverty. Some boys are put in prison without sentence; others stay longer than they should because no one delivers the paperwork to release them. The education programme that Sister Anna provides is remarkable. It relies on contributions from outside Malawi, not least those from the healthy lifestyle project and St Margaret's high school in Airdrie.

The report of our Malawi visit, which includes details of the workshops that we delivered to members of the Malawian Parliament, is available on the Scottish Parliament's website. It is highly recommended reading, Presiding Officer. I take the opportunity to commend Margaret Neal for her work in supporting the delegation.

Malawi is a beautiful country, with a wealth of natural resources. It could easily become a more popular tourist destination. Its people are friendly, warm and welcoming, as well as resilient—that is why it is known as the warm heart of Africa. However, the challenges that the country faces are immense, with hunger, poverty and illness blighting so many people's lives. Therefore, a visit there is uplifting and humbling but also disturbing.

James Dornan (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP):

As has just been mentioned, during Parliament's February recess, I visited Malawi along with my colleagues Liam McArthur and Elaine Smith on behalf of the CPA's Scotland branch. As was also mentioned, we discussed committee processes with members of the Malawian National Assembly. It was eye-opening to hear about the difficulties that Malawi's parliamentarians face in arranging committees, often due to time and cost constraints. They appeared to take a lot from our input. We have just heard the advert for the report, which all members should go and read immediately.

It seemed clear to me that that cross-parliamentary relationship has a tangible impact, not only on parliamentarians in Malawi but on members of our Parliament who take part in such visits. I hope that such engagement continues. As an aside, at the last meeting of the cross-party group on Malawi,

it was really nice to see a couple of the young Malawian clerks, who were over here on an intern programme.

As Elaine Smith said, while we were in Malawi, we visited a number of projects that are supported by Scottish organisations, such as charities and schools. I was thrilled to attend Matindi girls academy, which is part of Mary's Meals. One of the classrooms at the school was built with the support of the pupils, staff and parents of Langside primary school in my constituency, and part financed by my old school, Holyrood secondary school. When I returned, I visited Langside primary school to discuss my trip with the pupils and to show them what their great work and support have helped to achieve in Malawi.

I took over to Malawi a generous donation of boots, balls and football strips from Queen's Park Football Club, which is based at Hampden in my constituency. They ended up with those unfortunate young men in the young offenders institution.

Last Friday, I had the pleasure of attending Queen's Park's annual dinner, where I spoke to George Watson from the Spiders' community team, who arranged the football equipment for my trip. He has a long-term interest in supporting Malawi, and we got talking about his latest trip to the village of Ekwendeni in north Malawi. It was his second successive year visiting the village, but this time he went with 14 folk, all from the southside of Glasgow, who went to share their knowledge and expertise.

Within that group were musicians, nurses, doctors, teachers and football coaches. They were based in the local church and, in the mornings, they helped to run a holiday club that offered 400 kids activities such as crafts, singing, music, hockey, parachute games—I am not really sure what they are—and, of course, football. As well as getting to take part in the activities, each child got a cup of porridge, and for some that would be their only meal of the day. In the afternoons, George worked for two to three hours with a group of coaches from the area to put on a course of coach education sessions. He challenged the coaches to put on a football festival on the last day of his visit, and more than 400 children took part in what was a remarkably well-run competition.

As we know, in many places football is the community's lifeblood, but it was largely uncoordinated in that area. George noted that there was the will to have an organised outfit, and that having such an organisation would make it easier for Queen's Park to offer targeted support. At the dinner, he told me that his advice has been taken on board and that the Ekwendeni community football group has been established and a chair and office bearers put in place. Since then, Queen's Park has been able to send over more football and other resources to assist with further development in the area for boys and girls of all ages. That is another brilliant example of how the relationship between Scotland and Malawi works at a practical, grass-roots level.

Because of the strategy that this Parliament has been working towards under successive Governments, there are countless examples across the country of groups and organisations just like Queen's Park that are using their resources and expertise to empower people in Malawi.

One of the messages that we repeatedly received when we were in Malawi was that the co-operation agreement and the relationship between the two countries work so well because we both see the relationship as one of equals. Apparently, that is not always the case with some of the other arrangements that Malawi is involved in. At the heart of this successful arrangement between our two countries is the co-operation of equals.

As someone who has seen the benefits at first hand and has heard from others about their relationships with groups across Malawi, I commend the co-operation agreement between Scotland and Malawi to the Parliament, and I look forward to the next decade of our growing relationship with that beautiful country and its lovely, friendly people.

Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD):

Three years ago, I took part in a very similar debate. At that stage, we were looking ahead to the Livingstone bicentenary, which was an opportunity to celebrate the long-standing and deep-rooted

connections between Scotland and Malawi. On this occasion, the time horizon is rather shorter—it spans the 10 years since the signing of an historic co-operation agreement between the previous Scottish Executive and the Government of Malawi.

Before I turn to what I believe that agreement has helped to achieve and where we need to focus over the next decade, I want to pay a brief tribute to two people who I believe are due particular credit for helping us to rediscover and rejuvenate the ties between our two countries.

It was, of course, Jack McConnell who signed the co-operation agreement in 2005, but his contribution was never simply ceremonial. His personal drive delivered the agreement, and his passionate belief in the benefits that the relationship can bring to both countries has remained undimmed ever since.

