



External Assessment of Evidence of the Scotland Malawi Partnership (SMP) Impact / Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) Data, 28 April 2022

Background

Corra Foundation was approached to undertake a short independent review of the Scotland Malawi Partnership's end of year reporting to Scottish Government. This entailed an assessment of the evidence provided by SMP of progress made towards the five outcomes outlined in the logframe confirmed in 2020, which covers the period from 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2023.

This review was therefore of the second year of SMP reporting against this logframe, as it enters its final year of work towards the following impact goal and five outcome areas:

“Impact: Increased knowledge of, participation in, and impact of Scotland's civic links with Malawi

- 1. Maintain mutual understanding, coordination, effectiveness and impact as a result of SMP-hosted activities.*
- 2. Maintain awareness and understanding amongst key stakeholders of governmental and civil society work with Malawi.*
- 3. Public awareness and engagement across Scotland of the bilateral relationship, the role of government and civil society, and the impact of this work.*
- 4. Continued visible and meaningful youth engagement and youth leadership in the bilateral relationship.*
- 5. A co-ordinated and confident sector with strong collaborations, clear mutual understanding, effective two-way assistance and common objectives, if any, identified.”*

As in the previous reviews of SMP annual reporting undertaken by Corra in 2019, 2020 and 2021, this review does not constitute a full impact assessment. Rather, it is a one- to two-day exercise comprising a desk-top document review and short consultation meeting which serves to provide an independent assessment of the evidence provided by SMP in reporting on its progress during the year in question, April 2021-March 2022.

The assessment is structured around the SMP logframe and comprises a short narrative report commenting on progress by individual indicator and providing inputs for use in the final logframe report. In terms of information sources, the assessment has considered:

- the documents listed in the annex (all provided to Corra by SMP),
- SMP website and social media content, and,

- a discussion on selected issues highlighted by the document review (an online Zoom meeting held on 27 April 2022 between David Hope-Jones, the SMP Chief Executive, and Chrissie Hirst from the Corra Foundation).

These primary sources have been complemented by observations on SMP's work from Corra staff working on international issues and participating in occasional SMP-hosted events or reading/viewing SMP-produced material over the last year, and by occasional observations on SMP shared by other stakeholders, many of which are also Scottish Government and Corra grantholders. However, while knowledge and information gained informally through engagement in the Scottish international development sector have inevitably been relevant for this review of the last year, it should be underlined that Corra did not undertake any specific enquiry or interviews with SMP members in order to gather information or evidence for this review of the SMP reporting.

Comments on MEL Framework and Quality of Data

SMP has put effort into collecting and documenting evidence for its reporting against the specified outcomes: documentation was ordered and detailed, with helpful annotations and explanations provided for approaches to calculation.

The report prepared by Corra in April 2021 made a number of general observations regarding the logframe, quantitative evidence requirements and gender and diversity disaggregation which remain relevant. The number of respondents to the SMP annual survey is also a point highlighted in previous reviews: this did increase this year, from 76 (appx 6%) to 89 (appx 7%), which is a positive development, but does remain relatively low, particularly given the logframe reliance on member feedback for six indicators. The review would therefore encourage SMP to continue exploring options to encourage, incentivise or facilitate a higher proportion of member responses, though would also observe that the SMP is not alone, and many organisations face similar challenges in gathering detailed survey feedback from service users.

Assessment of Evidence of Specific Outcomes

This review considers the Impact Statement and each SMP 2020-23 logframe Outcome below, reviewing and discussing the evidence provided against each indicator, and on that basis noting a summary and colour-coded remark for insertion into the Year 2 logframe report at the appropriate point/indicator.

Review of Impact Statement: Increased knowledge of, participation in, and impact of Scotland's civic links with Malawi

The three indicators for this Impact Statement were largely met. The number of SMP members, Impact Indicator 1, has increased from last year's figure of 1,272 to 1,312, and while this has not reached the milestone target of 1,350 the increase of 40 remains significant and is a greater increase than the 22 of the previous year. This increase also comprises new members across all categories of membership (individual, organisational, youth, schools, local authorities), indicating that membership and engagement with the SMP continues to be attractive and valued across its areas of activity.

Progress against Impact Indicator 2, the proportion of SMP members completing the annual survey who feel that the SMP has advanced the impact statement, is a solid 100%, exceeding the 80% target. Impact Indicator 3 concerns evidence of key civic and political leaders from across Scotland and Malawi and there is ample evidence of this shared in the reporting, including of very high-level expressions of support from British and Scottish government ministers and the President of Malawi. Additional evidence presented in other documents on SMP activities and member feedback is largely very positive and does speak to members increasing their knowledge and increasing participation in links, personal contacts and activities related to Malawi – as well as the increasing participation of Malawi-based participants in online events.