Secondly, I acknowledge the role that was played by the missionary, scholar and tireless campaigner the late Rev Andrew Ross. I first met the Doc in his capacity as honorary president of Edinburgh University Association Football Club, but when I later worked as an adviser in the Scottish Executive, he instilled in me the importance of re-energising Scotland's ties with Malawi. It was an honour, if a bit of a surprise, to find myself at the Doc's graveside in the missionaries cemetery in Blantyre during the visit that Elaine Smith and James Dornan mentioned. He is sorely missed, but his legacy in binding together two countries that he loved lives on.

As colleagues may know, along with Mike Russell, I have the privilege of co-convening the cross-party group on Malawi in this Parliament. It is a very active group, and at our meeting earlier this month we took time to reflect on just some of what has been achieved over the past 10 years.

The Scotland Malawi Partnership, whose work I, too, highly commend, has produced an excellent document detailing 10 case studies from the past 10 years that help to illustrate the breadth and range of projects and relationships that have been supported. That breadth is truly astonishing. As Bruce Crawford reminded us, 94,000 Scots and 198,000 Malawians are actively involved in one way or another, and £40 million has been raised through Scottish communities.

Those projects and relationships span many areas, including health and education, the environment and energy, agriculture and trade, and arts and culture, to name but a few. As Humza Yousaf rightly made clear, what makes Scotland's relationship with Malawi so special, so resilient and so impactful is the way that it binds and builds from the grass roots up.

The Scotland Malawi Partnership's document highlights the civic links that exist, which I can see for myself in my constituency. Links between schools such as Sanday and Westray and their counterparts in Minga and Chitengu remain strong, as do the ties between the Orkney and Thyolo presbyteries. Those links benefit people in both communities enormously; anyone who is in any doubt about that should hear the compelling presentations from Gleniffer high school pupils, which they gave to the CPG back in September. However, that raises the question of how we spread those benefits to other schools, particularly schools in Malawi, and what more we can do to encourage and support young girls to get the education that they are all too often still missing out on. Those challenges still lie ahead.

Similarly, although, as Claire Baker pointed out, we are seeing positive signs on the health front, with HIV infection and maternal mortality rates dropping, there can be absolutely no let-up. That point is certainly well made in the Labour amendment, which also underscores the importance of developing trade in support of a "strong and sustainable" Malawian economy. There is certainly an appetite to build on such successes.

There is much to be proud of in what has been achieved over the past 10 years, and I welcome this brief debate and the opportunity to reflect on those achievements and how they have helped to broaden and deepen Scotland's mutually beneficial relationship with the warm heart of Africa. It is now time to build on the success of this genuinely unique partnership.

Michael Russell (Argyll and Bute) (SNP):

I am very pleased to take part in the debate. When I visited Malawi in October and November 2012, I was very struck by the contrast that has been drawn out this afternoon between the extraordinary hospitality and welcome that we received in that warm heart of Africa and the fact that it is one of the poorest countries in the world.

The visit was incredibly memorable and, as with any visit, it is places and people that stand out. For example, I remember visiting Eston Mgala at Kusumala Institute of Agriculture and Ecology's permaculture site and seeing the astonishing work that is being done to grow plants; talking to the headteacher of a school in the Dedza mountains who received a computer and solar panels from East Craigs primary school in Edinburgh, which would give the school connectivity for the first time; meeting the then President Her Excellency Grace Banda, who gave me the map of Malawi that hangs in my office; and not just attending a meeting of the joint permanent commission of co-operation in the mountains above Zomba but going to the university in Zomba to launch the Livingstone fellowships and to meet some of the students and staff who are working in extraordinary circumstances.

I am delighted to be, with Liam McArthur, the co-chair of the cross-party group. It is testament to the strong, living and lively links between Scotland and Malawi, and it is remarkably well served by David Hope-Jones and his team from the Scotland Malawi Partnership.

The minister was absolutely right to stress at the beginning of the debate that the relationship is not just about political structures but about people, and I believe that people contribute three things that we can build on to take the relationship forward.

The first is the relationship's history. Liam McArthur mentioned Andrew Ross, but there are, of course, many great figures whom we could mention, starting with David Livingstone and going right through to Robert Laws, who founded Livingstonia. He was a man from Aberdeen who taught the people of Livingstonia to speak English with an Aberdeen accent—we can still hear an element of that in the English that is spoken in that part of Malawi—and who told all his male staff to grow beards to give them 20 minutes a week more for the Lord's work. We should remember the passion that Robert Laws showed in that beautiful part of Malawi.

I also want to mention Colin Cameron, a Scot who was a member of the first post-independence Government in Malawi and who was appointed honorary consul for the country when it returned to multiparty rule in the early 1990s. He spent a passionate part of his life working for the people of Malawi as a lawyer and politician.

We can build not only on our history but on our existing networks. Among the most striking things that I have seen in my constituency—and which I think that, as constituency and regional MSPs, we all see—are the remarkable links that have been made between people such as policemen and women, teachers, journalists, doctors, nurses, foresters, dentists, politicians and many others. Those person-to-person links with Malawi ensure that there is learning between the two countries and the two sets of people. Not only was that headteacher in the Dedza mountains learning from the pupils and teachers of East Craigs primary school but they were learning remarkable lessons from him, his staff and his pupils about sustainability, progress, poverty and determination. We can build on those links.

We can also build on equity. When I was in Malawi, I was struck by the fact that Scotland does things differently. It does not use its relationship to tell other people what to do; it works in partnership with the people of Malawi. The joint commission that I chaired with the foreign minister is about the context; it is not about instruction. We need to build that type of relationship.

The minister talks about trading relationships. We should build trading relationships with equity. Malawian coffee is already widely available—indeed, it has been served at Bute house. Malawian gin is also available, and there are many other products that we could use. The relationship can be the template for other relationships that we have as we grow in confidence as a nation.

Siobhan McMahon (Central Scotland) (Lab):

David Livingstone played a major role in improving public health and freeing the indigenous population from the scourge of slavery in Africa and particularly in Malawi. He is a Scottish hero in the true sense. He left the world a better place than it was when he entered it. It is therefore only fitting that our former First Minister Jack McConnell recognised the work that David Livingstone did and which others have done in Malawi by establishing our partnership with that country 10 years ago. Jack McConnell can and should be proud of many achievements, but I am sure that that partnership remains among his greatest.

Many of us who have spoken or will speak in the debate have our own partnership with Malawi. I have spoken many times in the chamber and in other forums about my experience of Malawi and about my memories of it and friendships from my visit some three years ago.

Malawi remains among the poorest countries in the world. In the 2014 UN human development index report, it is ranked 174th out of 187. That ranking might improve when the latest report is issued in December, but it is a deeply depressing statistic. Malawi has a population of 16.36 million people, and their life expectancy is just 55. On average, people spend just four years in a school environment. In less developed rural areas, the incidence of HIV and AIDS is six times higher among women than among men because of the sex trade that is so evident in the country.

In education, much of the discrimination that women experience is deeply ingrained in Malawian culture. Until the early 1960s, Malawian girls were not allowed to attend school. Female education is still viewed by many as irrelevant. Far fewer girls progress through primary education, and female literacy levels are substantially inferior to male literacy levels.

It is important that our partnership with the country strives to make the situation better. The Scottish Government has a large part to play in gaining greater equality for women, particularly in education, but it is heartening to know that local schools, churches and organisations are also taking up that cause. I often talk about the role that St Margaret's high school in Airdrie has played in that regard, but Falkirk high school, which is another school in my region, has also worked to support female education. Falkirk high school is linked with Bandawe secondary school. The partnership dates back to 2007, and the motto of the partnership is:

"The Two Will Make a Difference".

That is a simple but powerful statement.

Projects such as the mother group project and the girls go for health initiative, which are part of the North Lanarkshire healthy lifestyle project that is run by Charles Fawcett in conjunction with the Forum for African Women Educationalists in Malawi, have been working hard to narrow the gender divide. The mother group project works to encourage more women to attend school, and the girls go for health initiative strives to keep them there. Women are provided with hygiene and sanitary products and with financial aid for school fees and educational materials, and workshops are organised to encourage male pupils to respect and value their female peers.

A further project that I am aware of because of a local connection is classrooms for Malawi. Its chairperson is James Kelly, who is a parishioner of St Bernadette's parish in Motherwell. As I have said in previous debates, that parish has its own partnership with Malawi.

Classrooms for Malawi believes

"that the only sustainable route out of poverty is education."

It says:

"We work throughout Malawi to improve places of education in some of the world's poorest communities. Recent estimates show that around 2 million children in Malawi are either taught in unsafe and unfit classrooms, outdoors, or simply cannot go to school as the facilities are not there. We want to put an end to this."

St Bernadette's parish, of which I am a parishioner, has a partnership with St Anne's parish in Namulenga. Through that partnership and through classrooms for Malawi, it has helped to renovate

Namulenga girls school. It would have been understandable if the parish had stopped there, but it has now switched its focus to helping to foster a better educational environment by providing backpacks, school supplies, transport and furniture as well as toys for the children in the nursery. The parish sent a container in September, which should arrive any day now.

We often speak in the chamber about education, and rightly so, but we can too often forget how privileged we are to have access to education in our country. My experience of Malawi still drives me to this day. It is not an exaggeration to say that my visit made me a better person and changed my outlook on life.

We have achieved a great deal in 10 short years. I am sure that we can achieve a whole lot more in the next 10 years.

David Torrance (Kirkcaldy) (SNP):

I am pleased to contribute to today's debate on Scotland's long-standing partnership with Malawi and the Scottish Government's commitment to international development. This year of 2015 has been a decisive year for international development in which we have seen the UN General Assembly commit to 17 new global goals. In a few weeks, I hope that the UN climate change conference in Paris will be another stepping stone to ensuring that developing countries receive adequate help in dealing with the effects of climate change. In that context, I very much commend and support the Scottish Government's involvement in the development sector and, in particular, the Government's continued commitment to working with Malawi.

I welcome the Scottish Government's approach in supporting Malawi as an equal partner. As the partnership agreement says, it is a

“reciprocal partnership based upon sharing experiences and skills.”

In the 10 years since the partnership agreement was signed, I believe that Scotland and Malawi have benefited mutually from the relationship. The agreement has facilitated networking, promoted best-practice examples and, not least, created many friendships across two geographically distant countries.

The number of individuals, schools and organisations that have forged links to Malawi in various ways is astonishing. According to the Scotland Malawi Partnership, 94,000 Scots and 198,000 Malawians are engaged in various ways. A 2014 study conducted by the University of Edinburgh confirmed that citizens in both countries gained immensely from the partnership, with more than 2 million Malawians and 300,000 Scots benefiting annually from the impact of their joint endeavours.