Impact Indicator 4: The external review of evidence provided concludes that SMP's work in 2021-22 has increased knowledge, participation and the impact of Scotland's civic links with Malawi. Member feedback remained positive and all milestone targets for the year were met (with the exception of membership targets where numbers fell slightly short, although increasing across all types of membership, namely individual, organisational, school, youth, and local authority). Numerous endorsements from civic and political leaders, including at a high level, support this conclusion.

Review of Outcome 1: Maintain mutual understanding, co-ordination, effectiveness and impact as a result of SMP-hosted activities

The evidence provided in SMP reporting sees all targets under Outcome 1 exceeded. All members who responded to the annual survey, 100%, felt the SMP's work has advanced this outcome, exceeding the 75% target and maintaining the similarly high level achieved last year. The number of and attendance at SMP forums over the year exceeded the target, particularly in terms of attendance (643 attendees against a target of 150). It is also worth observing that last year, with 2020-21 covering the period of strictest lockdown, a variety of meetings were counted towards this indicator (13 in total). This year, including periods where restrictions had eased, the SMP has held far more events, a total of 51, but only counting formal 'forums' in evidence for Indicator 1.1.1.

The gender balance of contributors to the events was 67:33, men:women, and so fell short of the imbalance threshold of 60:40. The logframe notes this (flagging the impact of a particular book

launch involving a number of male speakers), and confirms that SMP will be working to address this in the coming year. The gender ratio of participants remained within the milestone threshold however, and positive attendee feedback (on both the quality of the meeting and its impact on their link with Malawi) also again exceeded the target. Notably, the proportion of attendees providing feedback on forum events increased significantly with 37% doing so this year (up from 27% last year), thereby strengthening the evidence for indicator 1.1.3. The number of testimonial or descriptive statements collected from participants regarding the positive impact of SMP meetings on their work also exceeds the target and is significantly higher than last year. The total annual attendance at SMP events was 1,759, short of the 1,850 target but by less than 100, with the 32 SMP events held meeting that target and the 19 partner events only just shy of the respective target of 20. Again, gender balance across participants was well within the target range and participant feedback on both the quality of the event and its effect on strengthening links with Malawi was over 90%, exceeding the 80% targets. SMP has also collected numerous testimonial statements from members describing the positive impact SMP membership has had on their links with Malawi.

Outcome Indicator 1.2: The external review of evidence provided concludes that SMP-hosted activities in 2021-22 have contributed to mutual understanding, co-ordination, effectiveness and impact. Given that the 2021-22 period remained affected by pandemic restrictions at different points, and by a wider fatigue affecting many as Covid-19 continued to impact multiple areas of life for a second year, the number of SMP events delivered and the increase in participant feedback collected are noteworthy. While not specifically covered by this logframe, it also feels relevant to observe that the work SMP has undertaken during this period on equity, diversity and inclusion (including consideration of racial justice and decolonisation) has relevance for advancing mutual understanding, including, *inter alia*, the 'People to People' podcast series, cultural activities around David Livingstone's legacy and Samson Kambalu's artwork, and a series of discussions around equity and diversity.

Review of Outcome 2: Maintain awareness and understanding amongst key stakeholders of governmental and civil society work with Malawi

The evidence provided in SMP reporting sees all targets under Outcome 2 exceeded, some very significantly. The percentage of members who felt the SMP's work has advanced the outcome was 98%, exceeding the 75% target and maintaining the high level achieved last year. All Scottish Government funding announcements for Malawi were promoted by SMP updates, and targets were also exceeded, over double or triple the targets set, in relation to the SMP coverage and promotion through the bulletin and social media of Scottish Government-funded projects and Scottish Government funding opportunities. Targets related to the SMP bulletin were also met and significantly exceeded, in particular for bulletin recipients (1,655 against a 1,260 target) and opens (19,274 against a 13,500 target). Similarly, targets related to the SMP website were also significantly exceeded, in particular the number of new visitors to the SMP website, 41,351, which is nearly double the target of 21,000.