I am proud to say that, as part of that engagement, pupils and staff members at Balwearie high school in my constituency of Kirkcaldy have set up their own initiative to promote secondary education in Malawi. It all started when a group of students visited the country in 2012. Since then, the school has put great effort into raising money for Malawian students who are unable to pay for high school education. Balwearie high school has emphasised that it has also been a great experience for people in its school community to learn more about their Malawian counterparts.

Balwearie high school is a member of the Scotland lights up Malawi project, which is built around the work of SolarAid in Malawi and involves educating Scottish school pupils on energy, poverty, climate change, solar light, global citizenship and sustainability. Other schools in my constituency have engaged in similar activities.

By extending the boundaries beyond fundraising, Malawian and Scottish children are encouraged to develop a deeper understanding of each other's lives, while fostering cultural awareness. I see that project as a unique and highly commendable form of international education and I am happy to say that it has been recognised by Education Scotland and the British Council.

Education is a crucial stepping stone to development. However, from looking at the new global goals for sustainable development, I believe that another highly relevant issue that we need to prioritise is good health and wellbeing. As members will know, health forms a key part of the Scotland and Malawi co-operation agreement and a lot of activity is going on in that area. That

includes training health professionals, facilitating exchanges between medical universities and supporting community-based medicine and first-aid training in rural areas. However, despite those efforts to improve health outcomes, 90,000 child deaths in Malawi are caused by preventable diseases.

Another project involves the University of Aberdeen and Robert Gordon University in an initiative, in collaboration with Malawi's Ministry of Health, to develop a sustainable model for midwifery education and practice. A particular focus is given to recruiting midwives in rural regions and providing them with additional skills.

It is impossible to name all the excellent projects that have been launched under the umbrella of Scotland's partnership with Malawi. As we have heard today, Scotland is already aware of its responsibilities as a global citizen. The co-operation agreement with Malawi reflects that commitment and I am confident that it will continue to impact positively on the lives of many Scots and Malawians.

Elaine Murray (Dumfriesshire) (Lab):

I am pleased to make a brief contribution about the links between my constituency of Dumfriesshire and Malawi. The first project that I will talk about is the collaboration between the Dumfries campus of Scotland's Rural College and researchers from Malawi, which has been going on for more than seven years. It started as a staff exchange project that involved work on improving milk yield and quality, but it was developed further by a research group under Dr Mizeck Chagunda of Scotland's Rural College in Dumfries. In that project, researchers negotiated free airtime with a local mobile phone provider and signed up 80 farmers who texted in information on their cows' milk production. If the yields were not as expected, the farmers were provided with advice by an extension worker.

Several other partnerships have followed with Lilongwe University of Agriculture and Natural Resources and Mzuzu University to train farmers, extension workers, development managers, researchers and trainers. Eight postgraduate students and one postdoctoral scientist have been involved, 22 experts have worked between Scotland and Malawi and 28 farmers and 43 extension workers have been trained in forage production, feeding, animal breeding and data recording. Dr Chagunda received a special achievement award at the Malawi Association UK's awards ceremony in April this year in recognition of his services to the Scotland and Malawi relationship.

Also this year, a former student at SRUC's campus in Dumfries, Bettie Sindi Kawonga, received recognition in the shape of a \$150,000 prize for her concept of incubation centres to help young unemployed people to become dairy entrepreneurs. That addresses two problems that are faced in Malawi—youth unemployment and low agricultural productivity. Bettie is now a lecturer at Bunda College of Agriculture, but she studied for her MSc in Dumfries, funded through the Scottish Government's international development fund, and during that time she did very useful work with local primary schools.

The other initiative that I will describe briefly was launched only in August, but it has already achieved considerable success. Jan Jamieson was a primary teacher and headteacher in Dumfries and Galloway when, sadly, she died of cancer at the age of only 47. She and her husband, Sandy, had been involved through their church in projects that support young people in Malawi. After her death, her family felt that the best way to remember her commitment both to education and to Malawi was to launch a foundation to support young people in Malawi who have the academic ability to progress through secondary school and further education but do not have the financial resources.

In recognition of the importance of educating women and the educational disadvantage that girls suffer compared with their brothers, in the first instance, the foundation proposed raising funds specifically to support girls for at least four years and then possibly on through university. Amazingly, the sum that is required to support one girl through one year of education is only £150. Since the end of August, the foundation has undertaken an incredible programme of fundraising that has involved several local primary schools, and it has already raised funds to support 11 girls who are capable of academic achievement but who would otherwise not have had the opportunity.

At the foundation's launch, Sandy Jamieson told an illustrative story, which might have been of Malawian origin. A small boy came across a huge number of starfish that had been washed ashore on a beach during a storm. He set about trying to throw them back, one by one, into the sea. A passing adult asked why he was bothering when so many had been washed up, as the boy could not make much difference. The boy responded by returning another starfish to the sea and stating, "It makes a difference to that one." Global poverty can appear overwhelming when we look at it in its totality, but many projects are making a difference one by one to the lives of some of the poorest people in our world.

Christian Allard (North East Scotland) (SNP):

As the minister said in his opening speech, there is a human story behind every statistic. We have heard a lot of statistics in the debate, so I will spare members from hearing more; instead, I will talk about the human story.

Our relationship with Malawi is one that we should treasure. It is a great example of what can be done and what works. I thank the Scottish Government and the minister—and the Scottish Executive before them—for the great work that is being done and everything that they have done to ensure the safety, respect, success and ambitious nature of our relationship with Malawi.

Scotland's connection with Malawi was brought to my attention recently—not in Malawi, as I have not had the privilege of visiting the country, but in Alford in Aberdeenshire. At a coffee morning, I met Kathleen Thomson and her husband, who founded Famine Relief for Orphans in Malawi—or FROM for short—10 years ago in 2005, so it corresponds with the anniversary that we are celebrating today. When the couple visited their daughter, who lives in Malawi, they were so affected by seeing the reality of the standard of life there and what needed to be done that they were prompted to create the organisation.

Since 2005, Famine Relief for Orphans in Malawi has grown in size and it has done a lot. For example, the charity has provided one meal a day to more than 2,500 children at feeding stations and orphanages. It has sent out three crammed shipping containers with medical equipment and supplies, which have all been donated from within the area.

The charity has also supplied 30 bicycle ambulances to allow patients from remote villages to get to hospital. It is important to understand that there are rural challenges. I saw the photos of the bicycle ambulances, and they are fantastically well used. I was told about a pregnant woman who was many, many miles away from a hospital and who would have had to walk all the way there. The journey was made a lot easier by the bicycle ambulance. Of course, they are also a lot easier to repair than ambulances.

The charity also provided enough funds to build a clinic in Mwanayaya village, which had no medical facilities at all. It has funded bore holes to give access to clean water, and solar power has been provided in clinics and classrooms, because it is about education as well as health. Those are among a number of achievements by Famine Relief for Orphans in Malawi since 2005. It was a pleasure and a great opportunity to meet the driving force behind the initiative.

FROM Scotland is not alone in its efforts. There is a lot of collaboration with various individuals, organisations and businesses in the area, including OEG Offshore, MacScott Bond Ltd and Freelands Ltd. Those companies have provided the crucial help required to send shipping containers with hospital beds, X-ray machines and medical supplies to Malawi to ensure that they reach those who need them the most. At the end of the day, that is what it is all about—help reaching the people who need it the most.

The work of this family is truly moving and continues to be seen as their daughter, Tracy Morse, from the small community of Pitcaple in Aberdeenshire, who decided to make Malawi her home, has been managing the Scotland Chikwawa health initiative since 2006. It gets great support from the Scottish Government. The charity works with the headlining Scotland Malawi Partnership to channel aid directly to the areas of Malawi hit by recent floods.

Those are merely a few examples of the successes of the 2005 co-operation agreement in building strong links between Scotland and Malawi—links based on respect, humanity and security for all the people living in both countries. Scotland’s relationship with Malawi is a credit to the people of both countries.

Hanzala Malik (Glasgow) (Lab):

I thank Humza Yousaf for today’s debate and Claire Baker for her amendment. It is an honour to speak about the relationship between Scotland and Malawi on the 10th anniversary of the signing of the historic co-operation agreement between the two Governments of Scotland and Malawi and the continuing friendship between the two countries.

The relationship shows the continued commitment that successive Scottish Governments, including those from different political parties, have shown over the past decade. I congratulate the Scottish Government on the efforts of the international development programme and its importance around the world today. I congratulate Humza Yousaf in particular. He seems to be doing a fine job so far.

Humza Yousaf:

So far! [Laughter.]

Hanzala Malik:

I also believe that Scotland should continue its international development work, which helps us to develop our international position—in particular, our work with partners such as Malawi, as it has clear outcomes. I am sure that Jack McConnell is pleased by the continuing strength of his legacy.

I understand that, today, 46 per cent of Scots personally know someone with a connection to Malawi. I whole-heartedly agree with the Scotland Malawi Partnership, which states that this is now a national effort. Importantly, the relationship goes both ways. More than 300,000 Scots benefit from the relationship between the two countries, many of them through the school-to-school programme. It is important to note that, for every £1 that the Scottish Government gives, around 10 times that amount is raised by the people of Scotland themselves, which we should be proud of.

I would like to note the contributions of Glasgow City Council and the University of Strathclyde’s Malawi millennium project to forging the links between the two countries. The millennium project was set up in 2000 to celebrate the links between Malawi and one of the university’s most famous students, Dr Livingstone—Humza Yousaf alluded to the fact that Dr Livingstone was working there over 156 years ago, which was an incredible contribution from the Scots.

Many projects and partnerships have sprung from the efforts of University of Strathclyde staff and students, inspiring Glasgow City Council to set up the Lord Provost’s millennium fund. Glasgow City Council has donated more than 2,000 computers, money, medical equipment and project management support, as well as training in many areas. As a Glaswegian, that makes me—and I am sure many others—proud.

This is very important on-going work. I take this opportunity to thank all Scots, particularly Glaswegians who have gone the extra mile. I have known unions, uniformed services, churches, mosques, NGOs, ordinary people and workers in all the departments of Glasgow City Council continue to work towards an impressive programme. Students have particularly impressed me. I want to thank them for all their contributions and say that I want them to continue this huge role of continuing to make an effort to bring a better life to people around the world.

We in Scotland ought to be and are proud of our inheritance and what we have learnt from our ancestors, and we continue to follow their footsteps in making a positive contribution around the world. Malawi is no exception.