Targets for enquiry handling were also met, with survey responses from enquirers confirming their satisfaction in the outcome and handling of their enquiry, and numerous statements from enquirers noting how SMP responses had supported their efforts. Notably, twice the number of enquirers provided feedback when compared to last year, now over half the number noted as supported, thereby strengthening the evidence for helpful responses to members. Similarly to last year, sharing knowledge across the network has been an area of solid performance, supported by more online meetings, and although lower than last year, indicator figures remain high and targets have been far exceeded. That notwithstanding, a small proportion of member survey feedback indicates that there may be specific groups within the membership who are benefitting less from knowledge sharing and this could be an area for SMP to explore as it continues to develop its member services in a responsive way.

Outcome Indicator 2.2: The external review of evidence provided concludes that SMP work in 2021-22 has contributed to key stakeholders' awareness and understanding of governmental and civil society work with Malawi. Data on the number of digital views and interactions with the SMP bulletin and website visits has seen substantial increases following the implementation of new SMP measures which have evidently been successful. Evidence of member engagement indicates that despite the continuing pandemic context, members remained interested in engaging with others on their work through the SMP, including on Covid-19 response issues.

Review of Outcome 3: Public awareness and engagement across Scotland of the bilateral relationship, the role of government and civil society, and the impact of this work

The evidence provided in SMP reporting sees all targets under Outcome 3 exceeded, with SMP's work on more innovative online content a particular area of achievement. The percentage of members who felt the SMP's work has advanced the outcome was 94%, exceeding the 75% target and maintaining the rate of positive responses from last year. Aside from Facebook 'impressions', for which data is not fully available, all social media targets were met or comfortably exceeded, particularly LinkedIn impressions. The production of video content remains an area where the SMP has far exceeded its original targets, producing 58 videos rather than the planned 6, and with 79,724 views rather than the 500 envisaged and last year's 17,151, indicating that these videos are increasingly relevant and interesting to viewers. While these dramatic departures from original projections do reflect the pandemic-related shifts to how many people work and engage with each other, they also reflect the fact that the SMP has successfully responded to these changes. The local and national media targets¹ set for SMP advocacy have been met and exceeded in terms of the number of Malawi features in the Scottish media.

¹ As noted previously, Indicator 3.3.1 is currently worded in way which could be read as media pieces focussed on Malawi, rather than articles/pieces including coverage of Malawi; particularly given the quite high target of 160 p.a., equivalent of 3 per week, a note that the latter interpretation would be more appropriate and realistic. An additional note, and one which was highlighted in previous reviews, is that while the Scottish media features on Malawi are certainly an interesting indicator in relation to public awareness, the categorisation of "positive" vs "negative" undermines the value of the indicator as discussion of potentially 'negative' topics (e.g. albinism, climate change, etc.) may well be informative, accurate and contribute to informed and constructive public engagement.

Outcome Indicator 3.2: The external review of evidence provided concludes that SMP work in 2021-22 has contributed to public awareness and engagement on the bilateral relationship across Scotland. Targets for social media, online activity and local and national media coverage have been exceeded, with video production and viewing continuing to be an area of particularly and increasingly high activity that indicates both strong public interest and the quality of the material offered.

Review of Outcome 4: Continued visible and meaningful youth engagement and youth leadership in the bilateral relationship.

The evidence provided in SMP reporting sees almost all targets under Outcome 4 met or exceeded, with SMP's work in this area notable for their impact on the number of people reached. The percentage of members who felt the SMP's work has advanced the outcome was 95%, matching last year and exceeding the 75% target. The number of school SMP members, 269, saw a jump up from last year's 242, and exceeded the set target of 260. The number of school points of support during the year, 75, fell slightly below the target of 80, however the number of young Scots benefitting from SMP support, 71,071, far exceeded the target of 40,000, as did attendance at the two Schools Forum meetings held during the year which was 102 against a target of 30. At 98%, positive feedback on the Schools Forums also exceeded the target of 80%, as did statements from schools highlighting the positive impact SMP has had. Notably, the Youth Congress planned for March has been postponed until the Autumn of 2022, so at this point evidence is not available for three indicators. Similarly to last year, twice as many Youth Committee meetings were held than planned, 12 in place of 6. The target of 3 examples of Youth Committee influence on SMP policy was met, the target of 375 SMP Youth members significantly exceeded with 430 such members, and the logframe notes also offer several testimonial statements from Committee members.