Richard Lyle (Central Scotland) (SNP):

I think that Humza Yousaf is doing a very good job. [Laughter.]

In my remarks this afternoon, I will reflect on what we have done in the past decade, particularly to share my views on the impact that the work has had on my awareness of the historic relationship that Scotland and Malawi have developed.

Scotland has an inherently special link with Malawi—one of the world's poorest countries—that dates back to the work of missionaries and, of course, Dr David Livingstone. For more than 150 years, Scots have worked to help the people of Malawi to deliver and develop basic education and health systems. Each year, more than 300,000 Scots and 2 million Malawians benefit from the relationship that Scotland and Malawi have developed in areas such as agriculture, education, health and renewable energy.

As many speakers have already said, signed in 2005 the co-operation agreement between Scotland and Malawi has been a success that has delivered in its efforts to build strong links between our two nations. In practical terms, the Scottish Government's international development fund is making a real difference to the lives of some of the most vulnerable people in Malawi.

Since the Scottish National Party Administration began in 2007, the Government has doubled the budget and protected it against Westminster funding cuts, such is our commitment to delivering not only for Scots but for our fellow men and women across the world. Over the past decade, action by successive Scottish Governments has meant an investment of more than £37 million to more than 100 projects to improve the lives of the people of Malawi.

In January this year, the minister Humza Yousaf announced a further additional package of more than £9 million to fund 20 life-changing projects through the Malawi development programme over the next three years. I welcome the many initiatives that the Scottish Government is delivering to help the people of Malawi, from economic development projects to help to create jobs and boost incomes for some of Malawi's poorest people, through to the funding package of £150,000 in January 2015 to help Malawi to deal with the effects of the severe flooding.

On a personal level, I want to take the time to recognise the many hundreds and thousands of volunteers who travel to Malawi each year, in particular but not exclusively the young people who tirelessly fundraise and travel to Malawi to help local projects to deliver schools and support communities. Just as Scotland's young people are an asset to our nation, so too are they an asset to the people of the world. We across the chamber should take the time to recognise the work of young people who volunteer in Malawi to help to make a lasting difference to people's lives.

I also note, from my region, examples such as the provost's Malawi fund run by the provost of North Lanarkshire Council, which seeks to fundraise to help contribute to making a difference to the lives of those in Malawi. I had the pleasure of attending the provost's most recent Malawi dinner; not only was it a thoroughly excellent evening, but the proceeds went towards that fund, to help support people and deliver for the people of Malawi.

I would like to take the time to recognise in particular the work done by Provost Jim Robertson of North Lanarkshire Council and his commitment to Malawi. I understand that Jim personally contributes part of his salary to help to make a difference to those in Malawi. Jim shows many of us that, working together, we can make a difference.

It is on that thought that I would like to linger for a moment, as it is the case that the Scottish Government has done an excellent job. In closing, I note that the Government is one that will make a significant investment in the relationship between Scotland and Malawi.

Cameron Buchanan (Lothian) (Con):

I am pleased that we have the opportunity today to celebrate 10 years of Scotland's historic co-operation with Malawi.

Scottish Conservatives continue to support a strengthening of Scotland's links with Malawi, as we share the conviction that emphasis must be placed on the localised projects making a difference. As with all programmes, it is vital for its long-term success that all projects are evaluated and aligned with the original aims of the co-operation agreement covering civic governance, health, education

and sustainable economic development. Furthermore, it is welcome that there is a high level of awareness of the relationship. We should press on to reach the level of awareness that this partnership deserves.

The agreement's high-level aim to strengthen civic governance and legal expertise is rightly recognised as a key driver of development. That makes it particularly welcome that the goal has been followed through by the Edinburgh-based social enterprise Challenges Worldwide, as it has organised mentoring for attorneys in Malawi's legal aid department by Scottish criminal lawyers, which is exactly the sort of peer-to-peer sharing that this relationship is all about.

The agreement to contribute to the improvement of maternal health and increase the capacity of health colleges recognises crucial areas that are in need of progress. Again, the key is that co-operation has been at the direct, expert level, where the impact is highest, as demonstrated by the University of Strathclyde training nurses and medical assistants in integrated maternal and neonatal health services.

On the vital element of education, which many have spoken about, the high-level aim to build capacity at a local level and support the exchange of skills is crucial. That makes it important that targeted projects are delivered directly, with measurable outcomes, so that we can judge their effectiveness and learn from the successes. A stellar example of that is the project by Sense Scotland to deliver training courses for 1,029 parents, 140 teachers and 746 influential community leaders, which has led to the establishment of parent-teacher associations.

Moving on to another key aspect of development, namely enterprise, the agreement was wholly correct in identifying the exchange of business skills and expertise as vital, including collaboration between agricultural bodies. As we businessmen know all too well, advice from experienced hands and sharing ideas with others go a long way.

It is therefore to be warmly applauded that Opportunity International, which has an Edinburgh office, translated that aim into direct help as it provided access to microcredit and business advisory services for 740 people. Furthermore, the Macaulay Land Use Research Institute translated the agreement's goals into reality by increasing crop diversity and yield for up to 1,955 farmers. As our co-operation continues, it is important that we promote such success stories and use their lessons to spread their impacts ever wider.

I have spoken of the importance of learning from specific, targeted projects in Malawi as the co-operation agreement continues. However, the same is equally true here at home. In order to maintain the fantastic enthusiasm and can-do attitude from the Scottish public that has underlined the agreement's success thus far, we should not just celebrate the relatively high level of awareness but aim to increase it even further. If we want the scope and impact of the agreement to grow, involvement here needs to grow first.

Anne McTaggart (Glasgow) (Lab):

I welcome the opportunity to conclude the debate on behalf of the Scottish Labour Party. As we have heard, Scotland and Malawi have always shared close links and relationships, ever since 1859, when Scotland's David Livingstone received a warm and inviting welcome from the area that is now Malawi. Ever since, our citizens have enjoyed continued personal links in the region, with 46 per cent of Scots knowing someone who is actively involved in a link with Malawi. I thank our latest MSP group—Liam McArthur, Elaine Smith and James Dornan—for their outstanding speeches about the stark reality that they know from their recent visits.

Glasgow has been a constant supporter and grateful beneficiary of our relationship with Malawi. Other members mentioned the importance of the help that the Scotland Malawi Partnership gave to the Governments of both our nations in the signing of an official co-operation agreement on 3 November 2005. That agreement set the goal of collaboration on four main issues: civic governance and society, sustainable economic development, health and education. Only 10 years after that historic agreement, the spectacular results and positive impact of our collaboration are exciting and encouraging. They have been strongly highlighted by many members.

The impressive fulfilment of the intentions that the Scottish Government set out would not have been possible without community groups throughout Scotland. In 2014, membership of the Scotland Malawi Partnership consisted of 70 large organisations, 23 medium organisations, 49 small organisations, 156 individual members, 16 Scottish local authorities, 116 primary schools, 86 secondary schools and 176 youth members—I am waiting on somebody shouting “House!” for bingo.

In Glasgow alone, members of the Scotland Malawi Partnership have had an immeasurable impact. Glasgow City Council has made Malawi a priority since 2005. Each lord provost has visited Malawi to maintain relationships, raise funds and encourage Glaswegians to engage further with the country. The council’s Malawi leaders of learning programme improves the teaching and leadership of Malawian staff and young people and, thus, improves the educational outcomes for Malawian youth. I place on record the great work of my local secondary school—Knightswood secondary school—and, in particular, all the hard work that my latest school work experience pupil, Rae McGreevy, is doing to help to support Malawi and to visit the country next year.

Other members have mentioned further groups, such as Tearfund, that work with organisations in Malawi to support children, reduce exposure to natural disasters and improve access to food, water and sanitation. The Glasgow-based organisation Sense Scotland has been working with small organisations in Malawi to establish projects to assist deafblind and disabled children and adults. Those initiatives, along with many others throughout Scotland, have directly benefited 2 million Malawians and indirectly benefited 4 million.

Although Scotland’s organisations and institutions have used their connections to Malawi to improve Malawian lives over the past 10 years, the mutual relationship between us cannot be ignored. With 94,000 Scots and 198,000 Malawians involved, our links with Malawi are an integral part of Scottish society and must receive continuing support. The connection with Malawi is a unique national effort mobilised by all the people of Scotland. I hope that the Scottish Government agrees that, now more than ever, we should continue our 156-year-old relationship with Malawi, which is built on respect, mutual trust and understanding.

Humza Yousaf:

We have had a great debate across the chamber—I always enjoy hearing stories from members’ localities. There have been some very good suggestions on how to take forward the relationship for the next 10 years and beyond. I will address some of the points and reference some of the contributions that were made.

Claire Baker was right to ask her question about the international development fund. I accept what she said about the £9 million being frozen over the period that we have been in government, but I would put that in context. In our 2011 manifesto, we committed to freezing only two budgets, one of which was the NHS budget, which is arguably the Scottish Government’s most important budget and is certainly its largest. The other was the international development fund, which shows the importance that we attach to our international development work. Notwithstanding that, I accept what Claire Baker said. Some thinking is always being done in Government, and that is especially the case as we approach the election.

Claire Baker:

I fully accept that the Scottish Government has protected and frozen that budget, but we as a Parliament should reflect on the priority that we give to the fund and look at how we can restore or increase its value.

Humza Yousaf:

I accept that. In the run-up to the election, we will rightly be lobbied by a number of international development NGOs, to which we will listen carefully. We will also think about how we can do things innovatively with that £9 million. That is a key feature of the work that we do.

Liam McArthur’s contribution was excellent inherently. He highlighted the fact that the relationship spans the length and breadth of Scotland. I remember meeting Pastor Kester of the

Thyolo highlands in my first week in the job. I hope that Liam McArthur will pass my warmest regards to him and to the community at Westray, which was twinned with the Thyolo highlands.

Jamie McGrigor was right to highlight the work that the Department for International Development and other international partners do. The Scottish Government has a very good relationship with DFID's head of Malawi, Jennifer Marshall, whom I met when I was out there. We had a good conversation. Although DFID could do some things to tweak its work in Malawi—we could certainly look to work together on certain projects—I am very pleased that the relationship is strong. Jamie McGrigor was also right to mention Mary's Meals, which is an organisation that has universal support across the chamber and is under the world-class leadership—I think that the member used that phrase—of Magnus MacFarlane-Barrow.