Outcome Indicator 4.2: The external review of evidence provided concludes that SMP work in 2021-22 has contributed to visible and meaningful youth engagement and leadership. Despite the last year including some periods of pandemic-related closure which will have affected school members' engagement, and with the exception of the postponed Youth Congress, SMP work in this area has continued to exceed set targets and reach high numbers of young people. While not reflected in the logframe indicators and evidence, it is notable that the new MaSP & SMP Partnership Guide was also launched in the last year, reflecting a valuable new resource now available to support engagement and bilateral relationships in this area.

Review of Outcome 5: A co-ordinated and confident sector with strong collaborations, clear mutual understanding, effective two-way assistance and common objectives, if any, identified

The evidence provided in SMP reporting sees targets under Outcome 5 met or exceeded. The percentage of members who felt the SMP's work has advanced the outcome was 98%, an increase from 92% last year and exceeding the 75% target. The target number of two network forums were

held, both with full attendance of all three networks, with examples of collaboration and positive testimonies on co-operation also provided. In relation to SMP support for information-sharing on the Scottish Government International Development Strategy, the number of actions undertaken, 31, tripled the target and included awareness raising, promotion at and through events as well as bulletin features. SMP also exceeded the target of opportunities for input, support and feedback to the Malawi Development Programme, and has engaged with the Scottish Government Communications team to exchange and promote material on 3 occasions.

Outcome Indicator 5.2: The external review of evidence provided concludes that SMP work in 2021-22 has contributed to co-ordination, collaboration and understanding among Scottish international development sector stakeholders active on Malawi. Targets for co-ordination meetings and joint events have been met or exceeded, and SMP external events and communications have actively supported input to and discussion of the Scottish Government's international development work and strategy. Notably, SMP was able to successfully use the specific opportunity offered by COP26 to leverage additional co-ordination and collaboration among different sector stakeholders to advance the common objective of responding to the climate crisis and amplifying voices from Malawi in relevant discussions and media coverage.

Conclusions

This review of the annual report documentation shared by the SMP and additional public sources notes a range of evidence provided to support the conclusion that the SMP has:

- successfully delivered on the pre-set outcome milestones for the 2021-22 year of implementation,
- been able to meet those milestones despite the continuing challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic which affected both member engagement and staff capacities, and,
- additionally, been able to meaningfully respond to the new needs of members in relation to the Covid-19 response and to use the opportunity provided by COP26 during the implementation period.

This assessment has found good evidence of progress in relation to the logframe for almost all indicators at impact, outcome and output level, with many exceeded and none judged as significantly missed, particularly when performance against complementary indicators is taken into consideration. Detailed consideration of how and whether individual indicators have been met is outlined above by outcome, and that text includes discussion of relevant additional factors (e.g. the Covid-19 pandemic, COP26, activity which is not reflected in the logframe, etc.) that are likely to have affected delivery and measurement.

Last year's review encouraged SMP to review on what the shift to digital has meant for their work and response to member and participant needs: it was very positive to read that such reflection is ongoing. Negotiating the new 'hybrid' world and managing the coming transitional period will

be a key challenge of the coming year – one shared across the sector as organisations juggle the often divergent needs of different service users and staff. As models of work and engagement continue to shift and develop, attention should be given to ensuring the benefits brought by greater digital participation (highly significant for the SMP in terms of greatly facilitated participation of those based in Malawi) are retained while the network responds to the desire for more in-person activity among stakeholders in Scotland.

Two important thematic developments will also be relevant to consider when reflecting on the last year and looking ahead. Firstly, responding to the climate crisis must continue to be a priority: here, the SMP has the opportunity to use the momentum and awareness generated by its advocacy work around COP26, as well as the positive experience of greater online engagement over the last two years, to support its members towards increased action in this area. Secondly, while work on diversity, equity and inclusion in Scotland has seen a recent increase in response to the Black Lives Matter movement, there is a general risk that this may be short-term for some actors when it should remain a key area for exchange and reflection going forward. The nature of the SMP's work means that as an organisation it is able to make important contributions on these issues: a range of relevant activities have been undertaken and it is very positive that SMP plans to continue and develop this work.

Annex 1 - Documentary Evidence drawn on for this assessment

SMP 2021-22 Logframe (completed PY2)

SMP 2021-22 Narrative Report draft v1.1

SMP Core Funding Proposal 2020-23, 11 Nov 2019

SMP Event Attendance and Feedback Apr 2021-March 2022 excel file

SMP Feedback data notes 2021-22

SMP Endorsements from civic and political leaders compilation

SMP Survey Monkey quote extracts 2021-22

General review of SMP website, www.scotland-malawipartnership.org

Scan of SMP social media platforms – Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, LinkedIn

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