Mike Russell summed up the debate best. He mentioned three things. The first was history. It is important to set the historical context, because that shapes the work that we do. The people-to-people relationship is the cement foundation that underpins the entire partnership. He also spoke quite rightly about equity and equality in the partnership. That was the proper tone, which everybody took in the debate. Nobody views the relationship between Scotland and Malawi as a big brother, younger sister type of relationship. We always speak of it in terms of mirror countries or equal countries, or countries collaborating together.

I was interested to hear Mike Russell's anecdote about Doctor Laws, who told his students to grow a beard as that would give them an extra 20 minutes a week with the Lord. That might explain why Mike Russell has kept a beard. I always thought that he was a bit of a sinner, as opposed to a saint.

All members talked about sustainability, which I will spend the rest of my contribution speaking about. Sustainability is hugely important. In fact, it is vital, if we want to continue this relationship for not just 10 years but beyond that. How do we achieve sustainability? There are a number of donors in Malawi. Malawi has been receiving international development aid for the best part of four to five decades. Some indicators show that things have got worse in that regard, rather than better, so sustainability and doing projects in the best way possible, so that they make an impact, are key.

We can be sustainable with the work that we do in various ways. The first way is to use Scotland's expertise, which will be vital in how we make a difference to the needs of people in Malawi. We have a relatively modest fund, although it has a big impact. Using our expertise in areas such as renewable energy will be key. Jamie McGrigor was right to mention some of the renewable energy projects that the Scottish Government funds. Those projects are important, not just because we set up solar panels, micro hydro turbines and other renewable energy projects, but because we teach skills to people in Malawi so that they can implement renewable energy solutions themselves. When a solar panel breaks, they can fix it, and they can devise innovative renewable solutions rather than waiting for international donors to come and give them the expertise. That is one way in which we can make our work in Malawi sustainable.

The second way is through governance. Many members have spoken about the Scottish Parliament's relationship with the Parliament in Malawi. I commend that work and encourage the Scottish Parliament, the CPA and others to continue with it. I have heard at first hand from parliamentarians how important they find that work and how much they value it. I know that many MSPs have a buddy among the members of Parliament in Malawi, some of whom are now ministers in the Malawian Government, and I can tell members that the MPs really value those relationships.

Malawi has had a difficult time in the past couple of years with the cashgate scandal, which has to some extent eroded trust in the political system. We have a chance to help to build that trust back up.

Elaine Smith:

The Malawian MPs whom I met when I was in Malawi—particularly the women, I have to say—were capable, competent and caring, and they were clearly motivated by working for the good of their constituents and their country. Does the minister agree that we should do what we can to share our knowledge and experience with them, while also learning from them?

Humza Yousaf:

Yes, I agree with the sentiments that Elaine Smith has just expressed, and in particular her point about women parliamentarians. As she is probably aware, Malawi has unfortunately regressed in that respect, with fewer female parliamentarians following the most recent elections than there were in Parliament previously. That is a matter for regret, and we should work with the Parliament of Malawi and the political parties there to try to improve the situation.

We should also look at sustainable trade. As Claire Baker mentioned, Malawi's biggest export is tobacco. As we all know, the use of tobacco is—thankfully—going down across the world, so that is not a sustainable future.

Claire Baker mentioned the Chance for Change organisation; I have had the great pleasure of seeing the good work that it does in working with young entrepreneurs. Two thirds of Malawi's population are under the age of 25, so there is an opportunity to increase entrepreneurialism among young people, which will help to create jobs and wealth in the future. Scotland can help with innovative finance solutions in Malawi, given that access to capital, with a 40 per cent interest rate, is incredibly difficult.

We can make the relationship more sustainable through education, which many members spoke about. Mike Russell spoke about it particularly well, based on his previous experience in education. From nursery all the way through to professional exams, Scotland can play a key role. We need to help to build capacity in Malawi in colleges, universities and schools so that we prevent a brain drain. There are a lot of good projects, fellowships and scholarships in Malawi, but to some extent those have the effect of taking some of the best and the brightest minds away from Malawi where they are vital and desperately needed. We can work with Malawian universities and educational institutes to help to build that capacity.

Liam McArthur:

One point that was made to those of us in the cross-party group on Malawi when we visited Gleniffer high school was that those schools in Malawi that have relationships with Scottish schools are attracting pupils from elsewhere to the detriment of other schools in other communities. Looking ahead to the next 10 years, we probably need to address that issue.

Humza Yousaf:

Yes—it is one of those unintended consequences that often come from good work.

It is important to highlight all the aspects of partnership. If we can build a good relationship with the Government in Malawi, we can encourage it to roll out at national level something that is working in one school, hospital or university. That is where large international donors are also important.

We must tackle the gender gap that exists, which many members mentioned; that relates to sustainable development goal 5. Malawian women are disadvantaged throughout their lives. There are some inspirational Malawian women: Monica Dzonzi is known to many members in the chamber. In the work that she does with Bangwe youth centre, she is an inspirational role model for other females. We can help to encourage and support them, as reducing inequality and the gender gap will pay dividends in the future.

Those are the ways in which we can make Scotland's relationship with Malawi more sustainable, which is a great priority for us in the Scottish Government. I thank Hanzala Malik for his kind words to me, with the caveat that he said that I am doing a good job so far. I will do my very best in the future to continue that good work, as will the Scottish Government.

The last word goes to Dr David Livingstone. On the 10th anniversary of the signing of the co-operation agreement with Malawi, I think of his words:

“I am prepared to go anywhere, provided it be forward.”